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The Dangers of Resume Overkill

By Michael Sterling

Nearly everything written about resume design concentrates on what you should put in. But let's look at what should be left out, or at least minimized.

Item #1: Salary history or salary requirements.
I've never heard one good reason to mention your past, current, or expected salary. If you see an ad that reads, "Only resumes with salary history will be considered," don't believe it. If your resume is strong enough, you'll be contacted. Once contacted, be forthright.

Item #2: References.
If you have high-impact or well-known professional references, fine. Otherwise, "References: Available Upon Request" will do just fine. The strongest references are previous supervisors. Avoid personal references like your minister or your attorney, unless they happen to be Billy Graham or Sandra Day O'Connor.

Item #3: Superfluous materials.
When submitting a resume, avoid enclosing such items as your thesis, photos, diplomas, transcripts, product samples, newspaper articles, blueprints, designs, or letters of recommendation. These are props you can use during your interview, but not before. The only thing other than your resume that's acceptable is your business card.

Item #4: Personal information.
If it's not work related, leave it out. Listing marital status, children, or other personal information may seem harmless yet it may give a hiring manager the impression you are not current with Equal Employment Opportunity laws and corporate practices. By listing your Masonic affiliation, save-the-whales activism or codependency support group, you could give the employer a reason to suspect that your outside activities may interfere with your work.

Not long ago, I received a resume from a candidate who felt the need to put his bowling average on his curriculum vita. The person must have thought that kind of information might improve his chances of being interviewed. Given the choice, would I show his resume to an employer? Not a chance.

Remember, the greater the relevancy between your resume and the needs of the employer, the more seriously your candidacy will be considered. Say what you need to get the job—and nothing more.

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