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An effective opening for your resume

By Candace Moody
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Your job objective is usually the first item of substance on your resume, appearing right under your name and contact information. Is yours getting the job done, or is it wasted space?

If you're like most jobseekers, it's wasted space. Often, job objectives are so vague that they add no value whatsoever to your resume. Recruiters can recite by heart the standard resume opening. It goes something like this:

"To obtain a challenging and rewarding position in a growing company where my present knowledge and skills contribute daily to a successful operation and where opportunities exist for continued growth."

What's wrong with this message? For one, it doesn't really tell us anything more than "I want a good job." Who doesn't?

But there's another problem with this kind of objective: it's all about you. If we go back to one of the basic principles of resume writing, the resume serves as a marketing document. And the most effective marketing is all about the buyer, not the seller. So to market you well, your resume should not discuss what you want, but rather what a potential employer needs. A good objective will state what

kind of position you're looking for and give a recruiter some idea of why she should keep reading your resume. Here's a simple example of a strong opening:

"Objective: To obtain an entry-level account management position in financial services using my strong analytical and interpersonal skills." This statement keys in on a job target and manages to address some of what the company would be seeking in an entry-level candidate.

At a minimum, your job objective should seek to do no harm. Lately, we've seen objectives that actually kill chances at a job before the screener ever gets to read about the candidate's experience. Here's an example of one that does more harm than good:

"My objective is to find work in an environment where I can learn some new skills while polishing up on my old ones. I also want to take an opportunity to gain more work experience as mine is limited."

As an alternative, a summary of qualifications can be very effective at the top of your resume. While an objective focuses on the job, a summary statement focuses on the job seeker by highlighting experience and skills that employers will find important.

A summary statement is a one- to two-sentence

overview that captures the essence of your skills and experience. It highlights what makes you a qualified candidate as well as what makes you different, and better, than other applicants. It can be most useful for managers or for candidates who aren't sure exactly where they might fit into an organization. Here's an example of a strong summary statement:

"Medical coding professional with over five years of experience in insurance billing, diagnosis and procedure coding, and medical terminology. Supervisory experience includes managing team of six billing clerks in a large physical therapy practice."

The summary of skills and experience is a powerful marketing statement. It allows you to create a concise statement up front that answers the question, "Why should I hire you?" It also will direct the screener to look for certain highlights in your resume, just as the back of a book draws your interest in and prompts you to look for chapters that have the information you need. The most powerful statements include language from the employer's ad or job description, so that your qualifications reflect the exact needs of the position.

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