

# **This is the single biggest mistake you're making with your resume: Ladders 2018 Resume Guide**

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If there's one trick to getting your resume right, it's understanding that your resume is not about you. Sure, it's made up of your achievements, background, experiences, and credentials, but it's not about you. It's a professional advertisement, targeted toward your future boss. It's about the benefits your future boss gets from hiring you.

So, while it sure feels like it's all about your favorite topic — you and your experiences and your background and your journey and your adventures — it's not. Any more than an iPad billboard is about the transistors, and code, and chips inside. Sure, those are the materials that make the magic possible, but the iPad ads entice you to buy the magic, not the bill of goods.

Similarly, your resume is about your future boss' needs and the benefits she'll obtain by hiring you for the role.

## **This is the biggest resume mistake**

When we sit down to write a resume, we often start with writing what it felt like to be you — this school was followed by that education was followed by this first job was followed by that next promotion, and so forth. That's the version of the story that you're familiar with, the version you tell your folks and friends, your new acquaintances and your oldest college buddies.

It's the easiest version to tell because it feels like something we've been doing all our lives. In the right circumstances, we love talking about ourselves. Our opinions, our viewpoints, our sports teams and fashion choices. Our school, our kids, our town, our hopes and dreams and ambitions.

Given the right circumstances, "me" is a favorite topic the world over.

But when it comes to a resume, it doesn't feel like the circumstances are right. We don't know precisely who the audience is. We don't know what we are supposed to say. We're not sure how we are coming across. And we feel sheepish about bragging so blatantly to an imaginary herd of peers in our head.

But you were there when all this stuff happened! There's no better witness for your heroics, your triumphs, your tragedies, than you. You were on the scene! So, it ought to be easy right?

The difficulties, in fact, arise exactly from these two seeming advantages: It's composed of things about you, and you were there. When it comes to resumes, you want to tell people how it felt to be you. But they want to know what it felt like to be your boss.

And that's tough for you to write.

Because understanding what it was like to be your boss means stepping outside of yourself and looking at yourself as the sum of your work output. You didn't see yourself from your boss's vantage point. You saw it all from your perspective.

## **The real audience for your resume is your future boss**

The boss's seat is 180 degrees in the other direction. A boss is looking for output, not input. A boss is looking for outcomes, not duties and responsibilities. A boss wants to know the end of the story, the bottom-line, the score at the end of the game, not the feelings you had while delivering them.

You've spent years fighting, pleasing, avoiding, advising, sucking up to, or pushing back on, your boss. And now you're supposed to write your resume, about you, from his point of view? Not fair at all!

In fact, if you're looking to move up in your next job, your future boss is two levels above your current role. So, your ability to understand their needs, predicaments, hopes, requirements, and best guesses for the role are understandably limited by your own limitations of experience.

That's one of the reasons why even HR pros who have been hiring for decades have a tough time with writing a resume (and with many other parts of the job search process). Much like doctors are the worst patients and attorneys bad clients, HR people have tons of experience in hiring others, but almost no experience in hiring someone like themselves or their boss. Being a great buyer has very little to do with being a great seller.

## **How to write a resume the right way**

Writing your resume is a unique experience. Even though it's about you, writing a resume is not like writing a diary. Although it covers a time period in your life, it is not how you experienced those days and years. The stories that are interesting to you, and the drama that was involved in getting here, provide the compelling plotline to your own life story. For you, each job, each accomplishment, each bullet point, was an adventure, a battle, a triumph. But the emotional weight of each line of your resume is very little correlated with the professional weight your boss assigns to it.

Gaining the required distance to write about yourself in the form of a professional advertisement is difficult. Seeing yourself as a product is hard. Portraying yourself not as "you", but as the sum total of all the labor your future employer is purchasing is something you don't often do. The novelty of the experience, and the oddity of the perspective, can leave you feeling adrift, unmoored, a bit lost in the landscape.

## **The bottom-line on resume structure**

Writing a resume is not like how you think of yourself in any other part of your life.

So, the balancing act of mastering your own emotional response to past achievements, so that you can take an objective look at the professional value of each of those achievements and its worth to future employers, is the sole "trick" to resume writing.

It's a new skill. You'll get better with focus, awareness, and practice.

*This article is adapted from [Ladders 2018 Resume Guide: Best Practices & Advice from the Leaders in \\$100K – \\$500K jobs](#) (Ladders, Inc., 2018).*