

Executive Résumé Pitfalls to Avoid

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As a professional résumé writer and strategist, I often critique executive level résumés. I continue to be amazed at some of the mistakes that regularly occur. Experienced leaders consistently jump into these pitfalls, which can often eliminate them from attaining that all-important interview.

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First, any job seeker knows that there are many samples of résumés available on the internet and in popular résumé books. Copying someone else's résumé seems like a simple plan. It is also plagiarism. Your résumé is a strategic marketing document. In a job search scenario, every person has something different to offer. You are leader with a unique value proposition. Therefore, your best strategy is to create and market your own professional brand through your résumé.

On the surface, copying directly from a job description or advertisement may appear to be the next best idea. This seems like a quick and easy way to get all your duties on the résumé. Great strategy, if you want to be a clone. The problem with copying the content word for word is that you may be telegraphing a lack of ideas and initiative. As an executive, you should create a marketing document that distinguishes you by your achievements, rather than your job duties. Avoid this pitfall by designing a strategic résumé to show that what you have to offer is exactly what they need to buy.

You are a leader, and as such, it is necessary for you to convey mission, vision, and strategy in language that is easily understood by your staff. The same approach is true for your résumé. You need to help readers to connect and relate to your accomplishments. Using big words and lengthy sentences will not help you sound important, especially if they are used incorrectly. Your résumé should be an easy read. Use common words and clear sentences to put the focus on your qualifications and value. Don't hide behind a functional résumé if you can help it. Many executives try to minimize gaps in employment using this format. If you use this technique, you can be sure a perceptive recruiter will go directly to your career history to try to find what you are hiding. Whenever possible, use a reverse chronological format to keep your responsibilities and accomplishments under their respective job titles. If you must, use a combination of functional and reverse chronological that will strategically minimize your obstacles and meet your prospective employer's needs.

Eliminating your dates of employment to disguise career gaps will not work either. Recruiters know that missing dates can only mean one of two things, either you are trying to hide a poor career history or you are just plain careless. Always include employment dates to pass the detailed résumé review. To extend the longevity of your résumé and minimize gaps, consider listing the year only, instead of month and year. We have all heard about numerous successful court cases against executives that act unethically. Yet, it is alarming how many still “creatively embellish” their résumés. Dishonest executives may falsify their employment history, academic credentials, job title, responsibilities, or accomplishments. Most reputable organizations do background checks and yes, they do request your transcript. The higher the position, the more rigorous the screening process is. One white lie can destroy your chances. Even if you are not caught, when you live a lie, you are forever looking over your shoulder. It’s a small world and you will eventually get found out. Always be completely ethical and honest in all your dealings, written and verbal. With integrity, you will earn genuine credibility, trust, and respect.

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For executives, job search is not so much a numbers game, but one of strategy. Haphazardly broadcasting your résumé in application to any and every employer may appear to open up more options, but this tactic could hurt you in the end. Often messages received this way are treated as spam and deleted before they are ever read. If you do not have the appropriate qualifications, don’t even bother applying for the job. You will only look desperate. On top of this, if the right position comes up, you may not be considered. Make sure to focus your search on suitable positions where you are a good fit. Send your résumé with a personalized cover letter to the appropriate party involved in the hiring process. One well-written, targeted cover letter and résumé is worth hundreds of résumés indiscriminately shipped out.

Finally, as an executive, you have to know that a résumé printed on fluorescent pink or bright blue paper is guaranteed to stand out long enough to be dumped in the trash. This strategy was outdated years ago and for good reason. Intense colors are not suitable for a professional business document. Select a high-quality paper in brilliant white, watermarked, or off-white résumé stock.

As a leader, you must present your value in a professional and distinctive way. A well-thought out approach, based on sound résumé writing principles will generate interviews. If you can avoid some of these pitfalls, you will be well on your way to producing results. If you are unable to design an outstanding strategic résumé, hire a good résumé writer. It is money well spent. A professional résumé writer is an objective third party with the expertise to overcome your obstacles and make you shine!

About the Author

Sharon Graham is an executive résumé writer, employment interview strategist, and author of *Best Canadian Résumés*. With multiple certifications in résumé, interview, and career strategy, Sharon has elevated the industry by delivering cutting-edge innovations to résumé writers and career practitioners across the nation. She assists six-figure job seekers through her consulting firm Graham Management Group, www.GrahamManagement.com and is executive director of Career Professionals of Canada. You can reach Sharon by e-mailing info@GrahamManagement.com.