

# Defeating Job Search Blues

## And what recruiters look for in a resume

BY TAUNEE S. BESSON

*Editor's Note: This month columnist Taunee Besson answers questions about common job hunting and career problems. If you have a question about your job search or career, send it to our monthly advice column, National Business Employment Weekly, Box 300, Princeton, N.J. 08543-0300. All names are kept confidential.*

**Q: It seems when you're out there at first looking for a job, you have energy and confidence. Then depression seeps in as the time lengthens. How can you get through the rough times without them getting to you? Also, how do you keep your ego out of the job hunt when rejections pile up?**

**A:** Wouldn't it be great if we could bottle enthusiasm and take a swig when we're really thirsty!

My nine years in career counseling have convinced me that the job search tends to magnify emotional highs and lows. An invitation for an interview may evoke euphoria, while a rejection letter can bring a three-day depression. Rational behavior often goes out the window when you feel vulnerable and at the mercy of others.

Fortunately, you can tame your emotional roller coaster by regaining control and structure in your life. Like the exhausted parents of a newborn baby, remind yourself that the sleepless nights (joblessness) won't last forever. It's a temporary condition. Try to live one day at a time without pining for the past or worrying about the future, and you will feel a lot better.

If you must worry, schedule 15 to 30 minutes each day to examine your anxieties. Evaluate why they are bothering you and develop some techniques for dealing with them constructively. For example, if money is a real concern, work out a careful budget for making it last. Think of some alternatives that will keep you fed and clothed until you are employed again. If you deal with your worst expectations, they will lose their power over you.

Worrying about past performance is useless. If your last interview was a disaster, chalk it up to experience and move on. Reliving past deeds is only worthwhile if you can learn from them. Endless rehashes of, "This is where I dropped the ball," will only reinforce the likelihood that you will repeat past mistakes.

Be sure to schedule some fun activities, too. Often job seekers feel guilty taking time to enjoy themselves. They focus more energy on their job search than they would normally spend at work. This single minded dedication is both boring and unhealthy. An evening with supportive friends will do more for your morale than one spent poring over want ads.

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While an unemployed person's job search is his job, 40 hours per week offers plenty of time for calls, interviews, resumes, etc. Knock off work on the evenings and weekends or you are likely to burn out.

Take several moments every day to imagine how great you will feel when you find the right job. Many experts in goal setting say that visualizing your objective is the first step to achieving it. The old adage, "People get what they expect," is certainly true for job seekers. (Savoring past glories can help you to press on for the job you really want, too.)

Check your step-by-step game plan. Does it use contacts effectively or is it relying mostly on want ads and resume campaigns? Are there any other avenues you can explore to find job leads? Sometimes a little conceptual blockbusting can rejuvenate a flagging spirit.

Creating a weekly structure can be helpful as well. Having no place to go in the morning can get

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you off to a depressing start. Join a job club (job seeker's support group). Promise yourself that you will schedule a certain number of interviews each week. Meet a friend for lunch. Go to the library. Taking action always beats sitting around.

If you reel with each rejection, use the technique International Business Machines Corp. teaches its sales people. For every 10 people you see, you will get one offer. Each rejection brings you closer to getting the job you want.

Don't base your future on one potential position. Continue to generate possibilities until you receive a bona fide offer. People waste precious weeks waiting for the one job that doesn't materialize when they could be pursuing several other equally enticing opportunities that may pan out.

Finally, if you are really exhausted, give yourself some time to relax and regroup. To help you began your perspective take a weekend vacation away from home, cheer up a friend who is worse off than you or do some temporary work until the itch returns to continue your search.

**Q: Is there an established format for writing a resume? I have visited with at least a dozen employment consulting services during my career and each**

**has come up with a different approach. Is one better than another?**

**A:** In a word, "No!" Job seekers spend an inordinate amount of time fine tuning resumes designed to be all things to all people. Like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the perfect resume remains elusive. There isn't one resume format that fits everyone's background and job objective.

Like any successful piece of marketing literature, a resume must be tailored to meet the needs of the potential employer. A generic resume with a customized cover letter works to the advantage of relatively few people. In fact, according to Richard Bolles, author of "What Color Is Your Parachute?", the average company hires a person for every 1,470 resumes it receives.

However, you can stack the screening process in your favor if you keep the following in mind. Every resume should include:

- Your name, address and telephone number at the top.
- A specific job objective. It's much better to say, "Sales management position with XYZ Corp.," than, "A management position with a dynamic, growth-oriented company." The more you pinpoint your goal, the easier it is to provide supporting evidence for why you deserve it.
- Accomplishments. Potential employers want to know how your expertise can benefit them. Your accomplishments section should list activities and skills that fit their particular needs.
- Education. Work experience is generally more important than educational credentials, unless you are just graduating or a degree is a mandatory qualification for the position. Consequently, you should list your education, both degrees and applicable continuing education courses below your experience.
- Personal data. Professional organizations, civic groups and hobbies are good candidates for the personal category. However, demographics such as age, weight, height, marital status and number of children are superfluous to your ability to do the job, unless you are applying to be a swimsuit model. (Actually, this whole section can be deleted unless you know your potential manager is an avid runner just like you.)
- No resume should include:
  - Salary history. You can deal with compensation inquiries best in person. Stating past salaries on paper weakens your negotiating position whether you are currently making more, less or the same amount as your job objective.
  - Reasons for leaving the present job. Somehow they always sound negative unless you are there to discuss them one-on-one.
  - References. Only give references if everyone knows and loves these people. Otherwise you're filling critical space with names that are usually

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# Your turn to ask

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meaningless to your interviewer. (Do have your references together, though, in case a potential employer wants to call them after your interview.)

Personnel people screen resumes (sometimes hundreds per opening) to find the best candidates to interview. They are looking for specific skills and experience as they quickly scan each piece of paper. Your challenge is to make the cut and get an appointment to sell yourself in person. If your resume doesn't speak to their needs in the top two-thirds of the first page, they probably will reject it and squelch your opportunity to dazzle them face to face.

While there are lots of ways to present your accomplishments, all styles of resumes fall into one of two major types: the chronological and the functional. Both have advantages, depending on your situation.

The chronological resume typically is used by professionals who have years of experience in a particular career and wish to secure a job equal to or above the one they currently fill. It puts the last job first and moves through work experience in reverse order. Discussing the most recent position at the beginning quickly catches a potential employer's eye with the most relevant, responsible experience. Dates, job titles, companies, locations, position descriptions and accomplishments all are important ingredients in this style.

This format is the traditional, universally accepted one. However, it may not be the best style for you. In fact, if any of the following typify your experience, the chronological resume may do you more harm than good:

- You have gaps in your employment history of six months or more.
- You've jumped from position to position every two years or less.
- Your most recent experience isn't relevant to what you want to do now.
- You want to make a major career change and

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rely on your transferable rather than specialized skills.

- Your volunteer work is much more in line with your career objective than your paid experience.

In any of the above cases the functional resume probably will be the better choice. While this format is much more flexible than the chronological one, functional resumes all stress transferable skills and accomplishments rather than specific experience by job title. They usually state an objective. (Example: Director of Development for the Build a Better America Foundation.) Then they divide the desired

position into major functions. (Example: directors of development need expertise in fund raising, oral and written communication, event planning, budgeting and general management.) Next, they arrange their major paid and volunteer accomplishments under the appropriate functional category. For instance, experiences listed under oral and written communication might look like this:

### Oral and Written Communication

- Designed a brochure distributed to more than 10,000 people discussing the benefits and features of membership in The Women's Foundation.
- Wrote a proposal for a \$50,000 foundation grant to Keep America Green. It was funded for three years.
- Developed and distributed press releases to 30 media resources resulting in two feature stories and four television and radio show appearances.
- Spoke to 25 professional and civic groups concerning the need for citizen participation in local government.

You should note that job titles and dates are not key elements in the functional format. With it you gain a great deal of flexibility in listing your accomplishments in the order most relevant to your potential job.

If leaving dates and titles off your resume is uncomfortable, you might consider a chronological and functional hybrid that lists your key experiences by function at the top of the resume, then follows with a short account of your past positions and employers.

As you see, whatever resume you chose can be the best for you if it clearly states your objective and mirrors the potential employer's needs. ●