

Highlight Your Accomplishments!

We can't emphasize enough how important it is to highlight accomplishments. This is the number-one item that makes or breaks a resume, yet it's the one area that people struggle with the most. First, you need to understand what is meant by an "accomplishment." To have accomplished something in your work, you did not have to negotiate a multi-billion-dollar deal or find the answer to world peace (although those would certainly be worth mentioning). You simply need to have done something that produced a favorable result, whether that was for your employer, your coworkers, your clients, or even you. This could be as simple as making your coworkers' jobs easier by devising a new method of filing documents. Simple? Yes. An accomplishment? Absolutely. The main thing you want to get across when describing your jobs is that you did them well. Employers want to hire people who have proven themselves as to be valuable.

Here are some questions to help you think of contributions you've made:

- Were you commended for your work on a particular project?
- Were you the expert or go-to person in your office for any particular thing?
- Were documents that you drafted used with little or no edits?
- Were you trusted with additional responsibilities over and above others at your level?
- Did you receive positive performance reviews?
- Did you contribute to marketing efforts?
- Did you have any ideas that resulted in more efficient/streamlined operations?
- Did you develop trusting relationships with clients?
- Did you bring in clients?
- Did you resolve disputes?
- Did you save your employers money?
- What did you do that made your company/firm better for having hired you?

Think outside of the realm of your particular industry for a moment. Instead, think about all of the restaurants you've been to and all of the people who have waited on you in your life. There are huge discrepancies between a great waiter and an awful waiter; right?

Say the awful waiter and the great waiter both worked at the same restaurant for the same duration of time. And say both waiters decided to leave the restaurant business behind in order to move on to something else.

Here's waiter #1's job description:

Hank's Bar and Grill, Santa Fe, NM, Waiter, June 1998-Present
Took orders from customers; relayed orders to kitchen; brought food to customers.

Here is waiter #2's job description:

Hank's Bar and Grill, Santa Fe, NM, Waiter, June 1998-Present
Generated repeat business by delivering excellent customer service; spearheaded new tip-sharing system; frequently relied upon to cover shifts on moment's notice; received promotion to head waiter in a five-month period.

Which one would you hire? Even though waiter #1 and waiter #2 both only have restaurant experience, one gets the impression from waiter #2's job description that he is capable of excelling in other areas as well. That's because his resume shows a strong work ethic, people skills, leadership qualities, and a commitment to excellence. Waiter #1's resume shows none of those things.

If you simply write down the things that you have done, employers have no way of knowing whether you simply did them or did them well. For this reason, you want everything you list on your resume to illustrate one or more of the following attributes:

1. Leadership
2. Responsibility
3. Skill
4. Achievement

You can still list duties and responsibilities. However, simply describe them in a way that highlights these attributes.

Highlighting Accomplishments in the Middle/Later Portion of Your Career

Once you've been employed in your industry for a while, hopefully it will be a little easier to highlight some accomplishments from your positions. At this stage, one important thing to do is to *quantify* your achievements:

- What percentage of an increase in production did you create?
- How many cases did you keep from going to trial?
- By how much did you decrease errors?
- How much money did you save your client/company/firm?
- How much new business did you bring in?

You also want to explain your role in projects and their successful resolution. What tactics did you use to increase production? What types of policies did you implement? How did they make things run more efficiently?

Here is a list of examples to get you thinking about how to convey what you've accomplished in your career:

Negotiated complex technology and service agreements that saved more than \$40 million.

Played a prominent role in developing an innovative plan to increase market visibility by 25% in one year.

Led company through acquisition of major competitor, increasing revenues by 15%.

Instrumental in developing new efficiency plan that decreased downtime by 50%.