

How to Sell Yourself to an Employer

The key feature in obtaining a job is selling yourself to the employer. Selling yourself is the only way to get even in the playing field. Others may have fewer qualifications, but if they can sell themselves they can secure the job they want. Put yourself in the place of the employer and list what you would want to see on a resume when hiring someone. When you cater to the mind of an employer you have made a critical step in the process. Remember that your resume and cover letter may be their only chance to get to know you, so make it count. Pay attention to networking with those around you every day. Which ones catch your attention and which ones don't? Make sure to know your audience and tailor your resume to them.

Have you ever seen a couple and thought, "How did he get her?" or vice versa? Obviously, the person deemed less physically attractive knew how to sell his/her other great qualities to compensate for what he/she lacked in the looks department. You've also probably known someone who seems to have it all—good looks, charm, intelligence, etc.—yet sits at home dateless on Saturday nights. Clearly, that person is lacking when it comes to self-promotion.

If there were strict rules about dating, the "tall, dark, and handsome" guy would always get the girl, and the "nice" guy would always be left out in the cold. Likewise, if there were strict rules about how your credentials must be presented, then the same people (those with great credentials) would always get the good jobs, and the others (those with less than great credentials) would be forever stuck in bad jobs.

Self-marketing is what makes the difference. Your resume and cover letter give you an opportunity to level the playing field. The worst thing you can do is to take someone else's resume and simply fill in the blanks with your information. Not only that, it's bound to backfire on you! Your friend might have a 3.9 GPA and therefore doesn't need to flesh out his/her work experience quite so much. A colleague might have been promoted to a high-ranking position and therefore doesn't need to do as much selling of his/her experience. You need to view your resume and cover letter as an opportunity to show what you DO have that your competitors DO NOT.

Learn How to Think Like an Employer

The best way to get a good idea of what makes an effective resume and cover letter is to be on the other side of the hiring process. When you are in the position of hiring someone, you will see firsthand what employers like and dislike in applicants.

When Preferred Resume goes through the process of hiring professional resume writers, we learn even more about what should and should not be in a resume and cover letter. Even among the pros—the people who write resumes for a living—there are resumes that stand out and those that are mediocre. We hire only the cream of the crop to join our team and learn more from them about how to write truly exceptional resumes.

If you are beginning a job search, try to put yourself in either a real hiring situation (for instance, volunteer to participate in interviewing/screening candidates at your current job) or a virtual hiring process in which you should try to imagine a scenario in which you would need to hire someone. Think of your ideal intern, colleague, or manager. Jot down a brief job description. Then think of what you would want to see in that person's resume and cover letter.

You will find that there are a few key qualities you are looking for in your employee. Say those things are: (1) a degree from a reputable school in a particular subject; (2) strong organizational skills; (3) experience in a particular part of your industry; and (4) evidence of strong writing skills. If you find candidates with these credentials, you will look more closely at their resumes. If they have few or none of these qualities, you will toss their resumes.

After basic credentials have been met, you will consider “other” factors. Read through resumes wherever samples are offered (this site, online, career services offices), and find some that strike you as impressive. Once you have compiled a few, start to look for common themes. What language is used? What is/is not included? How is the material presented? What catches your attention?

Then look at the cover letters. Did you read them or did you go straight to the resume? Which letters did you find appealing? Were they short? Long? Aggressive? Laid back? Make a pile of the ones you like most, and see what they have in common.

This process will help give you proper perspective. You may realize after analyzing the resumes of others that some of the items in your own resume are not of any relevance, while other aspects should be given more prominence. Developing the mind of an employer is a critical first step in creating a masterpiece of a resume.

Learn How to Think Like a Salesperson

Once you have put yourself into the mindset of an employer, it is time to step into the shoes of a salesperson. Many people balk at the concept of “self-marketing.” But it is not as scary or as unflattering as it may seem. In fact, it is expected that you will “brag” about yourself in a resume and cover letter. If not you, how will they know how perfect you are for the job?

Every day we are bombarded with marketing in many forms: television and print ads, people on the street handing out fliers for restaurants, billboards, radio spots, etc. Spend a few days paying close attention to the marketing that surrounds you. Which pitches do you ignore, and which ones do you pay attention to? Why? What are the concepts involved?

Just as you’ll notice with the hiring exercise, a few key things will probably emerge. You’ll see that certain pitches capture and hold your attention better than others—namely, those that market to your particular need. The aim of a marketing campaign is threefold: (1) to capture a person’s attention; (2) to hold the person’s attention, and (3) to convince the person that he/she needs what you have to offer.

A lot of people get caught up in number one and neglect numbers two and three. Capturing someone’s attention is the easiest part. Of course, people wearing jumbo hot dog uniforms on the street are going to stand out. But are they going to make you actually purchase a hot dog or just make you point and laugh?

Your primary objective should be to develop an effective “pitch” that will mirror the needs of the employer. Pretend you are an employer thinking, “I could really use a competent assistant who has experience in construction environments, writes effective memoranda, and deals well with frustrated callers.” If a letter comes across your desk that meets those qualifications exactly, you’re going to think the person is perfect for your company.

Of course, another aspect of effective marketing is convincing someone that they need what you have to offer, even if they do not know it yet. Have you ever watched a particularly tempting food commercial and suddenly had an immense craving for that food? That ad did exactly what it was supposed to do. You probably were not even hungry before you saw this commercial, but suddenly you are racing to your car with nothing but drumsticks on your mind.

This type of marketing is most effective when you are approaching employers in an unsolicited fashion. Maybe you are an expert in a certain field or want to provide a certain service on a contract basis. If so, your marketing materials need to convince an employer your services are valuable and illustrate how you can add value. Here is an example of how that can be achieved:

“Dear Hiring Manager,

In today’s economic climate, many companies needing additional manpower are unable to take on a full-time market researcher. If your firm is in this situation, I can provide a solution.”

The first two sentences of this letter attempt to identify a need and offer a solution. Or consider the following:

“Could your company use a proven salesperson with the ability to increase your bottom line?”

What employer would not want to say yes to such a question?

This all boils down to a phrase you will see often in these articles: know your audience. An effective resume and cover letter takes account of an employer’s needs. If you are responding to a job vacancy or posting, think of it as the employer asking, “Is there anyone out there who can help me?” You want your resume and cover letter to provide the solution. If, of the other hand, you are writing to employers on an unsolicited basis, do some research and brainstorming to figure out what you offer that would be appealing to an employer. By proactively stating how you can be of service, you will have a better chance of creating a need for your role.