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CAREER & EDUCATION SPECIAL SECTION

LAWEEKLY

TEXT BY PAUL ROGERS

REPACKAGE YOURSELF



The Job Market is Changing Fast – Are You Keeping Up?

enced in the workforce, bringing many useful skills, so there is no real reason why that worker should feel any less capable or prepared than the younger worker. In fact, it is often mature workers that recognize where they may have skill deficiencies and are willing to do something about it.”

REFRESH YOUR RESUME

Your resume – that apparently humble sheet of paper listing your education and workplace history – will be at the sharp end of your search for new work. As a virtual ambassador that will precede any job interview, it’s a crucial component of your repackaging

“When someone signs-up for our services we work with them to identify what the brand message is going to be for their resume and to focus and target their resume to a specific audience,” Wood explains. “We review how they’ve marketed themselves in the past and provide consultation for how to effectively market themselves for the changing market.

“It’s effective in many ways: one, sometimes individuals must be reminded of the skill sets that they actually have and reminded of their roles and their contributions. As a resume writer my job is to pull out what you were actually able to achieve throughout your background.

“So when people are repackaging themselves it used to be that we would write a resume that summarized what our day-to-day duties were. In today’s tough job market, as an employer, I’m looking for *solutions* – so I need you not just to tell me what you have done, but *how did you do it well?* What were the results of what you were actually able to achieve? Because as an employer I need someone who’s going to increase efficiency and help me decrease costs – bottom line.”

That’s all well and good, but as we can’t change our education, work experience and skill set overnight, how can we significantly refresh our resume?

“Change your *focus*,” Wood stresses. “Right now it’s an educational process – I always tell my clients ‘your resume is the most important *marketing* document you’ll ever put together in your life!’ No longer look at it as a summary of what you’ve done. It’s not a curriculum vitae, where it’s sort of like a story of your life – it’s actually a marketing document that lets an employer know what are the solutions you offer.”

And for those considering shifting careers in mid-stream, that requires a special re-focusing of your resume.

“They should play-up the ‘hard’ skills they’re really good at and minimize the fluff and the ‘soft’ skills,” Wood continues. “If you were in finance and now you want to move into teaching, identify transferable skill sets. So in finance your job was dealing with multiple personalities; managing people; and securing, at the end of the day, hopefully some form of profitability. As a teacher, your job is again to manage a series of personalities; put together plans for your children; and work with them to achieve, at the end of the day, the ability to pass these tests.

“I always tell my clients that whatever job you’re going into, pay a lot of attention to the job descriptions and the person you’re going to interview with – look them up, find out what their backgrounds are; find out how the company markets that person. Because that’s going to tell you what the company finds to be important as skill sets.”

A new resume from CountrysBestResumes.com will cost you between \$100 and \$250. Elsewhere fees can go as high as \$1600. Expect the new document to take 3 to 5 business days to create. So who writes them?

“They’re professionally-trained resume writers with backgrounds in marketing, human resources and public relations,” Wood explains. “I have found that my strongest writers are those who have marketing backgrounds – who might have done direct-mail marketing. Because that’s what your resume is – a direct mail piece crafting language that, through its structure and presentation, immediately jumps off the paper and responds to that market. Most people believe that an HR person would be the best person to write a resume – I have a lot of HR managers as *clients!*”

Yet for someone recently laid-off, with rapidly dwindling savings, wouldn’t it make more fiscal sense to write their own resume?

“Ask yourself the question ‘what’s more important – the money you invest in the \$300 suit or actually getting someone interested and actually having them meet with you in the first place?’” says Wood. “More people spend a lot of money putting together the clothes package but not trying to attract the right opportunity.

“The benefit of actually going to a resume writing service is that you’re speaking to someone who isn’t involved in your day-to-day, so you tend to be a lot more honest. My job is to get through all the fluff: I don’t care that you’re creative – well, what did you *do* with that creativity? As a resume writer I’m going to get to the hard-nosed achievements, capabilities and knowledge.

“Many people work on making sure that their resume looks *pretty*, not *market focused*. The biggest mistake I see is when people write resumes that are long and boring . . . If you understand the industry you should be able to summarize it in a couple of sentences. Many people go on and on and they want you to know every specific aspect of their job . . . it’s just too much to read [for an HR person] and they lose interest.

“Think about it as a marketing piece - give just enough information to get that employer interested enough to want to call you for an interview. Think from the perspective as if you were the employer – what are the hard skills, the immediate skills that must be highlighted?”

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Turmoil in the global economy means that, regardless of your experience, skill set and employment history, you may well find yourself not only looking for a new job, but for a whole new *career*. Certain areas of our domestic economy (including construction, durable/non-durable goods and hospitality) have been hit particularly hard, but few are immune to job cuts. Staying within your career comfort zone may not be enough anymore – you need to be ready to re-package and sell yourself to employers in more “recession-proof” areas of the economy. And even if you’re staying in your current field or position, competition for jobs is tougher than ever – you’d better spruce-up your game!

“We’re starting to see a lot more clients who have been in the workforce for more than 25 years,” says Tawana Wood, President of TCB Solutions, owners of CountrysBestResumes.com, a New York-based multi-service resume writing firm. “Whereas four years ago the majority of my client base had between 3 and 17 years experience, now the majority of my clientele has over 20 years experience.

“And these are people who have never needed a resume in their lives! Top executives with TV stations; with sports organizations – people not just in manufacturing, but in finance, in sales and marketing. They’ve all been impacted. These are those who are ‘C’-level executives. That now makes up about 60% of my client base.”

“Because there have been such staggering changes in the work place these past several months, [repackaging yourself] has become crucial for everyone considering a career or job change,” says Daisy Swan, a Los Angeles career coach/strategist and owner of Daisy Swan & Associates. “Even for those who aren’t planning to make a change, employers are looking at who’s making the most of their job, who’s contributing and important to the organization and who’s just getting by. So for those who are working it’s just as important to do a double-check to see if any fine-tuning is needed in regards to work habits, professional appearance and relationships.”

“The biggest challenge facing the mature worker is their own mental outlook and ability to be flexible, remain open to learning new things, and accept that change can be a great thing for them,” says Karim Cherif, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at UCLA Extension. “The mature worker is often highly experi-

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GUIDE

CONSIDER COUNSELING

Though job-seekers often feel that their own research and the advice of those close to them are sufficient to navigate their search, professional career counseling can in fact be a sound investment.

"I suppose we'd all love for our spouse, our friends and family to help us in this way, but ... people close to us have their own ideas of what's best for us, whereas we keep our clients' very personal goals as the focus of our work," says Swan, the career coach. "It's a different experience entirely. When clients work with me or an associate they are choosing to partner with us to get to take a closer look at what they most want in their work, lifestyle and their contribution to the larger community. We become trusted advisors and mentors to our clients, create strategies and homework that help them to move forward, and challenge them to be more of who they want to be and become.

"Often our clients have an inkling of what changes they want to see happen – which new direction or ultimate goal they have, but

"Don't wait - if you know that a career change is in your future at some point, you've nothing to gain by waiting," – UCLA Extension's Karim Cherif

for one reason or another the future and how to get there looks foggy. We also have clients who have been laid off and are trying to get re-motivated and re-energized, and terrifically creative clients who may have hit a bump and need to get back into their groove again."

Career coaching from Swan's company ranges from \$120 for group meetings to \$1600 for one-on-one services.

"After an initial meeting when we gain greater clarity about our goals of working together we talk regularly over the phone. Homework assignments of all kinds keeps momentum moving; our discussions revolve around small and larger commitments which supports clients as they progress past dips, complexities and distractions, and the internal and external challenges that we all face during the complex working and personal lives so many of us lead these days."

Homework from Daisy Swan & Associates can take various forms.

"It might be a challenge to reach out to a number of people; to do some informational interviews; doing some research on a particular field that they're interested in," Swan explains. "It might be doing some thinking and writing about what it is that's interesting to them. It might be something more creative where we're trying to ignite their creative spirit again.

"We like our clients to work with us for a minimum of three months because there is an arc of change and the support our clients receive during that time is what really helps them to make lasting changes. We also work with people on a shorter-term basis."

WHERE TO START

"Don't wait - if you know that a career change is in your future at some point, you've nothing to gain by waiting," says UCLA Extension's Cherif. "Get started, meet people in the field, attend professional association meetings, go listen to speakers talk about your career field, attend an open house program at a school, and try out a course..... Besides, you might still have two or three more career changes awaiting throughout your working life! That would have been an unheard of concept only a generation ago, but today that is very much a realistic probability. And regardless of what your career field is, there are certain skills that will augment your likelihood for success, so consider taking courses in these areas that will be of key importance to employers not just

now, but in the future: good interpersonal and communication skills; legal knowledge; sales abilities (often the most overlooked); foreign language skills; and general global sustainability knowledge."

"My biggest piece of advice is to stretch, learn and get curious about areas of commerce that haven't already been explored," Swan concludes. "Fear is a contraction that keeps most of us from staying open and in action to find out new things. L.A. is so diverse; so teaming with creativity and ability. And because the city is so large and spread out it takes a lot of energy to connect with others to find out about opportunities that aren't already known through the already worn paths. Our challenge now is to connect to create, and re-create, new opportunities."

FIND OUT MORE

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