

10 useless résumé words (and 10 eye-catching ones)

Beth Braccio Hering
Special to CareerBuilder

"Generic hyperbole belongs on cereal boxes, not on résumés," says Duncan Mathison, a career consultant and co-author of "Unlock the Hidden Job Market: 6 Steps to a Successful Job Search When Times Are Tough." "If it does not pass the 'So what, anybody can make that claim' test, leave it off."

Instead of being another candidate professing to be a "hard worker," revitalize your application with a little seek-and-replace exercise. Scan your résumé for empty, overused words such as the following:

1. Outstanding
2. Effective
3. Strong
4. Exceptional
5. Good
6. Excellent
7. Driven
8. Motivated
9. Seasoned
10. Energetic

"Watch out for words that are unsupported claims of greatness," Mathison says. Adds David Couper, a career coach and author of "Outsiders on the Inside: How to Create a Winning Career ... Even When

You Don't Fit In," "If you call yourself an 'excellent manager,' how do we know?"

The nouns following those subjective adjectives can be equally meaningless. Anyone who has ever had a co-worker can claim to be a "team player." "Do not say you're a 'good communicator' or have 'excellent communication skills.' Who doesn't have these?" says Susan Ach, a career counselor at Marymount Manhattan College in New York City.

A better route to take is describing accomplishments and letting the hirer make his own judgment. Give specific (preferably quantifiable) accounts of what you've done that makes you an "outstanding salesperson." Likewise, peruse performance reviews for quotable material from supervisors that demonstrates why they consider you a "strong leader." Listing awards or other forms of recognition also can be used as support.

Some words should be avoided because they convey traits that employers consider standard for anybody who wants to be hired. "You're motivated? Hope so. A good worker? So happy to hear that; I didn't want to hire a bad worker," Couper says. Don't take up precious résumé space with unnecessary items.

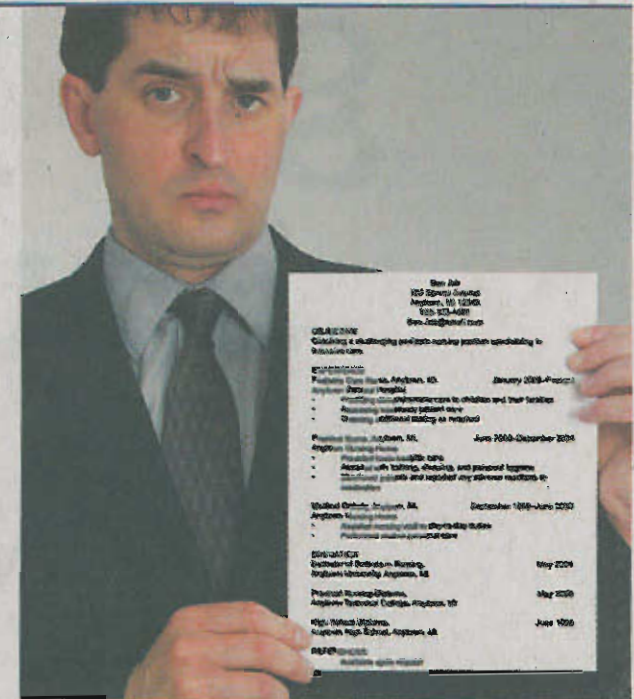
Also on the "don't" side: Words that seek to overcome what you might think are your shortcomings. "Using 'seasoned' for 'over 50' or 'energetic' for 'inexperienced'

looks like spin and smells like spin," Mathison says. Keep the focus on what makes you right for the job.

On the flipside, certain words can make hiring managers do a double-take. Light up their eyes with these 10 words:

1. Created
2. Increased
3. Reduced
4. Improved
5. Developed
6. Researched
7. Accomplished
8. Won
9. On-time
10. Under-budget

"We suggest that résumé writers include action words to describe their jobs," Ach says. Verbs project the image of someone who has the background and initiative to get things done. Employers can clearly comprehend what you've accomplished in the past and can use that as a basis for envisioning future success with their company. Think about it: If you were hiring, would you rather take on someone who calls himself a "productive manager" or somebody who states that at his last job he "increased company profit by 3 percent," "reduced employee turnover in his department to the best level in five



years," and "improved brand awareness by implementing a new social media strategy"?

Lastly, it can be beneficial to use verbs and nouns that are common to your specific industry. This shows your familiarity with the language of your field and optimizes the chances of getting past an automatic scan for keywords. But remember, too, that all companies tend to speak a universal language: money. "Terms such as 'on-time' and 'under-budget' are often good. Hiring managers want to know you can get things done with minimum fuss," Mathison says. Tell them what makes you the most profitable choice for the job and employers will tell you the best word of all – "hired."

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Social media not your thing? It could hurt your job search

Rachel Farrell, Special to CareerBuilder

Allie McCormick left her full-time public relations position to be a stay-at-home mom. Once she was ready to get back to work, she posted to Facebook that she was looking for a job.

"I believe my status was something along the lines of 'Allie McCormick is officially job hunting. I have over 10 years of experience in PR and marketing and am overall awesome [smiley face]," she recalls.

McCormick says she received several messages instantly. "Within four weeks, I had interviewed formally with three companies and had two offers on the table," says McCormick, now a PR consultant with Innography, an intellectual property software company.

Social media, also referred to as social recruiting, is on the rise. And if you're not familiar with it, you had better get to know it soon.

"Social media is where the employers are and where they're investing," says Adriana Llamas, Career Coach and author of "Career Sudoku: 9 Ways to Win the Job Search Game."

In a recent study by Jobvite, an online recruiting website, 55 percent of employers said they plan to increase their investment in social recruiting. Eighty-seven percent of them are already using LinkedIn for recruiting and 95 percent hired a new employee from their LinkedIn recruiting efforts alone, not to mention Facebook or Twitter.

Additionally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that up to 85 percent of career opportunities go unadvertised, which means that you have to use your network.

"Word of mouth and friend referrals are huge [in a job search]. The new word of mouth is through social media," says Sarah Cullins, president of Finesse Staffing, a recruiting firm based in Southern California. "It is often still who you know, not what you know, and social media helps you to know a lot more people."



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Echoes Llamas, "If you know of a company or a job you want to land, get your network working for you. With 350 friends, they know 350 friends who know 350 friends. You've just reached more than 1,000 people, and the likelihood is someone knows a hiring authority at your target company."

In fact, not having an online presence will hurt job seekers, says Morgan McKean, a consultant and writer who specializes in recommending "green" fashions, beauty products and home décor for women.

"These days, any business that doesn't have a Web presence isn't taken seriously. What job seekers have to understand is that their career is their business. They must have a place to send potential employers to see their background. The product or brand they are selling is their skill set. They need to have a place to showcase their features and the benefits to working with them. Without these things, they lack credibility in this new job market," she says.

If you don't already have a social networking or social media profile, the first thing to do is get one. Then follow these steps:

1. Be clear on what you want. "Candidates need to have a clear focus of what they're looking for in a position. If you want your network, online or offline, to help you,

you need to know what you're asking for first," Llamas says.

Saying that you are looking for a job isn't clear enough, Cullins says. "People won't take that seriously," she says. "If you clearly define what you want and what you can do and ask your network to actively help you, you will get led or pushed in the right direction."

2. Give help first. "When someone asks if you know of a good mechanic or if they paid too much to the plumber, help them out. Be sincere and helpful. Refer your social media contacts to others and they will reciprocate," Cullins says.

3. Consistent branding. "There are a plethora of candidates and job seekers I see that have one profile on Facebook that says 'restaurateur,' another one on LinkedIn that says 'social media marketer' and yet a third on Twitter that says 'food blogger.' Who are you?" Llamas says. "Create a consistent,

clear and precise brand across all the social networks and on your résumé so hiring managers and companies know what you do and that you're an expert in your industry."

4. Protect yourself. More often than not, employers will do a search for you before or after an interview, in a search engine or on a social network.

"To avoid giving away too much information, keep your profiles private. Only accept Facebook friend requests from people you know, and while keeping your LinkedIn profile public is recommended, you can choose to publish on certain aspects of your public profile on LinkedIn," Llamas says. "Avoid those summer beer-guzzling Facebook profile shots; your profile picture is always public."

5. Be social. "Social media is not just about blasting your opinion or your accomplishments to the world. Social media is an online party," McKean says. "If you engage people in conversations, compliment them on their work, ask questions and acknowledge their expertise, they are more likely to respond."

Ultimately, if you don't have a presence on social media, you look outdated and will get left behind.

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How women can negotiate their way to higher pay

Kaitlin Madden,
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Nearly 50 years after the Equal Pay Act of 1963 was passed, women still earn just 77 cents for each dollar than men earn. While many theories exist as to why this is, one hypothesis is that women are just not as likely to stand up for themselves and what they deserve in the workplace.

In fact, according to a 2008 study by Carnegie Mellon University, men ask for raises 85 percent more often than women do; and when told to choose a metaphor that best described their feelings toward negotiating, men chose "winning a ballgame," while women chose "going to the dentist."

So what makes women so hesitant to negotiate for what they want?

Much of it has to do with fear, says Becky Sheetz-Runkle, author of "Sun Tzu for Women: The Art of War for Winning in Business."

"Women are far more inclined than men to worry about the impact that asking for more money and advancement will have on their relationships," she says. "We don't want to damage our professional relationships, and we don't want people to think we're too aggressive, too greedy, too ... you name it. Because of this, we don't ask for the raise or the promotion, or we ask indirectly."

Many times, Sheetz-Runkle says, women will also simply work harder, hoping that eventually, someone will notice and reward them for their effort. But this strategy is also flawed. "It's not just about working hard," she says. "Researchers and experts who've studied wage disparity have found that women often believe that if

we work hard enough, everything will fall into place. After all, that's only fair, right? Maybe, but it doesn't necessarily work that way. We have to be direct and ask for what we want, not compensate in other ways."

The bottom line is that in order to get the pay and recognition they deserve, women must ask for it. Here, Sheetz-Runkle and other experts offer advice on how women can negotiate the salary they deserve.

Get background information

Before you go to your boss and make your case, spend a few weeks gathering background information on salary trends in your field.

Start off by researching the average compensation for others in your occupational function and geographic area to help you determine an appropriate salary range for your job. Sites like BLS.gov and CBSalary.com are good places to start. To delve further, "consult your trade association or a human resources association (like SHRM.org)," suggests Linda Swindling, a leadership consultant, former employment lawyer and author of the book "Get What You Want: Harness the Power of Positive Influence." "Just make sure that the data you receive is accurate for the geographic area you are in."

Build your case

Even if your research shows that you are grossly underpaid, asking your boss for a raise based on fairness alone might not be enough to get you one. It's important to support your request with information that proves you deserve it. Plus, building your case will make you more confident going into the meeting and will prevent you from second-guessing yourself, because you'll have evidence to back up your merit.

To prepare yourself for the negotiation, jot down your major accomplishments from the past year, ways you've saved/earned the company money, any emails or notes of praise you've received for your work, etc. Your argument will be much more convincing with proof of the value you bring to the company.

To make an even stronger case for yourself, create a list of goals, too. "Show what you've done in the past and what your plans are to add value to the company in the next 90 days or year," Swindling says.

Change your perception on negotiations

"By its nature, negotiation is confrontational, but it doesn't have to be hostile," Sheetz-Runkle says.

Instead of seeing a negotiation as an event where one person wins and the other loses, look at it as a conversation in which both parties are hoping to walk away having gained something. You want a raise, and your employer wants a satisfied employee, so the situation can have a positive outcome for both parties.

Practice beforehand

Practicing what you're going to say out loud beforehand -- just like you would for any other presentation -- will help you to feel more confident going in, and will also help you work out any kinks in your argument.

Once you have your presentation down, though, stick to those points, advises Alexia Vernon, a career coach and author of the book "Awaken your CAREERpreneur." "Rehearse your points.



And just as importantly, rehearse staying quiet after you deliver your information. By talking too much we can actually undermine our credibility by projecting nervousness and insecurity," she says.

Learn for next time

Though it's never too late to try and course correct an unfair salary, the easiest time to negotiate money is before you even accept a job offer. If you plan on making a job change in the future, remember to push back if you get a lowball salary offer, and don't be afraid to throw out a high number.

"While women negotiate less frequently than men, when asked for our salary requirements we often give a number lower than our male counterparts, which can be just as damaging as not asking in the first place," Vernon says. Ask for what you're worth -- it may seem intimidating in the short term, but in the long run you'll be glad you did.

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What hiring managers really want to see

Alina Dizik, Special to CareerBuilder

When you're job searching, simply getting the attention of potential employers can be a challenge. Of course, there are always a few tricks to keep employers intrigued, no matter what job you're eager to land. Wondering what hiring managers want to see? Here, job-search experts weigh in on what makes job applicants irresistible:

Presenting a stable work history

Employers need to see consistency on a résumé. "Many companies these days are not interested in people who have changed jobs every few years," says Joseph Kotlinski, a partner at Winter, Wyman & Co, a recruiting firm. "If you were out of work for a number of months, show a prospective employer that you stayed busy by taking classes [or] volunteering."

Make the résumé come to life

These days, simply handing over a one-sheet résumé is not enough. Most employers are eager to see an online showcase of your work. "While résumés are static, a link to an online portfolio can give it new life and meaning," explains Nathan Parcels, chief executive of InternMatch.com, a service that matches employers with interns.

"Marketers that include a link to their blog or engineers that include a link to their GitHub profile help prove that they are more than just words on paper and leave a lasting impact on employers."

Showcase awards on your résumé

Don't let notable awards be an afterthought, says Dawn Rasmussen, president of Pathfinder Writing and Career Services. Instead, list any achievements in the top third of your résumé because employers want to find people who are publicly recognized for their work.



"The types of things to put in this section include industry, peer, supervisor, subordinate or partner recognition awards (not financial incentives), speaking engagements, relevant industry presentations, any articles in industry publications that you might have authored [and] patents," she says.

Demonstrate listening skills

"Show that you are really listening," says Jennifer Kahnweiler, author of "The Introverted Leader." "You can get so focused on crafting the next right response that you may miss out on what is most important to your potential employer." To demonstrate your listening skills, take advantage of any opportunities that ask you to paraphrase what your interviewer has shared.

Understand company initiatives

It's not enough to quickly browse the company's website an hour before your first interview.

"Demonstrate your dedication and interest in the company," says Jessica Miller-Merrell, chief executive of Xceptional Human Resources. To gain an insider

perspective, browse LinkedIn and industry publications and look for news interviews with key executives. Learning as much as you can about the company also helps when it comes time to discuss compensation or work-life balance, she says.

Explain what you can do for them

A sure bet to get hiring managers to pay attention is by delving into how your experience can benefit the company. Career coach Malcolm Munro suggests describing two aspects: "How your experience can help the company solve its problems, and how your experience can help the company make money." Before each interview, take time to tailor your response.

Ask the right questions during the interview

The flow of the interview shouldn't be a rigid question and answer session. Instead, end the interview by discussing a few well-thought-out questions with the interviewer. "Two invaluable questions for the person who might be your future boss are: What keeps you up at night? And, how will you measure success?" Kahnweiler says.

Don't forget the follow-up

Sending a thank you email or card should never be an afterthought. Forgetting to do so or simply running out of time can prevent you from advancing to the next round of interviews. Not all employers abide by that principle, but many are eager to see that you're dedicated to landing the position. "Dropping a handwritten thank-you note into the mail immediately after an interview can make all the difference in getting hired or not," Parcels says.

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