



## WHITE PAPER SERIES

Getting the Interview: Despite the 'Red Flags'.

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**A** job candidate has three key opportunities to demonstrate the quality of their character to an employer/organization. These include the resume, the cover letter, and of course, the interview. When one considers how long it takes (in the real world) to truly discern another person, it is easy to see that the above three elements are as abbreviated as they are critical. Job seekers are charged with the task of knowing exactly what an employer is looking for; and furthermore, they must know how to effectively demonstrate that they do in fact meet the employer's criterion...oh yeah, and they have to be better than everyone else trying to do the same thing.

This is not a simple task. Thousands of qualified people are rejected everyday for the slightest of reasons. It is imperative to the progression of capitalism that fine candidates are weeded out such that finer candidates are cultivated to grow stronger business methods.

Given the above facts, what happens to the candidate who has a "choppy" vocational history? In staying with the theme of truth, it is here noted that these candidates are starting this already difficult race a few paces behind the pack. Their mountain is high, but not insurmountable.

A 3-part white-paper series has been developed that will examine the methods by which these particular candidates can place themselves in a more competitive position. By strategically implementing individual approaches to the three major components of the employment acquisition process (resume, cover letter, and interview), these candidates will improve their professional standing and increase their chances for vocational success.

The first white paper will discuss the all-important resume. Without an effective resume, a candidate limits his or her opportunity for gaining an interview, thereby cutting themselves out of the competition for employment. To gain helpful insights in structuring your resume, please review part one of this White Paper series. The second article in the series will analyze methods and hints for creating expert cover letters. And finally, the third article will explore the best practices for handling the all-important interview.

It is the intent of this series to help job seekers, who have bare segments in their professional continuum, by providing them with the latest and most effective employment strategies. By practicing the following methods, candidates are improving their chances of creating better resumes, structuring stronger cover letters, having a greater number of successful interviews, and ultimately, gaining a heightened opportunity for vocational achievement.

## PART 1:

### How to address time gaps when creating a resume.

The most common reason for time lapses in a resume include going back to school for higher education or technical training, raising a child, enrollment in the military, recovering from a traumatic illness or injury, and incarceration - to list only a few. The reasons for work time absences are as varied as they are vast, and obviously, some are looked upon with more favor than others. But, no matter what the reason is for a gap in work history, there are certain tips that will help make a stronger resume.

Explaining time off from work to a potential employer is often best handled in the cover letter. If ones feels that it is important for the prospective employer to understand why a candidate has had time away from work, then a brief explanation should be included in the cover letter. This will open the door for further conversation at the time of the interview. **However, the one thing that a candidate does not ever want to do is make the mistake of including gaps in a resume without offering an explanation.**

For a model candidate who has consistently climbed the ranks in a certain industry, a *Reverse Chronological* format is suggested. Essentially, this style of resume will list job experiences beginning with the most recent (at the top of the resume) and ending with the most dated work experience. This is a very simply way for a candidate to demonstrate their climb to success in a cohesive and structured manner. However, this format may not be the best course of action for persons who have holes in their vocational history, as it allows potential employers to easily view any time lapses that the candidate may have.

For candidates who have not followed a chronological path to the top, there is the *Functional Resume* or the *Modified Functional Resume*. A resume of this sort is designed to focus on what qualifications and "real life" skills a candidate has, rather than his or her orderly climb to success.

The first section of this style of resume should list a "**Summary of Qualifications,**" which is a few-sentence overview of tasks for which the candidate excels. These are broad descriptions.

For example:

A highly organized individual with strong problem solving skills. Works well within a group setting as well as an individual environment. Maintains strong flexibility and adapts well to varying workplace environments.

These should be in sentence format (**not** bulleted) and a candidate should never employ the use of first person.

The second segment of a functional resume should then provide **“Area’s of Strength,”** which will bullet point specific and unique talents that are supported by successful historical experience. This is the section that will require the writer to be specific and provide examples that support the **Qualifications** that were offered.

For example:

- As demonstrated by actions that increase procurement proficiency by 10% - proven project management experiences in the creation and implementation of assessment and report writing policy
- Hands-on experience in classroom instruction working with persons studying computer technology as demonstrated during 600 hours of classroom led instruction for professional adults.

Remember, these should be bulleted and speak directly to a candidate's unique experience. Again, never use first person.

At this point, the resume will present a section entitled **“Work Experience,”** under which the candidate will list relevant work history. Experts argue whether a functional resume should or should not include dates next to each work experience. Obviously, employers prefer to see the time-period in which a candidate has held a position, however, placing dates can be a touchy matter. If the candidate has been out of work for a long time, the employer may view this as unfavorable - which would suggest that omitting dates is the way to go. In contrast, however, by omitting dates, the employer may get suspicious and question the candidate's motives for doing so. This is a judgment call for each individual. In making this decision, one should consider the reasons for employment gaps and the likely response of the employer to these justifications. Either way, if a candidate does include dates, he or she should only provide the times in terms of years (e.g. 1997-2001), rather than offering both month and year.

If a candidate does decide to include dates, and if there are large gaps, the resume should provide an additional section entitled **“Additional Experience,”** which speaks about further accomplishments/experiences that have resulted in relevant growth during the time of vocational absence. These should be bulleted and include short, individual sentences.

For example:

- Volunteered with The Red Cross during employment hiatus
- Cared for spouse while he/she rehabilitated from an automobile accident

Once all the above information is captured, the resume should provide a sections entitled, **“Education,”** which present the potential employer with the candidates history in terms of schooling. This section should include all Technical and/or Trade schools, as well as Colleges and/or Universities attended. Additionally, all certifications should be listed in this sections as well.

For example:

West Chester University, West Chester, PA  
Received BA (Sociology) - 2004.

Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA  
Certified Nurse Practitioner - 2006

Education will serve as the concluding section of a resume. While there is really no correct way to create a resume, the above guidelines serve as a strong base for students entering the workforce, people changing vocational industries, and people who are looking to re-enter the workforce after a temporary hiatus. Every candidate will approach this process a little differently, and success does not necessarily come easily or quickly.

For more information on resumes and cover letters, contact Seth Acosta at The Sierra Group - 610-992-0288 x 13 or email him at [sethacosta@thesierragroup.com](mailto:sethacosta@thesierragroup.com).