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Preparing A High Impact CV

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The value of a well presented CV can not be overstated. However, it is all too often viewed as a chore that must be endured. When one considers the potential benefits of a highly effective CV the investment in quality time can be seen for what it is, an investment.

Let's be clear at this point, your CV must be prepared honestly and accurately, but it must also communicate effectively with the recipient. This means presenting information in a format that highlights experience, skills and achievements, in a way that can be quickly assimilated, understood, and retained by a recruiter or potential employer. When reviewing CV's a recruiter or employer will appreciate the documents that communicate effectively, and may be aggravated by those that are perceived as 'hard work'.

Your CV should be a summary documents only. Detail is discussed at interview. Too much or too little detail may serve to discount you from consideration. It is a fine balancing act.

The finished CV should ideally fit two sides of A4. Quantity definitely does not equal quality.

Keep the font simple (Arial), and an acceptable size (10 to 12), and think about the layout. Don't make pages too busy, keep a proportion of clear space. Use underlining or bold to highlight key words or points.

Don't forget to spell check and proof read your CV. A small error will destroy the credibility created by a well prepared CV. Better still, get somebody else to proof read it.

Think of your CV as a marketing tool, the role of the CV being to convince the recipient to sample (or interview) the product (you). Listing the product ingredients and manufacturing process is unlikely to convince anybody to try it, but explain the benefits and value of the product, and interest begins to stir.

Your CV should include the following sections, presented in the order shown. Though they can not be prepared in this order...

1. Personal Details
2. Objective
3. Attributes & Benefits
4. Achievements
5. Employment History
6. Education & Training

Your CV should be prepared in the following order...

Step 1 - Personal Details

Open the CV with your personal information. Ideally include full name, address, home and mobile telephone numbers, e-mail address, date of birth, and family status. You may prefer to leave out date of birth or family status.

Step 2 - Defining Your Objective

The next step in preparing your CV is to understand why you are doing it. What are you seeking to achieve? You are unlikely to achieve great career success unless you have defined what success is, and how you can realise it. You need to define longer term career objectives and the short and medium term steps that might deliver you.

Include a statement of Objective in your CV following your personal details, defining the next step, or the career objective that you seek to achieve. Describe the type of role, the type of company, and why you want the opportunity. Don't get carried away, it should be a short paragraph.

Step 3 - List Your Employment History

Whilst this is not the next section to be entered on the CV, you need to capture the factual information about your employment history before proceeding further. This factual information will be presented as the fifth section of your finished CV.

List all of the positions held with all employers in reverse chronological order, including dates. Make sure that all time periods are accounted for.

For positions held in the last 10 years provide a one or two sentence high level description of the role, plus three or four bullet points of key responsibilities.

For positions from 10 to 15 years provide a one or two sentence high level description only.

Beyond 15 years list position title and employer name only. Unless there is a specific reason for expanding upon a particular role, i.e. you are seeking to redirect your career into a previous area.

Step 4 - Identify Your Attributes and Benefits

Review your employment history and identify the key attributes (skills and qualities) learnt and utilised in the various roles. Then think about what benefits you brought to the employing organisations, how you utilised your attributes (skills and qualities) to deliver value.

It is important to recognise that your career may have previously changed direction, and that your attributes (skills and qualities), and the subsequent benefits and value that you delivered, will have evolved as your career has developed.

Focus upon the attributes (skills and qualities), and of course the benefits and value, that relate to the recent developments in your career and the career goals that you have established.

Create a statement of attributes and benefits, and the related value that you delivered to employers. Position this to follow your statement of Objective on the CV.

Step 5- Define Your Achievements

Detailing the benefits and value delivered to employers can be hollow without clear evidence of success. Achievements clearly demonstrate the potential benefit and value that you bring to an employer. Employers want to see real examples including percentages or other statistics. It is not enough to say you increased this or reduced that, there must be a measure of achievement.

Defining a measure of your achievement may not always be easy at the first attempt. Many people fail to recognise the true impact of their achievements. Lets look at an example.

Reducing a purchase cost by 10% whilst reducing the supply base from 50 to 40 suppliers is straightforward. But what about introducing a new technology that costs slightly more, but delivers benefits to the wider organisation by reducing rework or warranty costs. In this case it is important to establish an approximate measure of purchase cost increase versus organisational cost decrease, i.e. what was the net saving in warranty or rework costs due to the new technology after discounting the increased purchase cost. To say nothing of the increased goodwill as warranty problems reduce. The point here is that identifying the measure of an achievement is not always straight forward and may require detailed consideration, but will powerfully impact your CV's effectiveness.

Try to identify four or five achievements that you believe are of particular significance and create a one line bullet point for each, including the quantitative measure.

Include a bullet point list of specific achievements after the statement of attributes and benefits.

Step 6 - List Education and Training

Finally list details of education. Potential employers are only interested in your higher qualifications with dates of study, i.e. Degrees, Diplomas, Certificates, and professional qualifications. If you do not have a higher qualification then it is important to include the highest level of qualification that you have otherwise the recruiter or potential employer may think that you have forgotten to include details of your education.

For higher qualifications it may also be relevant to include the name of the institution, if you feel that this is noteworthy.

You should also list the name of any training courses attended relevant to the position sought or your career objective.

If you have language capability then it is important to state not only the language but also the level of proficiency (basic, conversational, fluent).