

“Ten Top Tips for Improving Your Resume: A Consultant’s Viewpoint”

by Brenda Zechmeister

With mergers, staff and budgetary reductions and additional duties found across the non-profit landscape, many development professionals are, or may soon be, seeking a new position. A resume and cover letter provide potential non-profit employers with a “first look” at you and your credentials. Here are ten specific ideas to capture a reviewer’s attention, distinguish yourself and help obtain an interview.

➤ **Offer demonstrable fundraising results in your resume.**

The more a prospective employer knows about your capabilities, the better. Don’t be timid about tooting your own horn about your accomplishments. Outline your fundraising experience, and be specific about objective criteria such as number of solicitations completed, net income generated, and/or number of volunteers recruited in campaigns you worked on or staffed.

➤ **Show examples of direct, face-to-face contact with prospects/donors.**

Help a potential employer visualize you working for them. Share stories of events and/or situations you successfully managed and creative ideas utilized to improve a fundraising campaign, produce new major gifts or give a fresh approach to an annual event. Tell about challenges you encountered and how you transformed them into opportunities.

“To keep a lamp burning we have to keep
putting oil in it.”
Mother Theresa

➤ **Demonstrate extensive knowledge and experience with donor software and other equipment.**

Tell them what you know about donor software, like Excel, Photoshop, ACT or Razor’s Edge. Likewise, let them know if you have experience producing videos, creating Powerpoint presentations, layout and design of marketing materials, etc. These experiences can be added bonus points that makes you stand out amongst other candidates.

➤ **Indicate an understanding of financial reports.**

Being comfortable with numbers and financials is a real asset. It's important to be able to understand and explain to others (other staff, board members, volunteers) the difference between an income statement and an audited statement or what a balance sheet is and what the numbers all mean as they relate to fundraising. Know what percentage of total revenue comes from fundraising activities.

➤ **Present capital/endowment campaign experience.**

Detail your direct experience with various kinds of fundraising campaigns in different types of non-profit organizations. Tell what your duties were and highlight your successes, as well as challenges and how you overcame them. The more diverse your experience, the better equipped you are to handle different situations.

“The world recognizes nothing short of performance,
because performance is what it needs,
and promises are of no use to it.”

Philip C. Hamerton

➤ **Describe active, volunteer service at another NPO (not your employer).**

Be sure to list your volunteer experiences - those related to fundraising as well as those that aren't. Not only does your service show other facets of your work experience, it shows other aspects of your personality in general. It also demonstrates your commitment to community.

➤ **Have five (5) top personal references, including at least one mentor.**

Employers count on the objective opinions of others with whom you have had associations. It often gives them added assurance of your abilities and potential, and provides them with additional insights that are helpful in determining whether or not to hire you. Therefore, it is important to give careful thought to who you list. Be sure to ask their permission.

➤ **Publish, present or perish.**

Write and publish articles and submit copies with your resume. Use examples from AFP, AHP, CASE, NCPG or other professional organizations if you have not done this before. Become an effective public speaker, and make presentations. Join your local Toastmasters to help build your confidence in public speaking. List your published works, speaking engagements and presentations on your resume. In addition to giving you added credibility, this is also a good opportunity to get your name in the public arena and to network.

“With others sometimes,
But with yourself,
Never be satisfied.”
Thomas Trager, S.M.

➤ **Understand on-line contributions, e-newsletters and e-commerce.**

Technology is moving forward with lightning speed, and those who keep up with the latest will be able to take advantage of many opportunities to fast track their careers. For fundraising, it's helpful to learn about Kintera, PayPal, and eTapestry, just to name a few. Connect with organizations that offer education sessions on this technology, such as professional groups and local schools. Sometimes, they even offer free or low-cost workshops. Include seminars that you've attended on your resume, especially if you become certified for a particular skill.

➤ **Choose hobbies wisely.**

Listing your hobbies gives prospective employers another insight to who you are. Hobbies can produce useful, transferable skills, such as photography or creative writing. Horseback riding can be a volunteer opportunity. Attendance at arts and cultural events can double as networking possibilities. Sometimes, it can be a good way to connect with a potential employer who has similar interests. If you know he/she loves to bike, and you do too, be sure to list that. If you like hiking, and you're interviewing for an environmental organization, or you enjoy going to the theater and you're interested in working with a theatrical group, include those interests as well.

“You can't always get what you want,
But if you try
Sometimes you might find
That you get what you need.”

Mick Jagger
The Rolling Stones

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