

What's Wrecking Your Résumé?

By Rachel Zupek, CareerBuilder.com writer

'Exceptional communication, leadership and management skills.' To a seasoned résumé reviewer, that line reads: yada, yada, yada, says Kurt Weyerhauser, managing partner for Kensington Stone, a California-based executive search firm.

Why?

"People who read résumés for a living dismiss such comments because they are subjective assertions made by the only person who has anything to gain from them -- you," Weyerhauser says. "How do I know if you have the expertise to make accurate assessments about the quality of such skills?"

Along with using subjective assertions, experts say job applicants are famous for filling their résumés with jargon words and empty language that say nothing of their actual capabilities -- and it's the most detrimental move a job seeker can make.

"Verbs such as 'assist,' 'contribute' or 'support' without any additional information mean essentially nothing to a recruiter or hiring manager," says Michele Minten, director of centralized recruiting for Hudson, a New York-based recruiting firm. "Instead, a job seeker needs to be specific in how he or she assisted with a particular project."

Empty phrases

One thing you won't see on a successful résumé is empty phrases describing your work; instead, you'll find specific examples illustrating your accomplishments.

"The secret of a great résumé is that it leads the reader, on his or her own, to come up with the very assertions you would like to make," Weyerhauser says. "The best way to achieve this is to show, not tell. Use facts, not feelings."

Check out these expert examples of empty phrases:

Phrase: "Proficiency in problem identification."

Problem: "People want solutions, not problems," says Jo Bennett, partner at Battalia Winston, U.S. member firm of the Amrop Hever, a New-York based executive search firm. Instead, describe the solutions for specific problems you solved, she says.

Phrase: "Cultivated a team-based atmosphere."

Problem: On the surface, this may seem like nice wording, but it leaves people wondering what the person actually did that accomplished the claim, says Christopher Novak, an author, motivational speaker and leadership coach with The Summit Team, a leadership consulting firm in Syracuse, New York.

"It's almost too good a word to carry credibility in that it's slick but not substantive," he says.

Phrase: "Demonstrates proven ability... ."

Problem: "The activity will demonstrate your availability," Bennett says. Take out demonstrate and just include 'proven ability to (insert important activity here).'

Phrase: "Championed family-friendly policies that increased retention."

Problem: This phrase is hollow, Novak says. "It gives the impression that they somehow pushed through major policy initiatives when more often, one discovers that they simply added their voice to someone else's work."

Jargon buzzwords to avoid

There's no shame in being ambitious, aggressive, a people-person or a team-player, but anyone can describe themselves in those terms, Minten says. The best way to demonstrate those qualities is through achievements that explain what makes a person that way, she says.

But, Minten adds, while using the latest buzzwords won't get a hiring manager's attention, understanding what the keywords are for your particular industry or job function will.

Here's a list of 25 buzzwords to avoid (or use sparingly), according to Bennett, Novak and Minten.

- Top-flight
- Collaborative
- Interface
- Innovative
- Energetic
- Problem-solver
- Proclivity
- Strategic
- Dynamic
- Ethical
- Penchant
- Aggressive
- Motivated
- Outstanding communication skills
- Creative
- Goal-oriented
- Proactive
- Team player
- Take-charge
- Entrepreneurial
- Detail-oriented
- Organized
- Hard-working
- Ambitious
- People-person

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