

Your work history: How far back should you go on a résumé?

By Beth Braccio Hering, special to CareerBuilder

Today's hiring managers have stacks of applications to get through quickly, so job seekers need to make each moment count when presenting themselves to prospective employers. While every candidate wants to give a thorough picture of accomplishments and skills, is it necessary to go back to the very beginning when presenting one's job history?

"The reality is there is no right or wrong answer; it is all about preference," says Frank Dadah, [general manager of financial contracting](#) for the Winter, Wyman Cos., one of the largest staffing firms in the Northeast. As a general rule, Dadah says he likes job seekers to include the past 10 years. "Anything further back than that is going to be obsolete. With the changes in technology and business practices, anything further back is really meaningless. I am not suggesting that if you worked for one company for 30 years that you only put 10 years on your résumé, but I am suggesting that if you have six jobs totaling 15 years that you only go back as far as approximately 10 years."

Camille Fetter, [managing partner](#) for TalentFoot, an executive search firm based in [Chicago](#), says she prefers including a complete job history. "You may have had exposure to a specific industry that could be relevant to your prospective employer's business. If you eliminate this experience altogether, you're filtering information from the prospective employer that might just be the experience you needed to rise above the competition."

Fetter also says that five to 10 years of missing experience on a résumé may be a red flag to employers. "[Recruiters](#) and hiring managers may jump to the conclusion that you're trying to hide something," she says.

Dadah agrees that some interviewers may see an omission as dishonest, but he also points out, "We have all been told that résumés should never exceed one (when mailing) or two (when emailing) pages in length. Is it dishonest to shorten your résumé to keep it to a page or two?"

Handling the early years

However far back a job seeker chooses to go, effective presentation is crucial. Showcasing key skills and accomplishments at the top keeps the hirer reading, giving you more time to sell your attributes. Unless there is something from your early career that is particularly noteworthy to highlight, older information tends to be placed toward the bottom of a résumé.

"I advise job seekers to give paragraph or bullet-point job descriptions as far back as 10 years. If the person has been in the same job for 10 years, then most of the résumé should be based around that one job," says Lizandra Vega, author of "The Image of Success: Make a Great Impression and Land the Job You Want." To keep the résumé fresh and concise, she recommends that earlier positions simply be listed by title, name of the company and dates of employment. "This shows the candidate has had prior work experience, and it lets the employer know the types of companies the candidate has worked for before getting to where she is currently."

Giving employers what they want

While there may be no absolute rules as to what should or shouldn't be included on a résumé, remember that the ultimate goal is to present oneself as the best possible candidate for the position at hand. Always look to the information given in the job description for guidance.

"There are times when 10 years back just isn't far enough," Dadah says. "For example, a company may be looking for a controller with 25-30 years of experience. In this case, truncating your résumé may be inappropriate."

Bottom line: There isn't one "perfect" way to lay out your work history, nor is there one magical résumé guaranteed to land any job. Be prepared to tinker with your presentation depending on the needs of the individual position. When all is said and done, the best résumé is the one that gets you hired.

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