

# *Resume Revamp: A Little Less Conversation, A Little More Action!*

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When I sit down to write an article, I usually try to come up with some reference to classical antiquity or perhaps Enlightenment-era philosophy. I like to think that the progenitors of our society have something relevant to say that will shed light even in our relatively "dumbed-down," pop-centric, go-go culture. But when I sat down to write this article on reapproaching the professional resume, I felt that the sedate, reasoned approach to life exemplified by our intellectual forebears just did not catch the spirit of the modern job search. Not at all.

## **Fleeting Romance**

I am not the first to notice that the **interview process** is analogous to a dating relationship. Moreover, in this age of increasingly short law-firm tenures, the law firm-attorney dance can resemble a singles' bar scene. If this is the case, then recourse to the timeless Justice Holmes is in order. Recall his admonition: "the timid may stay at home."

You do not want to stay at home--you want to fulfill your professional goals and get into a platform that creates the synergies you need. You have to get your name noticed, and for any given person, you do not have two chances to do it. Just one.

At BCG, we pride ourselves on creating extremely detailed and evocative cover letters. We do our best to answer in a cover letter all the questions a hiring partner would want answered before extending an offer. A fantastic cover letter will open doors and get you past multiple gatekeepers, but a resume must still deliver. At some point, a decision maker is going to pore over that resume and hope that the skills and experience he or she has been looking for will finally appear. And this person will not want to guess and surmise--he or she will want answers. I hasten to add that your resume has approximately 11.3 seconds to communicate those answers. This is why your resume very likely needs "a little less conversation, a little more action."

## **Action v. Conversation**

While I would normally hesitate to quote the King of Rock 'n' Roll for the centerpiece of anything worth writing about, I have to admit that his injunction "action over conversation" is the perfect synthesis of the interview-process-as-dating-ritual and the need to truly communicate and impress in a resume. Basically what I mean is that your resume must be taut, dense, and full of "answers" rather than "questions." In short, your resume must be an action saga, not a **job description** or mere "conversation."

With this as a philosophical basis, I provide the following broad perspective and practical advice on how to reimagine your resume as a fearless piece of pointed advocacy rather than a timid, milquetoast recital of unsupported conclusions.

## **A Vital Preliminary Word about Format**

Many of my candidates initially have a difficult time listening to my suggestions because they cannot get out of their minds the outdated rubric that indicates a resume can be only one page long. They hear about the extra detail I want them to add, and they are afraid they will exceed this outdated and lifeless magic circle, which they conceive of as a cardinal rule. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. A resume, if well written, is a pleasure to

read.

In the context of a professional resume--especially for a [lateral attorney](#) with at least one year of experience--*two or even three pages are perfectly acceptable*. Thus, if you are following me, I hope that you have allowed yourself to completely deconstruct in your mind your current resume and its format, the better to begin your conception of that document anew.

**First: The "Legal Experience" portion of your resume is going to be reconstructed to demonstrate your abilities, not describe them.**

[Think of your resume as a piece of advocacy. A good brief shows a judge how and why your client's position is the only reasonable one.](#) Similarly, your resume must be designed to answer the "how?" and "why?" behind statements like "experienced in all aspects of litigation" and "complete mastery of corporate formation tasks."

Something like that lyric "a little less conversation..." is going through the mind of someone who reads multiple resumes in a week. The hiring partner or recruiting coordinator is thinking, "Why can't this highly educated person tell me something interesting about themselves? Why does this resume look like every other one I've ever read except for the name, the school, and the graduation date?" You, as a candidate, must make it your mission to foreclose the possibility that those thoughts will go through the minds of the decision makers at the firms you approach. Thus, I want you to conceptualize your resume as a showcase for success stories that highlights your skills and puts them into a particular context.

**Second: Write the perfect list of bullet points with my "eight golden keys" to grabbing attention.**

Your resume is going to be full of detail, but it must be snappy. The best way to draw a reader in without making him or her feel "trapped" by undifferentiated text is to use bullet points. You have seen bullet points before--short sentences, or perhaps groups of two or more sentences, set off by text above and below them by dashes, arrows, or round dots--"bullets." Your resume should use them strategically, but the most important aspect is crafting the text.

In my view, you should use bullet points similarly to how you may have used them in briefs--as a recitation of evidence supporting a conclusion. The first line or two of any heading under the "Legal Experience" portion of your resume is your firm name and your title ("associate" or "partner"). If the firm is a well-known one, your "conclusion" may already have been stated ("I am a world-class [litigator, corporate attorney, etc.]").

Further, you may want to simply write out a two-line "conclusion" just under this information to give the reader an idea of what you have practiced. The point is to communicate the way you frame yourself to other [attorneys](#)--you are communicating to the reader that you are a competent and well-rounded litigator (for example) who has lots of experience with sophisticated work. Alternatively, this could also be done at the very outset of your resume in a "Profile" section (a three-to-five-sentence narrative paragraph summarizing the most important points about your legal skills).

- **[See 6 Things Attorneys and Law Students Need to Remove from Their Resumes ASAP If They Want to Get Jobs with the Most Prestigious Law Firms](#) for more information.**

Regardless of how you frame the "argument" of your resume, the bullet points are the meat that backs up the conclusion already made. And those bullet points need to deliver. Note that these do not simply provide "further information" for the reader. No. They present facts that prove--that demonstrate--your competence. The way to prove competence is through the eight golden keys, which individually or in combination provide the "scope, the "context" of your work. They are:

1. degree of autonomy
2. caliber of client
3. sophistication of work
4. volume of work
5. client industry
6. degree of client access
7. dollars involved
8. social/political significance of the outcome

Ideally, each bullet point will throw in powerful phrases or word clusters that allow the bullet text to contain three to five of these "golden keys."

Let me demonstrate. A bullet point in a litigation resume might say, "Took the lead in several complex commercial litigation matters." I see this type of phrase every day in resumes. The candidate should have focused on one of these matters and touted his or her individual work.

For example, the following communicates much more: "Wrote, argued, and won summary judgment defending a Fortune 100 worldwide chip manufacturer in a \$50 million licensing and distribution lawsuit based on appropriate application of choice of law provision." Notice that I have used at least five categories, including degree of autonomy ("wrote, argued, and won"), caliber of client ("Fortune 100"), sophistication of work ("motion for summary judgment" and "choice of law provision"), client industry ("chip manufacturer"), and dollars involved ("50 million"). If I didn't have any of these facts, I would try to find at least two categories that did apply.

The point is that you must take the time to dig back into your past successes and mine them for gems. In the day-to-day practice, we tend to think only of our current projects, forgetting past successes. Don't make that mistake.

### **Third: Make sure you have covered the basics.**

Every attorney resume should have at least the following sections: biographical information (name, cell phone number, and email address), legal experience, education, and affiliations/admissions. If applicable, add the following: "Other Experience" and "Publications and Presentations." Try to use the above principles when describing your law school and undergraduate careers.

### **Fourth: Honesty is the *only* rational policy.**

It should go without saying that every single statement and every portion of every statement in your resume, transactions list, bio, or any other piece of writing you submit to a potential employer must be 100% accurate. There should be no puffing, no stretching of the truth, no artful lapses of completeness to convey the wrong idea.

Most real or perceived "blemishes" can be handled. What *cannot* be "handled" is even the hint of misdirection. The legal market is too tight to deal with the cognitive dissonance that results from partners having to rethink their analysis of a candidate's fit for their firm after realizing some important aspect of his or her profile wasn't immediately obvious from the original submission or resume.

### **Action, Action, Action**

This basically all boils down to making the job of the hiring firm easier. By doing the analysis yourself of what

you have done, where you've done it, what the results were, and how it impacted clients, you are leading the reader to the conclusion you want him or her to reach without the reader having to work to prove or disprove any representations you've made. Thus, less conversation--less space-taking chatter about "abilities"--and more action: more direct demonstration of your proven successes.

If you can make that cognitive leap, you are much further down the tarmac than your competition. And believe me as someone who is in a position to see trends in the industry, competition for premier positions will only increase.

No pressure!