

# ATTORNEY RESUME SECRETS REVEALED

By BCG Attorney Search



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney  
Search and Placement*



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by BCG Attorney Search

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# TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THE MARKETING MINDSET .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leveling the Playing Field</li><li>• Demystifying the Employer</li><li>• Learn How to Think Like a Legal Employer</li><li>• Learn How to Think Like a Salesperson</li><li>• The Role of a Cover Letter vs. a Resume</li><li>• Backing Up Your Claims with Evidence</li><li>• What is a Legal Resume?</li><li>• Misrepresentation</li></ul>	
<b>CHAPTER 2: RESUME FORMAT .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Format</li><li>• Length</li><li>• Using Layout to Your Advantage</li><li>• Don't Sweat the Small Stuff</li></ul>	
<b>CHAPTER 3: SUMMARY SECTIONS .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Objective=Obsolete</li><li>• The Uses of a Summary Section Profile</li><li>• Summary of Qualifications</li><li>• Areas of Expertise</li><li>• Accomplishments</li></ul>	
<b>CHAPTER 4: EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What to Include and How to Include It</li><li>• The Importance of the Education Section to New Graduates</li><li>• The Importance of the Education Section to More Experienced Attorneys</li></ul>	



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*The Standard in Attorney  
Search and Placement*

<b>CHAPTER 5: EXPERIENCE .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is “Experience”?</li><li>• How Far Back to Go and How Much Description to Give</li><li>• Legal Internships, Clerkships, and Summer Associate Positions: How to Make Yours Stand Out</li><li>• Highlighting Accomplishments in the Middle/Later Portion of Your Career</li><li>• Translating Non-Legal Work Experience</li><li>• Order of Activities/Dates</li><li>• Alternative Headings</li></ul>	
<b>CHAPTER 6: BAR ADMISSIONS / COMMUNITY SERVICE / PUBLICATIONS / PRESENTATIONS / PERSONAL / REPRESENTATIVE CASE OR TRANSACTION LISTS / OTHER MISCELLANEOUS SECTIONS .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When and How to Present Additional Resume Information</li><li>• The Possible Consequences of Including Personal Information</li><li>• When and How to Create an Addendum to Your</li><li>• Resume</li></ul>	
<b>CHAPTER 7: ADDRESSING RED FLAGS AND COMPENSATING FOR WEAKNESSES IN YOUR RESUME .....</b>	<b>100</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using Layout and Format to Minimize “Flaws” Such As Job-Hopping, Lay-Offs/ Termination of Positions, Employment Gaps, Etc.</li><li>• Examples of Resumes for Inexperienced, Well-Rounded, Almost-Qualified, and Overqualified Attorneys</li></ul>	
<b>CHAPTER 8: COVER LETTER BASICS .....</b>	<b>126</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Five Qualities of a Fantastic Cover Letter</li><li>• Frequently Asked Cover Letter Questions</li></ul>	
<b>CHAPTER 9: DRAFTING A COVER LETTER FOR ANY SITUATION .....</b>	<b>146</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perfectly Qualified Attorney</li><li>• Inexperienced Attorney</li></ul>	



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Search and Placement*

- Almost-Qualified Attorney
- Laid-Off/Terminated Attorney
- Older Attorney
- Career-Changing Attorney
- Telling a Story with Your Letter

**CHAPTER 10: APPLICATION AND FOLLOW-UP PROTOCOL ..... 164**

Don't Become a Resume and Cover Letter "Obsessor"

Follow Up: Thank You Notes and References

**CONCLUSION ..... 170**



## INTRODUCTION

From a *summa cum laude* graduate of Stanford Law School to a student at the bottom of his class at a non-accredited law school to an attorney entering the legal field after 20 years as a figure-skating coach, my clients have included attorneys and law students at every level, in every geographic location (even overseas), and with every story imaginable. Like snowflakes, no two legal job seekers are exactly alike. Sure, they share certain things in common—each of my clients has either has or is in pursuit of a law degree, and each client has desired a new (or first) legal job—but the similarities end there.

What I learned from working with such a diverse group of legal professionals is this: Your credentials are only as strong as the manner in which they're presented.

I'll be the first to admit that I was skeptical about how much weight a resume really carried. Some people, it seemed, just didn't stand a chance. In the midst of a sour economy, how was someone who hadn't practiced law for 10 years going to get a job when those with nearly impeccable qualifications were struggling? But then I saw the people with long employment gaps get jobs, I saw people make drastic career changes, and I saw people secure positions on the other side of the country (or world). And, most important, I saw what a difference a resume can make. If you need further proof, one client submitted the resume we'd revised together to a firm that had rejected her just weeks earlier—and got an interview!

As success story after success story came in, I looked back at the successful clients' resumes, making notes of what had worked and why. I wish I could say that my analysis resulted in a no-fail formula that I could share with you by simply pasting a sample resume and cover letter here and saying "Voila! Just use this, and you're guaranteed success!" Unfortunately, it's not that simple. As I looked at the resumes and cover letters that had gotten people interviews, I soon discovered that—like the job seekers themselves—no two were alike. Successful cover letters were short, long, aggressive, humorous, and/or formal. Successful resumes were descriptive, concise, one page, two page—the list goes on.

What these documents all shared in common, however, was that they were products of significant strategizing and brainstorming by both the client and me. They gave a good sense of the person they were written about; they conveyed this person's best attributes in a clear, concise manner; and they turned some nicely formatted words and symbols into someone worth getting to know.



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While I can't offer a quick "here's what works" template, what I can offer is the knowledge I've gleaned from assisting more than 2,000 attorneys and law students to date with their legal resumes and cover letters. Every day, I am met with new challenges, and along with these challenges has come tremendous insight into what it takes to get a legal job, regardless of your situation. I've written this book to share that insight with you. While self-marketing takes various forms, this book will focus solely on marketing through the written word.

My goal is to help you 1) see yourself as the marketable legal professional that you are and 2) convey that marketability to others. Whether you feel you're extremely marketable or you are in the depths of despair because you're not where you want to be professionally, the following pages will provide you with advice that will put you one important step ahead of your competitors.



## CHAPTER 1:

# THE MARKETING MINDSET

**Before you ever put pen to paper to write your cover letter or resume (or any document for that matter), you need to ensure that you know your audience. This doesn't mean that you need to personally know each legal employer to whom you write, but you do need to have a sense of what an employer is thinking and looking for when he/she receives your cover letter and resume. This chapter will put you inside the head of the employer and help you to apply the things you already know about effective marketing (whether you think you know them or not) to your own self-marketing campaign. Once you are confident that you're taking the right approach, the actual writing of the documents will be much easier.**

### Leveling the Playing Field

Have you ever seen a couple and thought, "How did he get her?" or vice versa? Obviously, the person deemed less physically attractive knew how to sell his/her other great qualities to compensate for what he/she lacked in the looks department. You've also probably known someone who seems to have it all—good looks, charm, intelligence, etc.—yet sits at home dateless on Saturday nights. Clearly, that person is lacking when it comes to self-promotion.

If there were strict rules about dating, the "tall, dark, and handsome" guy would always get the girl; and the "nice" guy would always be left out in the cold. Likewise, if there were strict rules about how your credentials must be presented, then the same people (those with great credentials) would always get the good jobs, and the others (those with less than great credentials) would be forever stuck in bad jobs.

This is where self-marketing comes in. Your resume and cover letter give you an opportunity to level the playing field. The worst thing you can do is to take someone else's resume and simply fill in the blanks with your information. Your friend might have a 3.9 GPA and therefore doesn't need to flesh out his/her work experience quite so much. A colleague might have been made partner and therefore doesn't need to do as much selling of his/her experience. You need to view your resume and cover letter as an opportunity to show what you do have that your competitors do not.





## **Demystifying the “Employer”**

To an active job-seeker, the term “employer” doesn’t simply refer to a human being who needs to hire another human being. Instead, it refers to a mysterious god-like entity who selects the “good” from the “bad.” Many legal job seekers believe that the key to a successful resume or cover letter lies in a magic phrase, word, format, or font that will immediately land them on the “good” pile. They believe that the hiring partner or recruiter is a proverbial Rumplestiltskin, waiting for some insightful job seeker to say their name.

### **Clients frequently ask questions such as these:**

- Do legal employers prefer justified or left-aligned cover letters?
- Do legal employers like white or off-white paper?
- Do legal employers prefer that a two-page resume be stapled or paper-clipped?
- Do legal employers like bullet points or paragraphs?
- Do legal employers prefer that my heading be centered?
- Do legal employers like letters to be signed in blue or black ink?

When it comes to predicting exactly what legal employers prefer, there is no crystal ball that will tell you. When someone becomes a hiring coordinator, he/she does not enter a giant brainwashing machine that tells him/her to hate long cover letters or to love bullet points. Employers are individuals with their own unique likes and dislikes. While there are definitely some general rules with regard to what legal employers prefer, be aware that there is no secret formula that automatically guarantees success.

You also need to know that the person who puts out a job posting is not an evil monster, rubbing his/her hands together with glee while waiting to crush the hopes and dreams of every person applying for the job.

### **Here are some prevalent myths that I’ve heard:**

- Legal employers will throw your resume out without looking at it if it’s two pages long.
- Legal employers will toss your submission if there’s even one tiny typo.



- Legal employers will contact your employer before speaking to you to find out if you were a good employee.
- Legal employers will disqualify you if you don't include your GPA.

Employers want to like you. This might be hard to believe if you've had a frustrating job-hunting experience, but it's true. Legal employers genuinely want to find people who will do a good job, and they are hoping that good candidates will come across their desks. Hiring qualified and competent attorneys is in the employer's best interest. Therefore, if you can impress upon the employer that you can fulfill his/her needs and add value to his/her company or law firm, you will be considered, typo and all.

If there is anything that can approximate a magic resume and cover letter formula, it is this: Legal employers want to know what you can do for them. Adopting this as a mantra will start you on your way to a successful job search. Your goal in finding a job may be to make more money and advance your career, but if you convey this in your marketing materials, you will surely find yourself in the rejection pile.

### **Learn How to Think Like a Legal Employer**

The simplest and best way to get a good idea of what makes an effective cover letter and resume is to be on the other side of the hiring process. When you are in the position of hiring someone, you will see firsthand what employers like and dislike in an applicant, because you are the employer. Recently, I had to go through the process of hiring writers to assist me in drafting resumes and cover letters for clients. This process alone taught me more about what should/shouldn't be in a resume and cover letter than any books I've read, philosophizing I've done, or interviews I have gone on.

### **Here are some of the things I learned:**

1. Many people who apply for jobs do not put one second of thought into what they send and to whom they send it. I received resumes that contained an objective stating thus: "To obtain a teaching position." I received letters that carried on for two pages about the candidate's IT background. I received only a resume when a cover letter was explicitly requested.



2. Many people who apply for jobs are crazy. Seriously. I was sent pictures of cats, links to soundbites of candidates singing horrible folksongs, and a “virtual handshake.” I’m pointing this out because many people who are level-headed, non-crazy job applicants fall under the assumption that everyone else applying for the job that he/she is applying for is a super-qualified, attractive, poised, top 10% graduate of Yale Law School. This is not the case.

If you are beginning a job search, try to either put yourself in a real hiring situation (volunteer to participate in interviewing/screening candidates at your current job) or, if that’s not possible, a virtual one.

By virtual, I mean that you should try to imagine a scenario in which you would need to hire someone. Perhaps think of your ideal intern, summer associate, or colleague. Jot down a brief job description. Then think of what you would want to see in that person’s resume and cover letter.

What you will find is that there are often a few key things that you are looking for in your virtual employee. Say those things are 1) a law degree from a certain school or a certain caliber of school, 2) strong grades, 3) experience in labor and employment law, and 4) evidence of strong writing skills, i.e., publication or awards in legal-writing courses.

If you come across the resume of someone who has those four qualifications, you will look more closely at it—regardless of the font used, amount of space between lines, heading style, use or non-use of a serial comma, mention of the fact that the person acted in a college play, listing of “street basketball” as a hobby, or inclusion of a part-time job held during college.

If someone has none of those four qualifications, you’ll toss it—regardless of those same factors. If a person has some of those qualifications, you might consider him/her, and that “might” is where the smaller details come into play.

To get a sense of what appeals to you in terms of those “other” factors, read through resumes wherever samples are offered—this book, online, career services offices, etc.—and find some that strike you as impressive. Once you’ve compiled a few, start to look for common themes. What language is used? What is/isn’t included? How is the material presented? What catches your attention?



Then look at the cover letters. Did you even read them, or did you go straight to the resume? Which letters did you find appealing? Were they short? Long? Aggressive? Make a pile of the ones you like most and, again, see what they have in common.

The reason you're putting yourself into this hiring mindset is because it gives you proper perspective. You may realize that some of the things you fret over on your own resume aren't of any relevance when you are analyzing others' resumes. If you're looking for someone to help you out in an actual work situation, you'll quickly realize that someone who strikes you as intelligent and hardworking is much more attractive than someone who just has a nice-looking resume heading.

I guarantee that this exercise will teach you a few important things about how your resume and cover letter are viewed by legal employers.

A client named Robert sent his resume and cover letter to several firms in Los Angeles. He was surprised when he got a call for an interview from a firm he hadn't even remembered contacting. When he called the hiring coordinator back, he found out that his resume had actually reached this person by mistake. He had typed a wrong digit when he sent his fax, but the incorrect fax number happened to belong to a law firm that was in need of an attorney with his qualifications.

**This proves the point that an employer will take an interest in you if you have what he/she is looking for—even if he/she thinks you were writing to another firm!**

## **Learn How to Think Like a Salesperson**

Once you've put yourself into the mind of an employer, it's time to put yourself into the shoes of a salesperson. Many people balk at the concept of "self-marketing." It seems a scary thing to do to those who aren't familiar with marketing techniques, but it's not nearly as scary as it seems.

Every day, we are bombarded with marketing in many forms: TV ads, print ads, people on the street handing us fliers for restaurants, billboards, radio spots, a friend trying to pitch a blind date. The list goes on and on. Spend a few days paying close attention to the marketing that surrounds you. Which pitches do you ignore and which ones do you pay attention to.



Why? What are the concepts involved?

Just as you'll notice with the hiring exercise, a few key things will probably emerge. You'll see that those pitches that capture (and hold) your attention best are those that are marketing to your particular need.

**The aim of a marketing campaign is threefold:**

1. You need to capture a person's attention.
2. You need to hold the person's attention.
3. You need to convince the person that he/she needs what you have to offer.

A lot of people get caught up in #1 and neglect #2 and #3. In actuality, the attention-capturing part is easiest. Of course, someone wearing a jumbo hot dog uniform on the street is going to capture your attention. But is it going to make you actually purchase a hot dog, or is it just going to make you point and laugh?

This will depend on certain factors: Maybe you're a vegetarian. Maybe you just ate a huge lunch. Maybe you're allergic to whatever it is that's in a hot dog. In these scenarios, you are not a good target for the huge, waving Styrofoam wiener, regardless of how clever the pitch.

But maybe you're starving. Maybe you're looking for a quick bite to eat on the way into a meeting. Maybe you love hot dogs. In this case, you're a perfect target.

**Self-marketing operates in the exact same way.**

1. You need to capture an employer's attention.
2. You need to hold the employer's attention.
3. You need to convince the employer that he/she needs what you have to offer.

If you mail a legal employer a neon pink resume with confetti in the envelope, you will certainly capture his/her attention, but not in a good way. When thinking of ways to achieve #1, make sure you keep #2 and #3 in mind.



Your primary objective should be to develop an effective “pitch” that will mirror the needs of the employer. Pretend you are an employer: “I could really use a competent associate who has experience in bankruptcy law, is good in the courtroom, and is already barred in Connecticut.” If a letter comes across your desk that reads “I am a Connecticut-licensed attorney with excellent oral-advocacy skills and five years of bankruptcy experience,” you’re going to think it’s a gift from heaven.

Of course, another aspect of effective marketing is convincing someone that he/she needs what you have to offer, even if he/she doesn’t know it yet. Have you ever watched a particularly tempting food commercial and suddenly had an immense craving for that food? That ad did exactly what it was supposed to do. You probably weren’t even hungry before you saw this commercial, but suddenly, you’re racing to your car with nothing but drumsticks on your mind.

This type of marketing is most effective when you are approaching employers in an unsolicited fashion. Maybe you are an expert in a certain field or you want to provide a certain service on a contract basis. If this is the case, your marketing materials need to create a need in the employer’s mind and then illustrate how you can fulfill it. Here’s an example of how that can be achieved:

Dear XXXX,

In today’s economic climate, many firms needing additional manpower are unable to take on a full-time associate. If your firm is in this situation, I can provide a solution.

The first two sentences of this letter attempt to identify a need and offer a solution. Perhaps the employer reading this letter was swamped and not sure what to do about it. By pointing out how he could be of use, this candidate may cause the employer to create a position that didn’t previously exist. Here’s another example:

Could your law firm use a proven rainmaker with the ability to increase your bottom line?

**What law firm wouldn’t want to say yes to this question?**

Philip was an attorney with 15 years of experience, yet he lacked any portable business. He wanted to move to a different state and was worried that he’d have trouble finding a position because senior attorneys who lack business are not very marketable to firms. To make



himself marketable, he decided to try a different approach. Rather than seek an associate position (for which he'd be competing with younger, "cheaper" attorneys), he wrote to firms with the following proposal:

I would like to form a relationship with your firm in which I would work on an "of counsel" or contract basis. This hybrid relationship would enable me to work on the firm's cases while acquiring my own clients. I have sources of potential business, and I seek a platform on which to build my practice within the firm. I am confident in my ability to bring in clients in a short period of time. This presents your firm with a win-win situation, as you would only pay me for the work I do on your cases and would also receive a share of the fees I generate.

By presenting firms with this proposal, Philip showed employers how they could benefit from his services. This proactive approach helped him to turn a negative into a positive.

As you begin drafting your resume and cover letter, make sure you are aware of employers' needs. If you're responding to a job vacancy or job posting, think of it as the employer asking: Is there anyone out there who can help me? You want your resume and cover letter to provide the solution. If you're not responding to a specific job posting, but rather writing to employers on an unsolicited basis, do some brainstorming to figure out what you offer that would be appealing to an employer. By stating how you can be of service, you might save the employer the hassle of having to go through the hiring process.

### **The Role of a Cover Letter vs. a Resume**

It is assumed by many that the role of a cover letter is to get an employer to want to read your resume. The idea is that the letter should pique the interest of the employer and make him/her want to see what your resume has to say.

In some cases, this is true. Some legal employers give a great deal of credence to the cover letter, especially if you are applying to a writing-intensive position. That's because a cover letter serves as a better indicator of writing ability than a resume, which is usually comprised of short, choppy sentences, aka "resume speak." In addition, cover letters often provide information, such as your reason for seeking a new position, which cannot be found on a resume.



In most cases, however, this notion is false. Most legal employers will look at your resume first and will only read your cover letter if they deem your resume worthy. A lot of employers never read cover letters at all. In many large law firms, the cover letter is tossed, and only the resume is passed on to the hiring committee. That is because, as discussed previously, there are typically a few key things that employers look for before deciding whether to spend any time reviewing your materials in depth.

If you have absolutely no experience in a given area and the employer is looking for 5-7 years, your application will be dismissed once that is discovered. If you went to a particular law school and the employer has already decided not to consider anyone from that law school, you will be immediately dismissed as well.

That said, just as you should always wear clean socks “in case someone sees them,” you should always have an excellent cover letter “in case someone reads it.” Some legal employers like reading cover letters. An employer might happen to glance at your letter while drinking his/her morning coffee and read it closely just because it’s there. In some situations, your cover letter will have more of an impact than your resume.

So the bottom line is this: You should draft your resume in such a way that it stands on its own in the event that your cover letter is never read. In other words, if you feel that something is vital to your candidacy, it should either be mentioned in both documents or in the resume only. You should draft your cover letter as if it will be read, but don’t rely on it to convey any vital information that doesn’t appear on your resume.

## **Backing Up Your Claims with Evidence**

An attorney once sent me a sample cover letter that he’d been using for almost a year. He felt pretty confident in it and expressed bewilderment that it hadn’t resulted in any interviews. Here is what it said:

Dear Hiring Partner,

In two years, my experience as a litigator far surpassed that of most junior associates. As my resume reflects, I have interacted successfully with all the parties relevant to any practice; clients, opposing counsel, and judges.





What sets me apart from other candidates is my writing ability. Because of my schools advanced writing curriculum, I have written at a much higher level than most of my peers.

What I learned most in my two years is that the people with whom you work is vitale to any success. If called to interview, I can demonstrate both the legal acumen, and personality to continue your firms success.

Sincerely,  
L.J.

After making sure he wasn't joking, I explained to him that not only was his letter filled with grammatical and typographical errors, but it made a point of highlighting his "excellent" writing skills. Anyone reading it was sure to think he was the least self-aware person in the world.

As all attorneys know, a case can't be made without evidence to support it. The same goes with the case you are making for yourself as a job candidate. While you need to sell yourself, make sure that the statements you make are supported by actual events on your resume and are not just overblown hype.

### **Look at this section taken from a resume:**

#### **Qualifications:**

Excellent organizational skills, effective communicator, enthusiastic, adept multitasker, ability to prioritize, detail-oriented, team player, loyal, self-motivated, dependable, hardworking, dedicated, reliable.

Have you ever seen anyone describe themselves as lazy, shy, a poor communicator, closed-minded, boring, disorganized, or clueless in a resume? Of course not. If aliens landed on earth and were given only our resumes to judge us by, we would be deemed the most hardworking, organized, creative, problem-solving, multitasking, insightful, experienced, detail-oriented, and innovative society ever.

But what do these words really tell you about a person?

One bit of writing advice that is frequently touted by writing instructors is "Show, don't tell." This



advice is applicable to resumes and cover letters as well as creative prose.

In the interest of selling themselves, legal job seekers often include a lot of buzzwords in their resumes and cover letters: “Hardworking,” “detail-oriented,” “multitasker,” “good communicator,” “team player,” and “proven achiever” are some of the most frequently used. These types of words and phrases have become so overused that their meanings have become almost void. Additionally, without any evidence to back them up, these words don’t really say anything substantial about the person they’re describing.

If you write “I have fantastic research and writing skills,” you need to provide evidence of this. If you were on a law journal, you earned an A in your Legal Research and Writing course, or you were published, then employers will see that there is substance behind that statement. If there is nothing to support the statement, however, it will just be dismissed as fluff.

**Look at this example:**

1. I am hardworking and committed to excellence.
2. My work ethic is demonstrated by the fact that I worked 20 hours a week while attending law school full time, participating in moot court, and serving as an editor on Law Review without sacrificing the quality of my work in any of these endeavors.

**Here’s another one:**

1. My communication and interpersonal skills are top-notch.
2. I have excellent interpersonal skills. During law school, the Editor-in-Chief of the Intellectual Property Journal asked me to serve as Subscriptions Editor because she felt that my outgoing personality would be an asset in bringing in new subscribers. Likewise, as Treasurer of the Women’s Law Student Organization, I strengthened the organization by recruiting virtually every female law student on campus.

In both of these examples, #2 makes a much stronger impact by backing up the statement with evidence. Once, a client asked me, “How do I convey my intelligence in my resume and cover letter?” I hadn’t been asked this question before, so I spent some time pondering it. Obviously, you



can't state "I am intelligent," or you will seem pompous. A high GPA might convey intelligence, but not everyone who is intelligent gets great grades (and vice versa). Finally, I realized the answer was simple: If you present a well-written and well-thought-out resume and cover letter, that alone will convey your intelligence. This is an important, intangible benefit of these documents. In addition to selling yourself based on what you've done, the mere fact that you are presenting well-crafted materials will send a message to the employer that you are a smart person.

## **What is a Legal Resume?**

Because I work solely with legal resumes, many people assume that there is a drastic difference between a "legal resume" and a resume for a different profession. While there are no such things as a "legal format," a "legal font," or a "legal heading," there are a few basic rules that apply:

### **1) Legal employers place significant emphasis on education.**

The caliber of law school you attended and how well you did there are important to legal employers, particularly if you are a law student or a recent graduate. Therefore, you should be sure to make the Education section of your resume clear and prominent. Sure, if you went to a low-ranked law school, you might not want a neon sign pointing it out, but be aware that employers will be looking for your educational background and won't want to have to dig to find it. You should also flesh out your Education section by describing honors and activities, moot court participation, journal or law review membership, and anything else that will add to your candidacy for a legal position. (See Chapter 4 for more information on the Education section.)

### **2) Legal employers want to see your legal work history in a reverse chronological format.**

As discussed in the next chapter, there are several options for your resume format. While the resume doesn't need to be 100% chronological, there must be a list of where you've worked and when. Legal employers don't want to play guessing games while trying to analyze your work history. Plus, not listing your positions in order sends up a red flag. If you have hopped jobs or worked in some non-impressive positions, there are better ways to compensate for this than to get creative with the order of your positions.

### **3) Legal employers most likely will not be impressed by over-the-top creativity.**

We've all heard stories of some really crazy technique that landed someone a job. But for the purposes of a legal job search, you want to keep creativity to a minimum. Nix the frilly fonts, colloquial language, or pet photos. Unless you know for sure that the firm you're applying to is



extremely informal, you want professionalism to reign supreme. This doesn't mean that your materials need to be dry and boring. A catchy, attention-grabbing sentence or two is a good thing. But starting your cover letter with "I love patent law so, so much!" will probably ensure that it ends up tacked to an amused attorney's wall for the rest of the office to laugh at.

#### **4) Legal resumes typically have a "Bar Admissions" or "Bar Status" section.**

Because you have to be admitted to the bar to practice law, it is a good idea to have a separate Bar Admissions section on a legal resume. This section merely lists any states and courts in which you are admitted to practice, followed by the dates you were admitted. If you have taken the bar and are awaiting results, or if you have passed the bar, but are not fully admitted, this can also be indicated in the Bar Admissions section of your resume. This section is especially necessary if you are a recent graduate; one of the main things employers will want to know is whether or not you're already licensed.

#### **5) Legal resumes of more experienced attorneys often contain an addendum listing representative cases or transactions.**

Including a list of your most impressive or relevant transactions or cases can be a great way to show employers the breadth and depth of what you've done. This should typically be structured as an addendum to the resume so that the resume can remain concise. If you have just a few cases that you want to highlight, however, they can be included in your job description or in a section of their own. (See Chapter 6 for examples.)

#### **6) Legal resumes often list professional affiliations.**

While being a member of a certain bar association isn't a huge selling point, it is worthwhile to list your professional affiliations on your resume. Also, if you are involved with a board of directors, volunteer your services with a certain community group, or provide pro bono counsel to an organization, this section can be used to showcase those activities.

### **Misrepresentation**

Sara, a third-year law student, decided that she would write "Loves horseback riding" on her resume because a friend of hers who worked in the firm she was applying to tipped her off that the hiring partner was an avid horseback rider. She knew enough about horses that she felt she could carry on a brief conversation about them without giving away that she'd never ridden a horse in her life.



Sure enough, Sara got an interview. Her plan worked a little too well, though, when the hiring partner spent the majority of the interview asking her questions about horseback riding. When he began asking detailed questions—such as “What do you think is the best trail in Southern California?”—Sara began to panic, as she couldn’t come up with anything to say. At the end of the interview, the hiring partner revealed that the only reason he told people in his firm about his “interest” was to see how many applicants wrote about their similar, albeit fake, interest just to get an edge. Sara was mortified and she never heard from the firm again.

Stories like these have become almost like urban myths. I doubt that this sort of thing happens with too much frequency, but when it does, it is told to anyone and everyone as a warning against putting anything that’s not absolutely true on your resume. This is good. If there weren’t checks and balances in place, everyone applying for a job would be a valedictorian from Harvard.

Attorneys, above those in any other profession, are terrified of misrepresentation. And it’s probably the trickiest area to navigate with regard to resume preparation. That’s because a certain amount of creativity is necessary in order to present yourself in the best light, and the difference between creativity and deceitfulness is often hard to detect.

**Below are two groups of questions asked fairly often pertaining to misrepresentation:**

**Group 1:**

1. Is it okay if I leave old jobs off of my resume?
2. Is it okay if I leave dates off of my resume?
3. Is it okay if focus heavily on something that was a fairly small portion of my total responsibilities?
4. Is it okay to say I want to relocate to California when I’m also considering New Mexico and Las Vegas?
5. Is it okay to only include the school I graduated from, even if I only transferred there my last year?
6. Is it okay to leave off an A.A. degree?
7. Is it okay to say I have family in Wisconsin when only one distant relative lives there?



## Group 2:

1. Is it okay to say I drafted numerous briefs when I only drafted one?
2. Is it okay to say I was laid off when I was actually fired?
3. Is it okay to say I'm fluent in Spanish when I'm only actually semi-proficient?
4. Is it okay to say I was an associate at a firm when I was actually working on a contract basis?
5. Is it okay to indicate that I'm still employed if my job ended a week ago?
6. Is it okay to say that I worked on intellectual property matters if I didn't?
7. Is it okay to fudge the dates of employment for older jobs to cover a gap?

The questions in Group 1 might not seem so different from Group 2. But the answers to the Group 1 questions are all yes, and the answers to the Group 2 questions are all no.

But wait. Isn't leaving 10 years of experience off of your resume more misleading than saying you drafted numerous briefs instead of one? While it may seem so at first glance, the first issue represents an exclusion of information, while the second issue represents an outright lie.

It is never okay to lie. It is, however, okay to leave off information. Remember, a resume is a piece (or two) of paper that shows off those qualities that will be most attractive to a potential employer. This means that it's okay not to include certain things. Just because you spent the bulk of your day sending faxes doesn't mean you need to convey that to employers. But you shouldn't pad your job description with things you haven't done.

When evaluating whether something is a misrepresentation, the simple question you need to ask yourself is "Is this true?"

After you've ascertained that everything in your resume and cover letter is true, you then need to make sure that you can talk in expanded detail about each thing you wrote.

One attorney had this listed on her resume under the heading Volunteer Work: "Tutored elementary-aged children; accompanied them to doctor visits and school functions; provided



occasional meals.” When I asked her what organization she did this work for, she told me that the children she was referring to were actually her younger brother and sister. She considered it “volunteer work” because she wasn’t paid to help them out with homework and occasionally make sandwiches for them to help out her mother. Imagine how this would sound to employers if they were to ask her about her volunteer work in an interview situation!

Remember, your resume and cover letter are stepping stones to an interview. If you can’t explain something you wrote without sounding foolish, it shouldn’t be there! If, however, you feel confident that you can talk honestly about everything that appears on your materials in an interview, you can feel confident that you haven’t misrepresented yourself.



## CHAPTER 2:

# RESUME FORMAT

The format/design of a successful legal resume accomplishes three things: 1) it is pleasing to the eye, 2) it is easy to scan, and 3) it highlights those things you want to highlight, while downplaying those things you want to hide. If your layout accomplishes these three things, it's fantastic! I say that because people tend to fret unnecessarily over the look of their resumes, often to the point that they lose sight of what's really important: the content. You might love Helvetica font or hate Times New Roman, but if 9 out of 10 people disagree, you've got to go with what the masses like. Creating your resume is not akin to decorating your house. While your format needn't be mundane, keep in mind that your artistic sensibility is not what counts in your search for a legal position.

There are three basic formats for a resume:

1. Chronological
2. Functional
3. A hybrid of the two

Because this book deals solely with legal resumes, we will mainly be concentrating on two of these three: chronological and hybrid.

A purely functional resume format markets skills and achievements over job chronology. In a functional format, dates, job titles, and company/firm names are either buried or omitted completely. Most legal employers are bothered by purely functional formats because the progression of your legal career is important to them. Professions that are skills-based, such as those within the computer industry, lend themselves to a more functional format because the main focus is on the specific skills a candidate possesses.

A chronological format contains a list of your positions, from newest to oldest. In a purely chronological format, each position is self-contained. The details about each position are grouped together with the employer name, job title, etc., so that the person reading your resume can quickly see what you did, when, and in which position.





A chronological format works well because it's easy to follow. There's not a lot of guesswork involved when an employer can skim through your resume and quickly see your job chronology. This can be harmful in some cases, however. If you've done a lot of job hopping in your career, having a solely chronological format will draw attention to this fact. Also, if you have gaps in your employment, they will be emphasized by this style.

For these reasons, I often recommend a hybrid format. This format provides the best of both worlds: the emphasis on achievements and skills provided by the functional format and the legibility and simplicity of the chronological format.

A hybrid format can take many forms: It can contain one or more summary sections (as discussed in Chapter 3); it can divide your experience by practice area as opposed to employers; or it can highlight representative cases over specific responsibilities. Basically, a hybrid format allows for flexibility and creativity in the way that you present your experience while still containing a chronological timeline of your work history.

Clients frequently ask what the most effective format is. There is no answer to this question because whether or not a format is effective depends on how effectively it portrays your specific experience. The format that works well for one person might be a disaster for another.

Get the content in order first, and once it's all there, figure out the best way to arrange it. Whatever you do, don't plug the information into a stock resume template. Most resume templates look generic. Anyone else who used it will have a resume that looks identical to yours. You don't have to be a computer whiz to come up with an original format that works.

The examples on the following pages show some variations of the chronological and hybrid formats. As you read through the examples on the following pages and throughout this book, see which formats might work best for your type and level of experience.

# ALLISON M. SMITHEY

101 Arlington Avenue, 12D • New York, NY 10009 • (555) 555-5555 • [amsmithey@smithey.com](mailto:amsmithey@smithey.com)

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## EXPERIENCE

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### **Barnes Thornburg, LLP**, New York, NY

Associate Attorney, 2003 – Present

Participate in representation of major insurance carriers. Investigate claims through communication with insureds; negotiate resolutions via settlements and litigation; evaluate coverage issues; and report factual findings to carriers.

- Rapidly became expert in unfamiliar areas of law, resulting in quick advancement and additional responsibility.
- Serve as “go-to” person for new associates in need of help with legal analysis and/or writing.

### **Foley, Wexler & Johnson, LLP**, New York, NY

Contract Attorney, 2002 – 2003

Handled preferential payment actions in corporate bankruptcies through negotiation, filing suits, and evaluation of defenses; researched bankruptcy law; analyzed complex commercial litigation materials arising out of Charter Communications Corporation bankruptcy.

- Instrumental in discerning which (out of 700) potential claims taken over from another firm should be pursued with regard to 360networks’ corporate bankruptcy.
- Successfully negotiated with senior attorneys to settle a large number of claims before the statute of limitations expired.
- Combined efforts achieved more than \$1 million in pre-filing settlements.

### **Brooklyn Law School**, New York, NY

Teaching/Research Assistant to Professor Johnson Largesse, 2001 – 2002

Selected by Professor Largesse—a leader in constitutional, comparative, and international law—to assist in researching and editing books and articles. Assisted in Constitutional Law class preparation. Performed complex research and analysis on international law trends, human rights, and international criminal law issues.

- Received commendation from professor in footnotes of publications.

### **Brooklyn Law School Civil & Human Rights Clinic**, New York, NY

Legal Intern, 2001

Investigated claims of employment discrimination under federal, state, and city law. Project included client intake, legal and factual research, and client counseling.

### **Center for Adoption Law and Policy**, New York, NY

Research Extern, 2001

Explored international reproductive issues, culminating in report on legal status of reproductive rights and population policy in representative nations.

## EDUCATION

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### **Brooklyn Law School**, New York, NY

Juris Doctor, *cum laude*, 2002

- Dean’s List
- Goliath Public Service Fellowship
- Merit-Based Dean’s Scholarship
- Public Interest Coalition

### **The Arizona State University**, Phoenix, AZ

Bachelor of Arts, *summa cum laude*, 1999

- Dean’s List
- Phi Beta Kappa; Howitzer Memorial Scholarship
- Study Abroad: Puebla, Mexico, Summer 1996

## BAR ADMISSIONS

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New York Bar, 2003

# GUY G. GUSTAFSON

648 Hailfire Lane ▪ Alexandria, Virginia 21458

Office: (555) 555-555 ▪ Home: (555) 555-555 ▪ Mobile: (555) 555-555 ▪ [ggustafson@gustafson.com](mailto:ggustafson@gustafson.com)

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Accomplished, broad-based, general corporate attorney. Extensive corporate and commercial transactional experience. Significant labor and employment, litigation management, and complex regulatory compliance exposure. Familiar with banking, securities, and healthcare matters. Licensed in Virginia (1987) and District of Columbia (1988). Able to provide expert representation and counsel on a wide range of matters, such as the following:

## LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT:

- Sexual, age, racial, disability, and leave charges, investigations, and cases
- Whistleblower charges and investigations
- Employee handbook and supervisory manual
- Downsizing (*e.g.*, severance, separation, and layoff) matters
- Employment and consulting agreements
- Labor-organizing efforts

## DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND LITIGATION MANAGEMENT:

- Commercial business and contractual disputes
- Product liability claims
- Employment-related litigation
- Collection litigation (bankruptcy and other creditor rights)

## CORPORATE AND COMMERCIAL:

- Mergers, acquisitions, divestitures, investments, and joint ventures
- Debt and equity financing and offerings (and covenant compliance/enforcement)
- Corporate governance and securities compliance and reporting (including Sarbanes-Oxley)
- Commercial sale and purchase agreements (including distribution and supply chain management)
- Real estate and personal property leasing
- Intellectual property licensing and protection
- Export controls, foreign asset controls, and FCPA compliance

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## PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

**Fannie Mae Corporation**, McLean, VA, *Asst. General Counsel & Asst. Corporate Secretary* 2000 – 2003  
Advised on parent corporate governance, compliance, reporting, and transactional matters, as well as operating subsidiary commercial, labor and employment, and litigation matters. Subsidiaries manufactured aerospace fasteners worldwide (“Fairchild Fasteners”) and, to lesser extent, distributed other aerospace parts.

*Divestitures.* Collaboratively with GC and CFO negotiated and closed \$657-million sale of Fannie Mae Kids (\$560 million annual revenues, 4800+ employees). Simultaneously and independently advised senior executive officer on sale of non-core subsidiary for \$13.8 million. Handled smaller deals as well.

*Labor and Employment.* Spearheaded investigation of serious whistleblower allegations regarding product qualification testing; senior management accepted conclusion that allegations were made in bad faith and terminated employee. Successfully directed arbitration commenced by former employees seeking additional compensation and other damages. Led defeat of union-organizing effort through immediate forceful response.



# GUY G. GUSTAFSON

- Page 2 -

*Dispute/Litigation Management.* Major software vendor threatened legal action for damages and contractually valid injunction to halt Fairchild's further use of software, which would have crippled company operations; prevailed against vendor, convincing vendor to: (1) delay legal action; (2) settle for \$300,000 below its demand and \$150,000 below Fairchild management's settlement offer as of my involvement; and (3) extend discounts otherwise to have expired on future-year technical support services likely to be used, saving several hundred thousand additional dollars.

**Pera & Pera**, Washington, DC, *Associate* (joined pursuant to group move) 1993 – 2000  
Corporate transactions, such as mergers, acquisitions, offerings, and recapitalizations, and bank, securities, and healthcare regulatory counsel.

*M&A.* Counseled major investment funds on buyouts of major public specialized health care provider system (including hospitals, fixed and mobile laboratories, and physician practice management) for \$240 million and large clinical laboratory concern for \$550 million. Advised major finance subsidiary of foreign bank on \$585 million acquisition of health care finance company.

*Offerings.* Rescued faltering IPO. Privatized a two-hospital joint venture.

*Recapitalizations.* Advised major bank on a \$100-million loan to emergency physician supply and other healthcare services company in connection with buyout by major investment fund.

**Cusack, Piven & Cusack**, Washington, DC, *Associate* (joined pursuant to group move) 1992 – 1993  
Corporate transactional and bank and securities regulatory counsel. Also assisted on major government contract dispute.

*Corporate/Banking.* Rapidly became expert on NAFTA banking provisions and, utilizing U.S. bank regulatory expertise, structured Japanese bank's establishment of Mexican bank subsidiary despite significant capital, foreign exchange, and regulatory approval restrictions.

*Government Contract Dispute.* Working intensely with financial expert analyzing contractor proposals for several weeks, developed argument that NASA had overlooked major risks with awardee's proposal to manage Kennedy Space Center for 10 years (for approximately \$10 billion); largely as a result, NASA granted the protest and withdrew the award during the initial deposition.

**Wayne, Kent & Jordan**, Washington, DC, *Associate* 1987 – 1992  
Banking, securities, and commodities regulatory counsel, principally for major foreign banks and their affiliates; related corporate transactions.

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## EDUCATION

**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law**, Chapel Hill, NC  
*Juris Doctor*, 1987

- Class Rank: Top 10%
- Articles Editor, *North Carolina Law Review*

**Boesky School of Business at the University of North Carolina**, Charlotte, NC  
*Bachelor of Science in Economics (Finance)*, *magna cum laude*, 1984

# Howard Wallich

268 Eli Avenue ▪ San Francisco, California 93141  
555 555-5555 ▪ hwallich@wallich.com

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## Profile

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Experienced attorney specializing in complex commercial and intellectual property litigation, able to provide expert counsel in matters including:

- Avoiding potential legal disputes
  - Resolving disputes without litigation
  - Strategic management of lawsuits
  - Choosing and managing outside counsel
  - Contract and license disputes
  - Copyright, patent, and trade secret cases
  - Trademark and trade dress claims
  - Employment disputes
  - Unfair business practice claims
  - Product liability
- 

## Professional History

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**Chadwick & Parker**, San Francisco, CA

07/1998 – 01/2002

### Litigation Associate

Responsible for all aspects of litigation in intellectual property and complex commercial cases at busy national firm. Prepared cases for trial, arbitration, and mediation. Drafted pleadings, motions, and briefs, including summary judgment motions, preliminary injunction motions, and appellate briefs for federal and state appellate courts. Argued motions. Took and defended depositions, including expert depositions. Negotiated case settlements and drafted settlement agreements. Reviewed business agreements and practices for potential litigation issues and advised clients on strategies for avoiding and resolving legal disputes.

### Accomplishments:

- Defeated key summary judgment motion in *Computech v. Selma Pattymware International, Inc.*, 677 F. Supp. 2d 605 (E.D. Fla. 1999), precipitating favorable settlement for client.
- Resolved critical licensing dispute for international online gaming company; client obtained essential technology license on favorable terms without resorting to litigation.
- Successfully represented a premier Internet performance data company in a contract dispute; client avoided threatened litigation and opponent withdrew demand for increased license fees.
- Successfully represented a software company in an employment dispute; former employee withdrew all demands.
- Served as lead associate on numerous cases; supervised teams of junior associates and paralegals.

**Ralphson, Purj & Braff**, Boston, MA

07/1995 – 06/1998

### Litigation Associate

Participated in complex commercial, intellectual property, securities, and product liability cases at Top-100 international firm. Responsible for all aspects of trial preparation. Argued motions. Took and defended depositions, including expert depositions. Drafted briefs, pleadings, and motions. Managed large-scale document productions. Negotiated case settlements.

## Howard Wallich

–Page 2–

### Ralphson, Purj & Braff (continued)

#### Accomplishments:

- Lead associate and second-chair at trial of *Baywindow Technologies, Inc. v. Rolls Systems, Inc.*, 619 F. Supp. 79 (D. Mich. 1996); client prevailed on all counts.
- Drafted petition for certiorari to the U.S. Supreme Court.

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### Education

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#### **Boston College School of Law**, Boston, MA

Juris Doctor, *magna cum laude*, 1995

- Third-Year Class Rank: 11/381
- Member, *Boston College International Law Journal*, 1993 – 1995
- Jill Hennessey Distinguished Scholar, Paul J. Giacomo Scholar, G. Gordon Liddy Scholar

#### **University of Edinburgh**, Edinburgh, Scotland

Master of Arts in Sociology, 1986

- Graduated with First-Class Honors

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### Bar Admissions

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**California**, December 1998

**Massachusetts**, January 1996



## DIANNE MARTIN

1568 Yellow Brick Lane ▪ Lexington, KY 40312  
555.555.5555 ▪ [dmartin@martin.com](mailto:dmartin@martin.com)

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### PROFILE

Accomplished, Kentucky-licensed attorney with 15 years of experience. Strong advocate and creative problem solver who works closely with clients to ensure that they receive positive, cost-effective outcomes through negotiation, settlements, or litigation. Strong transferable skills, particularly with regard to real estate, commercial litigation, and domestic relations.

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Associate**, Rattan & Swish, P.C., Hardyville, KY 2002—2003  
Provided support on a part-time basis to firm specializing in real estate transactions, probate, general contract matters, and family law. Counseled clients; researched and drafted legal documents; attended court hearings and mediations; negotiated cases to settlement; conducted discovery and trial preparation for complex actions.

*Key Accomplishments:*

- Proven success in analyzing and drafting various types of motions and responsive pleadings, as well as commercial real estate leases.
- Commended for excellence in courtroom, as well as superb settlement skills.
- Independently managed office, personnel, clients, new prospects, own caseload, and emergency issues during employer's absence.
- Handled contentious case involving a response to a Motion for Violating a Status Quo Order; effectively and promptly ascertained the relevant issues and wrote and forcefully argued the response to the motion in court. Judge denied the motion, resulting in substantial savings to the client and enhanced reputation of the firm.
- Counseled clients with respect to legal procedure, strategies, and common sense approach to solving cases, including alternative dispute resolution, ensuring that clients were well informed, and actively being involved in the progress of their cases.
- Efficiently reviewed and summated complex documents.
- Utilized computerized research techniques for drafting documents.

**Independent Contractor/Sole Practitioner**, Trenton, KY 1996—Present  
Responsible for all aspects of litigation in family law and probate cases. Managed diverse caseload; drafted all types of documents and persuasive settlement letters; counseled clients; attended court hearings and mediations; negotiated complex cases to clients' advantage.

*Key Accomplishments:*

- Independently handled all aspects of cases from inception through completion.
- Developed client referrals.
- Conducted complex depositions resulting in successful outcomes of cases.

**Attorney**, Jane L. Smith, P.C., Louisville, KY 1996  
Defended City of Redfield in premises liability and employment discrimination cases.

*Key Accomplishments:*

- Enhanced turnover of cases and reduced City's liability payments through thorough pretrial preparation and settlement techniques.
- Researched appropriate law for drafting responsive brief to Motion for Summary Disposition within limited time constraints and convincingly advocated position before the court. Judge denied Motion to Dismiss, allowing case to be settled for a substantial sum, to the client's satisfaction.

# DIANNE MARTIN

–Page 2–

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**Associate**, C. Howell Thomas & Associates, P.C., Louisville, KY 1994—1996  
Represented clients in probate, family, and commercial litigation. Supervised legal support staff; extensive client contact.

*Key Accomplishments:*

- Successfully settled 100% of cases without going to trial.
- Formed relationships with non-legal professionals for the purpose of gaining insight and expertise into new areas, such as real estate, business and property appraisals, finances, and mental health
- Trained and worked closely with support staff to optimize effectiveness.

**Associate**, Martini and Olive, P.C., Hancock, KY 1988—1994  
Handled probate, small business, and commercial matters; family law, bankruptcies, and personal injury cases, including auto negligence and premises liability.

*Key Accomplishments:*

- Designed and implemented new administrative billing and practice policies, increasing collections of receivables and enhancing case turnover.
- Researched, wrote, and successfully argued motions and briefs before the court.

## EDUCATION

**Juris Doctor**, University of Kentucky College of Law, Lexington, KY

**Bachelor of Arts in History**, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Member of the State Bar of Kentucky in excellent standing

Member of Family Law Section of the State Bar of Kentucky

Licensed to practice before the Federal Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky



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## CASSIDY G. REGAN

322 South Broadway ▪ Baltimore, Maryland 21101

Phone: 555-555-5555 ▪ Fax: 555-555-5555 ▪ [croberts@roberts.com](mailto:croberts@roberts.com)

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### SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

Successful attorney in private practice with more than 10 years of experience representing corporate and individual clients in general contract, corporate, and employment matters. Executive experience managing own firm; serve in local government overseeing municipal budget of \$10 million and numerous departments.

### EDUCATION

**University of Maryland School of Law**  
*Juris Doctor, cum laude*

**North Carolina State University**  
*Bachelor of Arts in International Relations*

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

#### Litigation/Litigation Management

- Responsible for all phases of litigation, including jury trials, discovery, legal research, client contacts, settlements, and appeals. Practice included trials in state and federal courts, appellate courts, and government agencies.
- Successfully litigated in U.S. and Maryland courts and before federal and state agencies.
- Prevailed in appeals to U.S. Courts of Appeals and Maryland Courts of Appeals.
- Extensive legal research and writing experience, including winning appellate briefs.
- Represented large corporations in federal and state litigation.
- Successfully represented Maryland high-technology corporation in contract action against large multinational corporation.
- Represented clients in numerous trials and appeals, including auto tort, premises liability, real property, contract, commercial, environmental, and construction.

#### Corporate Governance

- Lead counsel in successful representation of shareholders of large software development corporation in ousting corrupt management.
- Substantial experience in contract negotiation, drafting, and general corporate law.

#### Executive Managerial

- Responsible for review and oversight of all operations for full-service municipal government with \$10-million budget.
- Oversaw operations of police, public works, planning, and administrative departments.
- Initiated very successful downtown commercial revitalization project.
- County councilman for district of more than 30,000 residents.
- Managed all aspects of law office.
- Highly successful military officer with extensive managerial and leadership experience.

#### Governmental and Public Affairs

- Testified before and lobbied state legislative and other public bodies concerning issues relevant to state and municipal government.
- Substantial media contact, including numerous televised interviews.

#### Other Legal Experience

- Successfully represented clients' interests in commercial dealings, real estate transactions, estates, landlord-tenant, general corporate, domestic, construction, tax, and more.
- Acted as general counsel for numerous small and mid-sized businesses.

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## CASSIDY G. REGAN

–PAGE 2–

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### WORK HISTORY

<b>Law Offices of Cassidy G. Regan</b> , Baltimore, MD <i>Sole Practitioner</i>	1995 – Present
<b>Law Office of Daniel McWilliams, Jr.</b> , Baltimore, MD <i>Associate</i>	1993 – 1995
<b>Baker McFisher, LLP</b> , Baltimore, MD <i>Of Counsel</i>	1990 – 1993
<b>Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County</b> , Towson, MD <i>Law Clerk to the Honorable Bob Leaven</i>	1985 – 1989
<b>U.S. Army</b> <i>Captain (Airborne Ranger)</i>	1980 – 1985

### BAR ADMISSIONS

Maryland State Bar, 1987  
U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, 1987  
U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland, 1989  
U.S. Tax Court, 1992

### PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Maryland State Bar Association

# STEVEN RAMSEY

364 Cthulthu Drive ▪ Fremont, California 90145 ▪ (555) 555-5555 ▪ sramsey@ramsey.com

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## EXPERIENCE:

**Office of the District Attorney, Alameda County, Walnut, CA**

September 2001 – Present

### ***Deputy District Attorney***

Responsible for all phases of criminal prosecutions from pre-trial practice through trial, post-trial motions, sentencing, and appeals. Successfully conducted more than 20 jury trials in misdemeanors and serious felony cases, including a homicide. Conducted more than 15 preliminary hearings. Direct and cross-examined civilian and expert witnesses, including ballistic specialists, medical experts, forensic pathologists, coroners, accident reconstruction experts, fingerprint experts, and toxicologists. Earned fast-track promotion through series of increasingly responsible positions during a two-year period.

- Felony Trial Team (September 2003–Present): First and only member of hiring class promoted to highly selective unit. Autonomously prosecute felony cases, including violent strike cases, first-degree residential burglary, commercial burglary, assault with a deadly weapon, narcotics sales, financial identity theft, obstruction of law enforcement, and theft cases.
  - Prepare all cases for trial, including witness interviews, discovery, preparation of legal briefs for pre-trial litigation of underlying legal issues, jury *voir dire*, and jury instructions.
  - Deliver opening statements and closing arguments before juries.
- Special Prosecutions Unit, Juvenile Division (January–September 2003): Managed all aspects of felony and misdemeanor prosecutions of minors, including felony and misdemeanor bench trials for crimes including armed robbery, armed car-jacking, attempted kidnapping, sex crimes, and weapons offenses.
  - Drafted legal briefs and conducted hearings on preliminary legal matters.
  - Successfully negotiated plea bargains with defense counsel.
- Misdemeanor Trial Unit (November 2001–January 2003): Responsible for all aspects of prosecuting misdemeanor cases, including negligent homicide, child molestation, aggravated battery, domestic violence, obstruction of law enforcement, vehicle hit-and-run collisions, weapons offenses, narcotics possession, and DUIs.
  - Successfully tried complex homicide involving more than 22 witnesses.
  - Performed extensive research and writing and successfully argued numerous motions, including motions to dismiss, motions to suppress evidence, motions to exclude evidence, motions for new trial, and post-trial appellate motions.
- Post-Bar Law Clerk, Law and Motions Unit (September–November 2001): Performed extensive research and writing on a wide range of preliminary legal issues on felonies and three-strike cases for the following hearings: motions to dismiss charges, motions to suppress evidence, and motions to compel disclosure of confidential informant.
  - Drafted and argued briefs before the Superior Court with a high rate of success.

**California Supreme Court, San Francisco, CA**

Spring 2001

### ***Judicial Extern to the Honorable P. Shirley Stephenson***

Worked closely with staff attorneys to hone skills in analyzing civil petitions for review. Evaluated petitions and prepared memoranda for the court's weekly conference, identifying issues presented and assessing merits of the petitions. Justice Stephenson personally approved work prior to circulation to the full court.

**Office of the District Attorney, San Francisco, CA**

Summer 2000

### ***Certified Law Clerk, Law and Motions Team***

Successfully argued 100% of briefs drafted before the Superior Court.



**Office of the District Attorney, San Francisco, CA**

Summer 1999

***Law Clerk, Child and Elder Abuse Unit***

Participated in the high-profile prosecution of a corporation, a case of first impression, and a child homicide. Conducted research on the criminal prosecution of corporations, the double jeopardy doctrine, conditional examinations, and libel. Developed a statement of facts from more than 600 pages of transcripts. Drafted briefs and memoranda. Managed discovery. Interviewed witnesses.

## **EDUCATION:**

**University of California, Irvine School of Law, Irvine, CA**

***Juris Doctor*, 2001**

- GPA: 3.0 / 4.0
- Participant, Moot Court
- Legal Research Teaching Assistant
- Queen Hall Pro Bono Certificate

**Inter-American University, Los Angeles, CA**

***Bachelor of Arts in English, summa cum laude*, 1998**

- GPA: 3.92 / 4.0
- Minor in Political Science

## **ADMISSIONS:**

California State Bar, December 2001



## Length

Once upon a time, there was a rule that stated resumes must never exceed one page. While some still abide by this rule, most have relegated it to the “old-fashioned” pile. The problem with this rule is that it causes people to eliminate essential information from their resumes in the interest of fitting them on one page. Or it causes them to cram their resumes so full of information that immediate headaches ensue.

Look at the examples on the following pages. If you were an employer, which resume would you rather look at?

**SANDRA METHA**  
3182 East 93<sup>rd</sup> Street, #8B, New York, NY 10028  
(555) 555-5555  
smetha@metha.com

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## **LEGAL EXPERIENCE**

### **COURTNEY GOUGHAM, LLP, New York, NY**

July 2000 – Present

#### *Contract Attorney*

Currently working on a complex products liability litigation concerning semiconductor chips. Litigation involves several well-known domestic and international chip manufacturers.

- Review and analyze highly technical documents to support and defend clients' claims during trial.
- Review work product of 20 other attorneys. Closely working with firm's attorneys to create a database of relevant documents.

### **PRO BONO ATTORNEY, New York, NY**

#### *Litigation Attorney*

February 2002 – June 2003

Worked on several litigations involving deceptive trade practices, consumer fraud, and class action.

- Filed an action against an entertainment business for malicious prosecution, abuse of process, and defamation; conducted research on Rule 37 of FRCP and Code of Professional Responsibility.
- Participated in an action on behalf of phone card users against a leading phone card company for consumer fraud arising out of allegedly deceptive practices in connection with undisclosed surcharges and overcharges levied on phone cards.
- Researched and prepared an article on the Fair Debt Collections Act (FDCA).
- Additional experience in immigration law. Drafted and filed various petitions before the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

### **AMSTEL, BECK & ADAMS, New York, NY**

#### *Associate*

August 2000 – January 2002

Litigation experience: Represented a major apparel manufacturer in a high-profile litigation against a prominent apparel designer.

- Conducted research, prepared legal memoranda, and drafted briefs and motions.
- Involved in a large document production, prepared privileged logs, studied depositions, and prepared deposition digests.

Transactional experience: Regularly conducted online trademark-availability searches on domestic and international databases; reviewed search reports and prepared opinion letters to clients. Prosecuted trademark applications in domestic and foreign trademark offices. Coordinated with foreign local counsel to maintain an extensive international trademarks portfolio and effectively resolve international trademark disputes. Additional experience in patent law. Reviewed law to determine requirements for filing design patent applications in Central America and Asia. Drafted memorandum regarding requirements and cost estimates.

### **R. KELLERSON, P.C., New York, NY**

#### *Intern*

May 1999 – March 2000

Advised and assisted start-up and technology companies in the licensing and distribution of innovative software.

- Drafted software license agreements, end-user agreements, maintenance agreements, re-seller agreement, confidentiality agreements, and mutual releases.

Assisted clients in the selection, registration, and enforcement of trademark rights. Coordinated with the firm's large network of local counsel to manage international trademark portfolios. Negotiated and prepared worldwide trademark settlement agreements for one of the largest privately owned dermatological companies in the world. Regularly conducted intellectual property diligence.

## **EDUCATION**

### **BENJAMIN N. CARDOZO SCHOOL OF LAW**

*LL.M., May 1999*

**Papers:** "A Critical Analysis of the Internet"; "Cybersquatting and You"

### **UNIVERSITY OF BOMBAY COLLEGE OF LAW**

*LL.B. (J.D.), May 1998*

**Class Rank:** 7/250; Among Top 3% of Class

**Activities:** *Head*, Students' Advisor Team, Legal Aid Program  
*Participant*, National Moot Court Competition

**Clerkship:** *J. Mhir, Supreme Court of India.*

Performed detailed analysis of bill for regulating cable industry and recommended changes to the Joint Parliamentary Committee. Created a report for National Human Rights Commission of India on deductions from prisoners' wages. Provided legal assistance to refugees via a UNHCR-funded project.

### **UNIVERSITY OF BOMBAY, ASHRAM COLLEGE OF COMMERCE**

*Bachelor of Management and Accounting (Honors), May 1995*

**Activities:** *Organizer*, Inter-college Business and Finance Convention  
*Secretary*, FLER, Debating Society

## **BAR MEMBERSHIP**

- Admitted, New York State Bar; Member, NYSBA and ABCNY



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## SANDRA METHA

3182 East 93<sup>rd</sup> Street, #8B, New York, NY 10028  
(555) 555-5555 • smetha@metha.com

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### PROFILE

Experienced attorney with expertise in general litigation and intellectual property law. Earned LL.M. from Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law and J.D. equivalent from the University of Bombay College of Law (graduated in the top 3% of class). Excellent research and writing skills.

### LEGAL EXPERIENCE

#### **COURTNEY GOUGHAM, LLP**, New York, NY

July 2003 – Present

##### Contract Attorney

Currently involved in complex products liability litigation concerning semiconductor chips. Litigation involves several well-known multinational chip manufacturers.

- Review and analyze highly technical documents to support and defend clients' claims during trial.
- Responsible for reviewing work product of 20 other attorneys to ensure high quality.

#### **PRO BONO ATTORNEY**, New York, NY

February 2002 – June 2003

Provided pro bono legal services in several cases involving deceptive trade practices, consumer fraud, and class actions.

- Filed action for malicious prosecution, abuse of process, and defamation against an entertainment company; conducted research on Rule 37 of FRCP and Code of Professional Responsibility. Drafted document request for a class-action litigation in connection with undisclosed surcharges and overcharges levied on phone cards.
- Researched and drafted legal memorandum on the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA). Prepared an article on Fair Debt Collections Act (FDCA).
- Drafted and filed various petitions before the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Received extended training to prepare and defend asylum applications.

#### **AMSTEL, BECK & ADAMS**, New York, NY

August 2000 – January 2002

##### Associate

*Litigation:* Represented major apparel manufacturer in high-profile breach of license litigation against prominent fashion designer. (Case was widely reported in the press.)

- Conducted research, prepared legal memoranda, and drafted briefs and motions.
- Managed review of a large document production (more than one million documents): prepared privileged logs, studied depositions, and prepared deposition digests.

*Transactional:* Regularly conducted online trademark-availability searches on domestic and international databases; reviewed search reports and prepared opinion letters to clients.

- Prosecuted trademark applications in domestic and foreign trademark offices. Interacted with USPTO in connection with substantive and procedural issues relating to trademark matters and with ICANN regarding domain-name infringements and cybersquatting matters.
- Managed international trademarks portfolio involving registrations in more than 200 countries. Successfully resolved international trademark disputes. Developed strategy relating to litigations, opposition, and cancellation proceedings.
- Also gained experience in patent law. Reviewed law to determine requirements for filing design patent applications in Central America and Asia; drafted memorandum regarding requirements and cost estimates for filing applications.

**R. KELLERSON, P.C.**, New York, NY

May 1999 – March 2000

Legal Intern

Advised and assisted start-up technology and other companies on licensing and distribution of innovative software.

- , Drafted software license, end-user, maintenance, re-seller, and confidentiality agreements and mutual releases.
- , Assisted clients in the selection, registration, and enforcement of trademark rights. Drafted trademark assignments, consent and co-existence agreements, and change of name applications.
- , Coordinated with firm's large network of local counsel to manage international trademark portfolios.
- , Negotiated and prepared worldwide trademark settlement agreement for a global dermatological company.
- , Regularly conducted intellectual property diligence.
- , Conducted prior art searches for filing patent applications. Drafted opinion letters to clients.

**EDUCATION****BENJAMIN N. CARDOZO SCHOOL OF LAW**, New York, NYLL.M. in Corporate and Intellectual Property Law, May 1999

- , Papers:
  - o “A Critical Analysis of the Internet”
  - o “Cybersquatting and You”

**UNIVERSITY OF BOMBAY COLLEGE OF LAW**, Bombay, IndiaLL.B. (J.D. equivalent), May 1998

- , Class Rank: 7/250 (Top 3%)
- , Student Advisor/Team Leader, Legal Aid Program; Participant, National Moot Court Competition
- , *Law Clerk to J. Mihir, Supreme Court of India*: Performed detailed analysis of bill for regulating cable industry and recommended changes to Joint Parliamentary Committee. Created a report for National Human Rights Commission of India on deductions for amenities from prisoner's wages. Provided legal assistance to refugees under a UNHCR funded project.

**UNIVERSITY OF BOMBAY, ASHRAM COLLEGE OF COMMERCE**, Bombay, IndiaB.A. in Management and Accounting, with honors, May 1995**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

- , Admitted, New York State Bar
- , Member, Association of the Bar of City of New York
- , Member, New York State Bar Association

**LANGUAGE SKILLS**

Bilingual in Hindi and English





The modern resume is not bound by the one-page-only rule; however, conciseness is still favored. If you're a recent graduate without a lengthy career prior to law school, your resume should probably be one page—simply because you don't have enough relevant legal experience to merit a longer resume.

Outside of that situation, your resume's length should be dictated by how much you absolutely need to say. Notice the "absolutely need" part. Your resume should contain only the information that is relevant and important. In other words, you shouldn't cut something out solely to save space, nor should you add a bunch of irrelevant "fluff" just to fill two pages.

Just as with format, you want to let the content of your resume dictate its length.

Before worrying about one page or two, get the content in order. Once it's there, see how it looks on the page. If your resume is just a little over a page, make some adjustments to the layout to fit it on one page. Likewise, if you definitely need to move into two-page territory, space your resume out a bit so that it fits nicely across two pages. Your second page should be at least half full. Keep that in mind when deciding on your final length.

### **Using Layout to Your Advantage**

After your primary format (chronological or hybrid) has been decided, there are a million stylistic choices to make. While there are no "rights" and "wrongs" with regard to resume style, there are some "dos" and "don'ts."

Before a word of your resume is read, it should give off a professional, polished appearance. You want your resume to achieve a balance of white space vs. text that makes it look full without looking cluttered. You also want to make sure that your format is easy to navigate. Within 10 seconds, the person reading your resume should be able to pick out your job titles, assess your educational background, and get a general sense of the level of your experience.

Avoid tiny fonts; large blocks of text; and overuse of bold, italics, underlines, and other formatting styles. These things can be effective in small doses, but ineffective if overdone. If you see an entire page where only one word is bolded, your attention will be drawn to that word. If half the words are bolded, however, you won't pay special attention to any of them.



Don't get too creative with your font choice. Times New Roman is a no-fail choice. Other serif fonts (such as Garamond or Book Antiqua) are good choices as well. As far as size, 11-point works well for resumes because it's legible, while still allowing a lot of information to fit on one page. And 12-point can be used if you need to make your resume look full and you've exhausted the content possibilities. Finally, 10-point should only be used if absolutely necessary. It can be hard on the eyes. Never go any smaller than 10-point.

As a general rule, paragraphs within resumes should not exceed six or seven lines. Once a paragraph becomes longer than that, it is likely the reader will gloss over certain things. Assuming each portion of your job description is important, you want to make sure it is displayed in a way that will get it noticed. It is better to have 4-5 lines that will definitely be read than 10-12 that will be ignored.

One trick to achieving an easy-to-read resume is to use bullet points. When items are displayed in a bulleted list, each one is given more attention than if it were lumped into a paragraph format. Look at this before-and-after example

**BEFORE:**

**JENKINS & NGUYEN, LLP**, Harrisburg, PA  
**PATENT / INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ATTORNEY**, 1990–1994

Drafted at least thirty-five patent applications, including seven patent applications directed toward the field of medical imaging systems, six patent applications directed toward the field of ultrasound technology, two patent applications directed toward the field of semiconductor technology, four patent applications directed toward the field of transistor oscillator design, three patent applications directed toward the field of flash memory architecture, five patent applications directed toward the field of mechanical devices, four patent applications directed toward the field of remote portlets, two patent applications directed toward the field of wave-powered electricity generation, and two patent applications directed toward the field of digital and analog telephony.

**AFTER:**

**JENKINS & NGUYEN, LLP**, Harrisburg, PA  
**PATENT / INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ATTORNEY**, 1990–1994



Drafted 35+ patent applications, including:

- 7 patent applications in the field of medical imaging systems;
- 6 patent applications in the field of ultrasound technology;
- 5 patent applications in the field of mechanical devices;
- 4 patent applications in the field of transistor oscillator design;
- 4 patent applications in the field of remote portlets;
- 3 patent applications in the field of flash memory architecture;
- 2 patent applications in the field of semiconductor technology;
- 2 patent applications in the field of digital and analog telephony; and
- 2 patent applications in the field of wave-powered electricity generation.

You can also combine bullet points with paragraphs. This allows you to highlight certain aspects of your experience. For instance, you may want to discuss the nuts and bolts of your job in a paragraph and use bullets to highlight some notable achievements.

**Here's an example:**

#### **Vice President and General Counsel**

**J&P Financial, Santa Fe, NM, 1996 – 1999**

Anticipated, analyzed, and resolved wide range of legal issues on behalf of J&P and its subsidiaries. Implemented and maintained compliance procedures and prepared, updated, and oversaw all federal and state regulatory filings. Managed outside counsel. Provided legal advice to President, CFO, and all departments on range of matters from employment law and contract negotiation to corporate governance issues.

- Instrumental in negotiating settlement of complex trademark litigation through mediation in federal court, thereby controlling litigation risk, avoiding trial, and saving substantial costs associated with trial and possible appeals.
- Provided legal guidance to Human Resources Department in revision of employee handbook.



- Effectively reorganized Legal Department's process for servicing client accounts by developing comprehensive and proactive new compliance procedures, calendar, and client-communication process.
- Successfully managed extensive SEC examination of employer's operations resulting in a regulatory review highly complimentary of newly implemented compliance procedures.

If you have worn several hats in your positions, or divided your time between one or more practice areas, you can also break your job descriptions into different categories.

### **Take a look at this example:**

**Assistant General Counsel, 1997–2000**  
**Landers Corporation, Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

Advised senior management on compliance, reporting, and transactional matters. Other responsibilities included:

**HUMAN RESOURCES:** Advised and worked closely with human resource personnel on a broad range of employment law issues, including advising human resources on site employee matters and investigating and drafting responses to EEOC charges of employment discrimination.

**DISPUTE/LITIGATION MANAGEMENT:** Oversaw litigation against major software vendor that threatened legal action for damages and contractually valid injunction to halt Landers' further use of software, which would have crippled company operations. Prevailed against vendor, saving company hundreds of thousands of dollars.

**CONTRACT NEGOTIATION:** Negotiated lease terms and rates with lessees. Drafted and negotiated a broad range of agreements, including sales agreements, procurement agreements, software-development agreements, marketing and license agreements, international agreements, vendor agreements, and distributor and dealer contracts.

### **Don't Sweat the Small Stuff**

A lot of times, the aspects of the layout that people fret over the most are those that matter the least. These are some of the questions that I have been asked:



- Should I tab or right-align my dates?
- Should I italicize or underline my job titles?
- Should I use an ampersand (&) or the word “and” between the semesters I was on Dean’s List?
- Should I use a 10-point or 11-point font?

My answer: NO ONE CARES! First, I dare you to find someone who has dismissed an otherwise-qualified candidate based on these types of factors. Second, in the improbable event that you do find such an employer, would you really want to work for that person? I mean, if this person turns you down over a square bullet point, what would he/she do to your trial brief?

Look at the examples provided throughout this book to get some ideas on effective ways to present the information on your resume. Again, make sure you use format and style to your advantage. There are certain layouts that make the resume look like it fills up the page, even if there’s not much information to work with. There are other layouts that allow you to fit a lot on a page without making it look cluttered.

Remember, while it’s important to have a visually attractive resume, the majority of the time and effort you put into creating your resume and cover letter should be dedicated to creating compelling content. The style of your headings, the size of your margins, and whether you use #56 or Apt. 56 in your address block should be the last things you consider.

Mary was a client who was format-obsessed. She submitted her resume to me with instructions that I make very minimal changes, and only if absolutely necessary. She included a long list of her preferences. She loved 11-point Arial font; she hated bullet points; she needed everything to be fully justified; she wanted her resume to be exactly 1.5 pages long; she liked her job titles to be in bold and her places of employment to be in small caps, not full caps; and nothing could be italicized—she hated italics! Mary also insisted that each of her job descriptions be six lines long, and that her education go before her experience, even though she’d been working for 15 years.

When I asked Mary why she had these preferences, I expected her to say that it was because she’d used this format several times to great success. Instead, she said she had



never actually gotten a job through the resume she'd been using—and she'd been sending it out for close to a year! But she stuck with it because her boyfriend and her mother said that it looked nice.

There have been many others who have fallen into this same trap. For whatever reason, they've grown attached to the little things about their resumes that they no longer know what purpose it's intended to serve. Make sure that the reasons behind your formatting and design decisions are substantiated by more than force of habit or the fact that something looks pretty. Your resume should be geared toward getting you a job, not a showing at an art gallery.



## CHAPTER 3:

# SUMMARY SECTIONS

As anyone who's ever used Cliff's Notes™ knows, an abbreviated version of a longer piece of writing can save a lot of headaches and bring clarity to an otherwise-complex story. The same holds true for the summary section of a resume. If you find your own head starting to spin when you look back over your career, imagine how an employer will feel when trying to analyze your work history. Or if you feel that your current resume doesn't convey all that you have to offer, what makes you think an employer will figure it out? A summary section gives you an opportunity to tell employers what they really need to know in a manner that is both concise and easy to understand. It is essentially a "snapshot" of you as a legal professional. While your individual job descriptions tell employers who you were in each position, the summary section of your resume gives you a forum in which to tell employers who you are overall.

### **Objective = obsolete**

To obtain an intellectual property associate position.

To obtain a position with a telecommunications company that utilizes my research and writing skills.

To dazzle a law firm with my wit and intelligence and eventually be made partner.

Gone are the days of "objectives," a sentence or two at the beginning of a resume that states what the job seeker is looking for in a position. The reason objectives are not favored is that they break the golden rule: Show employers what you can do for them.

Objectives are also fairly useless. If your resume and cover letter are well written, your objective should be clear. Finally, objectives are limiting. By describing one particular type of position, you may be excluding yourself from other positions within the same law firm or company that would also match your interests and skills.

Instead of an objective, more and more legal job seekers are employing summary sections



in their resumes. When employers receive upwards of 100 resumes per day for advertised positions, they don't have much time to devote to each one. Rather than just informing the employer of what you are looking for, a brief and well-written summary will highlight your relevant strengths, grab the employer's attention, and make him/her want to continue reading the rest of your resume in more detail.

**Here are the three main advantages you can gain by including a summary section in your resume:**

**1) You can highlight the most relevant aspects of your legal experience.**

A summary section can be a great tool for bringing attention to those things that are the most relevant to the position you're seeking, especially if they are not reflected by your most recent position(s). The information contained in the top third of your resume is what will attract the most attention. For this reason, a summary is a great way to ensure that the top third represents everything you want employers to know about you.

A client named Ruth wanted to practice healthcare law. She had primarily done real estate work throughout her legal career, but she did have some healthcare law experience. For example, prior to entering law school, she had worked as an executive with an HMO for several years. She also worked on some healthcare-related matters as an associate, even though she was technically assigned to the firm's real estate group.

Ruth was worried, however, that employers would see that she had been doing mostly real estate work for the past six years and immediately pigeonhole her as a real estate attorney before reading the remainder of her resume.

In order to brand her as a healthcare attorney, I helped Ruth create a Summary of Qualifications section at the top of her resume, in which she listed each healthcare-related function she'd performed in her career. She included the healthcare regulations she was familiar with and the types of cases she'd worked on (and her role in those cases). By putting this information at the top of her resume, the healthcare experience was the first thing employers saw, and, accordingly, they viewed her as a healthcare attorney.



**2) You can summarize lengthy experience.**

A lot of experienced attorneys run into a problem when trying to condense their lengthy experience. Maybe you've trimmed down your resume as much as you can, but it's still two full pages long. If this is the case, a summary is a good alternative to simply eliminating description. Yes, it might make your resume even longer, but employers will appreciate that they don't have to weed through two pages of dense text to figure out what you've done. If you can encapsulate your experience in a few brief sentences, it will take some of the guesswork out of the employer's hands. Then, once he/she has decided to consider you and not the other 99 candidates, he/she can go back and read your job descriptions in more detail.

**3) You can showcase your accomplishments.**

If you have a few large, notable accomplishments, why not put them at the very top of your resume? If you won a notable award, went to a great law school, graduated at the top of your class, or worked at a prestigious law firm, you can increase the prominence of these achievements by listing them in the summary section. Starting your resume with "Top 10% graduate of Cornell University Law School" is sure to get an employer's attention, and you haven't even made him/her look past the first line. You can either include a few accomplishments along with other summary information, or you can list several accomplishments in their own "Accomplishments" section to make them more prominent.

John was a client who had graduated first in his class from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. While the school is ranked 32nd in the nation, law firms in California (where John relocated after graduation) weren't very familiar with it. He was frustrated by the fact that he was constantly being overlooked in favor of graduates of lesser-ranked schools that were local and therefore better known.

When I looked at John's resume, I saw that his education was at the bottom of his resume, even though he was a fairly recent graduate. In addition, his class rank was barely noticeable.

To remedy this problem, I added a line to the top of John's resume. It read "Valedictorian (graduated 1st out of X students) of East Coast law school ranked 32nd in the nation by U.S. *News and World Report*."



A summary section can take several forms. Below are brief descriptions of the four main forms, but as you will see in the examples, these can be mixed and matched to create new forms. Essentially, the summary section provides an opportunity for you to be creative in displaying your best and most important attributes.

## **Profile**

A Profile is a paragraph that provides a brief overview of your career. You can use this section to pull together each aspect of your professional history in one place, from academic information to honors and awards to practice areas to foreign language abilities. You can also highlight skills in this section. Because cover letters are often overlooked or skimmed, employing a Profile ensures that any qualities that you want to highlight will be seen.

Remember, though, that the skills you mention should be supported by your resume. If you bill yourself as a “strong negotiator” in your Profile, there should be evidence of this in your job descriptions.

## **Here are some examples of Profiles:**

### **PROFILE**

Highly experienced healthcare attorney with joint J.D. and Master’s in Public Health from Emory University. Acknowledged subject-matter expert and published author frequently called upon to make presentations to other professionals. Practice focuses on corporate and transactional aspects of healthcare law, as well as regulatory compliance. Admitted to practice in Georgia, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia.

### **PROFILE**

Experienced attorney named “Attorney to Watch” by Alabama Attorney Magazine, February 2004 issue. Annual presenter, “Effective Mediation Skills” seminar, Alabama Mediation Association. Experience in formulating corporate policies, ensuring compliance, and spearheading fundraising efforts. Able to resolve disputes without resorting to costly litigation and effectively litigate cases when necessary. Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. Conversational in Spanish.

A Profile does not have to be very long to be effective. Here is an example of a single sentence that achieves its goal of explaining who this candidate is:



## PROFILE

Fully licensed Insurance General Counsel with extensive litigation, claims adjustment, and underwriting experience

### Summary of Qualifications

A Summary of Qualifications is similar to a Profile, but rather than using it to summarize your entire career, it can be used to highlight those specific aspects of your experience that relate to the position you are currently seeking. A Summary of Qualifications can be particularly helpful if you have dabbled in a certain area throughout your career and now want to focus on that area. For instance, maybe you've done labor and employment work "here and there" throughout your legal career, but it has only made up about 15% of your overall experience. If you decide that you now want to focus on labor and employment law, a Summary of Qualifications section will allow you to put that 15% in one place. Check out these two examples:

### Summary of Qualifications

- Currently enrolled in M.S. program in Human Resources
- Assisting law professor at University of Chicago with research on articles relating to employment law
- Summer associate at a well-respected Chicago labor and employment firm
- Employment Law Seminar paper: Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: The New Rules
- Writing sample: Workman's Compensation Laws and Their Effect on Hospital Billing Practices

### Summary of Qualifications

- Juris Doctor, with Concentration in Health Law, from Santa Anita School of Law
- Master's degree in Health Administration
- Presented seminar to undergraduates on issues such as HIPAA, Healthcare Fraud and Abuse, and Stark Laws
- Represented indigent clients' healthcare concerns as a student attorney for the Santa Anita Law School's Health Law Clinic
- Two years of experience as an intern for the Miracle Heights Medical Center's Managed Care Department



## **Areas of Expertise**

Another form that a summary section can take is the Areas of Expertise section. A list of a few key legal areas is visually striking while, again, taking some of the guesswork out of your resume. Someone in a hurry can easily assess the areas in which you are experienced.

The Areas of Expertise section can either stand on its own or be combined with a Profile/Summary of Qualifications section, as in the second example below:

### **AREAS OF EXPERTISE**

Toxic Torts/Mass Torts  
Environmental Law  
Construction Law  
Corporate Litigation  
Class Actions  
Product Liability

### **PROFILE**

Duke Law School-educated litigator with outstanding track record and considerable expertise in areas including:

- Title VII, ADA, ADEA, and FLSA
- Article 76 and New York Human Rights Law § 296
- Prevailing Wage
- Workers' Compensation
- Unemployment Insurance
- Regulatory Compliance

### **Professional Accomplishments**

As you will see throughout this book, accomplishments play a major role in a resume. That's because employers want proven achievers and the only way to bill yourself as a proven achiever is to show what it is that you've achieved. Accomplishments can often be included within individual job descriptions, but if you have a few very notable accomplishments, why not draw more attention to them by placing them in their own section? Here's an example of how that might be done:



### **CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:**

- Managed human resources, insurance, and risk-management departments with outstanding efficiency, cutting costs by up to 25%
- Advised on major, multi-year supply and inventory management agreements; convinced sales management not to execute one such agreement due to litigation risk and customer being financially unsound (customer later declared bankruptcy)
- Utilized Chapter 11 to employer's best advantage, consistently accomplishing reorganizations in record time
- Negotiated complex technology and service agreements that saved company more than \$40 million

### **KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Brought in \$1.5 million in new business through marketing efforts.
- Received numerous individual performance awards, commendations, and bonuses
- Devised and executed litigation strategies that consistently produced optimal results for clients
- Invited to present seminars on effective litigation strategies for the ABA and for the Indiana University School of Law
- Successfully argued case to Indiana Supreme Court establishing a new tort in Indiana for violations of state constitutional rights

### **Using a summary to compensate for lack of experience.**

While a summary section is typically most useful for experienced attorneys, it can also be a valuable tool for the inexperienced attorney. If you are having a really tough time filling up the page, or you feel like your experience is way behind that of your competitors, you can use a summary section to convey those qualities that cannot be conveyed through experience/grades alone. Here's an example of a Profile of a recent graduate:

### **PROFILE**

Recent law school graduate with strong academic background, including an M.A. in History and a B.A. in Philosophy. Experienced in customer relations, teamwork, and communication. Strong sense of professional responsibility and legal ethics. Able to view the "big picture" while sorting out and analyzing its complex components.



Amir, a law student I was helping, was having a tough time filling up his resume. Because he had to fully pay his way through law school, he worked for his family's dry cleaning business for all three years and didn't have an opportunity to participate in any activities or get practical legal experience through law clerk or summer associate positions. His GPA had suffered as well.

He did have a few unique attributes, however. Amir was a great writer. While his overall GPA wasn't very high, he earned an A on every single paper he wrote during his second and third years of law school. He also earned high praise from the dean of the law school, who described one of his papers (in a recommendation letter) as "the best he'd read in 10 years." He completely paid his way through school and balanced his studies with a 40-hour work week. In addition, he was the first person in his entire family to pursue a college degree, let alone a law degree.

Using this information, we created a profile that reflected the less tangible things he offered. It looked like this:

Hardworking and self-motivated recent graduate with proven research and writing skills, demonstrated by earning eight consecutive A's on law school written assignments and commendation from law school dean for writing "the best paper he'd read in 10 years." Maintained full-time employment throughout legal studies in order to fully fund education. Strong drive and commitment to the legal profession, as first family member to successfully pursue higher education.

A summary can also reduce repetition in your job descriptions. If you find that several of your positions comprised virtually the same responsibilities, rather than repeat those responsibilities under each job heading, include them in a summary section. This will not only free up space on your resume, it will bring more focus to the unique contributions you have made in each position.

If you find your resume lacking a certain "punch," or you don't feel that your best or most relevant attributes are coming through, try creating a summary section in your resume. The easier you can make it for employers to quickly see your best qualities, the better chance you have of getting an interview.





## CHAPTER 4:

# EDUCATION

**“Where did you go to law school?” This is probably the first question you’re asked after you tell someone you’re an attorney (that is, after you’re asked to provide free legal advice). Because the law is an academic discipline, a lot of importance is placed on an attorney’s academic pedigree, especially in the case of law students and recent graduates. Depending on where you got your J.D., it may be something you declare boastfully or something you or something you are more apt to whisper. Law schools come in all shapes and sizes and in all levels of prestige. This chapter will help you to decide how much emphasis you should give to your education and what you can do to make up for a less-than-stellar academic background.**

### **How much detail should I give?**

Depending on whether you’re a law student, a very experienced attorney, or somewhere in between, the education section of your resume can drastically vary in length. If you are still in law school or you recently graduated (within one year), your education is going to play a very large role in your candidacy. Therefore, you will want to flesh out your Education section as much as possible.

As you gain more experience, however, the details of your education will decrease in importance. Your degrees and the schools you attended will still be important, but less emphasis will be placed on extracurricular activities, clinic participation, coursework, and class standing. If you graduated in 1978, your involvement in the Student Section of the ABA and moot court will have little bearing on your candidacy.

Let’s start with the basics. If you’re an attorney, you have an undergraduate degree and a law degree. In addition, you might have a Master’s degree, a Ph.D., and/or an LL.M. Your degrees should be listed in the order in which they were received, starting with the most recent.

### **Here are the things you must include:**

1. Name of School
2. Location of School (city and state)
3. Degree



**Here's an example of how this information might be presented:**

**University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA**  
*Juris Doctor*

**Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD**  
*Bachelor of Arts*

This is the bedrock of this section. Now, here are some things that you should also include, depending on your particular situation:

4. Month/Year of Graduation\* (just the year is fine if it's not recent)
5. GPA (if it's decent) and Class Rank (again, if it's decent)
6. Honors
7. Activities

\*The only reason not to include your graduation dates is if you think age will be a hindrance. For more on that, see Addressing Red Flags and Compensating for Weaknesses in Your Resume in Chapter 7.

## **GPA/Class Rank**

One of the most popular questions asked is whether or not GPA and/or class rank should be included on legal resumes. Obviously, if you have a fantastic GPA/class rank, you will want to highlight that. Likewise, if you have a horrible GPA/class rank, you will want to hide that.

Most people, however, fall somewhere in between, and this is where the confusion comes in. Job applicants fear that if they don't include grade information, employers will think they did horribly. Conversely, they fear that if they include average grade information, employers will automatically disqualify them.

Both of these thoughts are valid. As a general guideline, if you are a law student or a recent graduate and your law school GPA is above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, it should be included. Typically a 3.0 represents a B, and therefore anything higher is considered good. There are other factors



to consider, however. In order to figure out what's best to do in your situation, you need to factor in the other items on your resume, as well as what your particular GPA means to your particular school.

More and more law schools are turning to unique grading systems that differ from the typical 4.0 scale. Even within the 4.0 scale, the curves can be drastically different. At one law school, a 3.6 could mean Top 10%, while at another, a 3.1 could mean Top 10%. For this reason, a GPA is not always the best indicator of your performance in law school.

If you did well in school, the best and clearest way to indicate as such is through your class rank. If you see 3/184 or Top 15%, you automatically understand that this person excelled in his/her studies in comparison to his/her peers.

If your GPA was only average, yet you won a few academic awards, excelled in moot court, and participated on a law journal, employers are going to assume that you did well in law school. Not including your GPA won't cause anyone to think you performed horribly, because it is clear that you excelled in certain areas. Therefore, if your GPA isn't very high, it is probably safe to exclude it. As an alternative to GPA, you can also list specific courses in which you received honors or high grades.

Great work experience can also make up for a less-than-stellar GPA. Maybe you didn't do so well in the classroom, but you tore up the legal clinic you participated in, and you come highly recommended from the firm you worked at as a summer law clerk. In that case, you might want to forgo the GPA in favor of fleshing out your Experience section as much as possible.

### **Make sure you're consistent!**

The consistency factor is one thing that can work for or against you in shaping the assumption that employers will make regarding your GPA.

What would you think if you saw this?

## **EDUCATION**

**New York Law School**, New York, New York

*Juris Doctor*



**University of Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland**

*Master of Fine Arts*

GPA: 3.8/4.0

**Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA**

*Bachelor of Arts*

GPA: 3.5/4.0

The fact that the bachelor's and master's GPAs are listed, but the law school GPA is not, leads one to believe that this student did terribly in law school. Otherwise, why wouldn't it be included? In this case, it would be better to leave off all of the GPAs and have the employer think it was a stylistic choice, rather than assume that you completely tanked in law school.

Sometimes law schools do not award GPAs or compute class rank. If your school is one of these, you may want to indicate this on your resume—especially if you have listed your GPA for your bachelor's degree or other degrees. Keeping in mind the consistency factor, you don't want employers to think that you omitted your GPA because it was bad. A simple statement reading (X University does not assign GPAs or provide class rank designations) will do the trick.

Here is an example of an expanded education section:

**University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA**

*Juris Doctor, May 2003*

- GPA: 3.5/4.0; Class Rank: Top 15%
- Member, Intellectual Property Law Society
- Margaret E. Bowman Scholarship for Excellence in Legal Writing
- Semifinalist, Charles Johnson Moot Court Competition

**Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD**

*Bachelor of Arts, May 1999*

- GPA: 3.4/4.0
- President, Pre-law Society



Bullet points are quickest way to convey any additional information associated with your education. If you have an extensive list of activities and honors, you may want to create a separate category for each. Here's an example:

**Juris Doctor, with Distinction, 1998**

*University of Minnesota School of Law, Minneapolis, Minnesota*

GPA: 8.42/12.0; Rank: 50/261 (Top 20%)

**Honors:** Honor Roll

Order of the Barristers, Inducted Spring 1998

American Jurisprudence Award for Property, Fall 1995

John Hancock Scholarship

James E. Winslow Scholarship

Bruce & Helen Scott Scholarship

Student Bar Association Award

**Activities:** Minnesota Law Review; Note Editor, 1997-1998; Member, 1996-1998

Student Bar Association; President, 1997-1998; Representative, 1996-1997

American Trial Lawyers' Association; Trial Team Member, 1998

National Moot Court Team, 1997-1998

American Bar Association Moot Court Team, 1996-1997

First-Year Moot Court Competition; Winner, 1996

This format makes the Education section easier to navigate and draws more attention to each honor and activity.

In addition to the information described in 1-7 above, if you are a recent graduate, here are some other things you might want to include in the Education portion of your resume:

8. Relevant coursework (especially if you are interested in a particular legal area)
9. Courses in which you received high grades
10. Descriptions of seminars or honors courses that were notable or unique
11. Study-abroad experiences





Listing relevant coursework on your resume can be a good way to compensate for lack of experience in a given practice area. A lot of students chose which practice areas to pursue based on their enjoyment of and/or performance in a particular course or type of class. If that's the case with you, it's a good idea to convey this on your resume. If you are interested in environmental law and an employer sees that you took five environmental law courses and received high grades in each, you will be a more attractive candidate. Don't wait until you are asked for a transcript to provide this information.

Here are two sections from the resumes of candidates interested in intellectual property law and business law, respectively:

#### #1)

Selected Coursework:

**Copyrights & Trademarks;** Cyberlaw; Entertainment Law; IP for Corporate Transactional Attorneys; Patent Law; Fair Use; Advanced Copyright Law; European Patent Law

#### #2)

- CALI Awards (highest grade) in Antitrust & Business Organizations
- Other high grades: Federal Income Taxation (A), Secured Transactions (A), International Business Transactions (A), Wills & Trusts (A), Corporate Law (A), Real Property (A)

#### **Don't be afraid to elaborate!**

You may have participated in a unique program or an intensive course that provided you with great hands-on experience. For instance, some schools are known for having a rigorous trial advocacy program in which students spend a lot of time in mock courtroom settings. If your school has such a program, or another program that was renowned or very valuable, feel free to expand upon it. Unless the person reading your resume is familiar with your particular school, he/she has no way of knowing that you received this specialized training. Here's an example of how you might flesh out this experience:



## **University of Arkansas School of Law, Little Rock, Arkansas**

*Juris Doctor, May 2003*

- GPA: 3.4/4.0
- Member, Journal of International Law
- University of Arkansas Practice Court Program: Completed program providing intense instruction in federal and state civil procedure and evidence; participated in numerous trial exercises, including opening statements, direct and cross-examinations, mini-trials, and one complete trial involving each facet of the trial process

In addition, you may have been a member of an organization or activity that is not well known outside of your school. Or you may have won an award for an academic achievement. If you don't provide details about what you did or why you were honored, these things will be irrelevant to the employer. This is why it's a good idea to have someone who doesn't know you or your experience read your resume. An objective person will be able to tell you where things need to be explained or fleshed out.

### **Take a look at this example:**

## **New York University Law School, New York, NY**

*Juris Doctor, 1999*

- Moot Court
- International Law Journal
- Blackstone Association Award
- President, NYLP

This seems like a decent candidate: good law school, participation in extracurricular activities, and a leadership role. But some additional details make a decent candidate into a great one.

## **New York University Law School, New York, NY**

*Juris Doctor, 1999*

- Moot Court: Placed as semifinalist in four competitions; Winner, Best Trial Brief, John C. Howard Moot Court Competition.



- International Law Journal: Co-founded and edited a journal focused on innovations in international law
- Blackstone Association Award (for second-highest academic average in law school class after four semesters)
- President, NYLP (New York Lunch Project): Spearheaded fundraising efforts, which generated \$400,000 to be used to supply lunch money to needy school children in New York City

In addition to providing detail, make sure you always spell out acronyms. Even if you think the acronym is well known, it's better to be safe than sorry.

## **Junior College**

There are two schools of thought with regard to the listing of a junior college degree on a resume.

1. It shows perseverance. There's something to be said for ascending from junior college to passage of the bar exam.
2. It shows that you couldn't get into a four-year college initially. Whether this is wrong or right, this is a fairly common perception that causes some people to look down upon those with A.A. degrees.

Whatever your reason for attending a junior college, you need to be aware of how it may be perceived. If your A.A. doesn't add anything to your candidacy, don't bother including it. Simply showing that you earned the degree won't matter to employers. They will be more concerned with your bachelor's degree and law degree. If, however, you feel it shows something about your character, your drive (perhaps you graduated first in your class), or your reasons for pursuing a career in law, then go ahead and list it. Say you received a degree in paralegal studies and then found that you loved the law so much you wanted to pursue a J.D. This is something that will be more understandable to legal employers than your getting an A.A. in something wholly unrelated to the law.

## **Internships**

If you are a recent graduate, your only legal experience outside of the classroom probably consists of internships, clerkships, legal clinic positions, and/or summer associate positions. For



that reason, you are going to want to list these positions in the “Experience” section, where you can expand upon them in detail.

For more experienced candidates, however, including internships in the Education section can be a great way to showcase what you did during law school without taking up too much room on your resume. At a certain point, a long list of jobs becomes unappealing to the eye and overwhelming to the brain. For this reason, it’s best to separate your law school work from your post-J.D. work after you’ve had several years of experience practicing law.

Here’s an example of a client who had an abundance of internships throughout her education. Instead of creating a chronological “laundry list,” this format allows her to display the internships in light of the studies she was doing at the time:

#### **UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, Seattle, WA**

*Master of Public Health, 1995*

- Intern, Seattle Children’s Hospital, Seattle, WA: Researched issues relating to the accessibility of quality care for children with special healthcare needs (Fall 1994)
- Research Assistant, Seattle Public Health Organization, Seattle, WA: Analyzed legal implications raised by the practice of cloning (Fall 1993)

#### **UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF LAW, Seattle, WA**

*Juris Doctor, 1993*

- Research Assistant, Department of Health Law, Seattle, WA: Researched issues relating to bioethics and human rights for two professors (1992-1993)
- Law Clerk, Center for Health Law Research, Seattle, WA: Researched and drafted consumer education materials on health insurance (Summer 1992)

#### **Should Education or Experience go first?**

As a general rule, if you are a recent graduate, your educational information should be at the top of your resume. Likewise, if you’ve been out of school for more than five years, your experience should take precedence. Keep in mind that these are general rules. In order to decide what to do in your situation, you need to assess what you feel to be your strengths.



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If you went to a top law school and you have four years of average experience, or you haven't practiced law since you graduated, you will want to list your education first. It will be a stronger selling point than your experience. If you went to a lesser-ranked law school and have great experience, you should put your experience first, even if you're only one or two years out of school. Whatever you feel will be most attractive to employers is what they should see first.





## CHAPTER 5:

# EXPERIENCE

Whether you are a new or an experienced attorney, the Experience section of the resume is the toughest section to write. If you're a new attorney, it's tough because you often have to make a few menial tasks sound impressive. If you're a veteran, it's tough because you have to encapsulate years of experience in a few short paragraphs or sentences and your perception of your experience will change with each passing year. Deciding how to present your experience requires a good amount of brainstorming. Make sure you don't rely on the stock job descriptions given to you by your employers. This might seem like a perfect solution—all you need to do is cut and paste. But merely listing your employer's version of what you do takes away from the entire purpose of a resume, which is to present your experience from your point of view. What is experience?

### What is experience?

The definition of "experience," according to The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, is "active participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill."

Experience doesn't necessarily have to come in the form of a paid position. When you begin evaluating your experience, make sure you take into account each and every aspect of your background that has contributed to your accumulation of knowledge or skill. Also make sure that you take a forward-thinking approach. The resume functions to describe what you have done in the past. Yet, while describing the things that you have done in the past, you must constantly be thinking about your future. As you begin drafting your resume, you should continually ask yourself:

### How do my past achievements/experiences make me qualified for what I want to do now?

Before you begin writing your resume, you should get a good feel for the requirements of the type of job you want. Visit online legal job boards and read job descriptions—as many as you can. See what kind of language they use and what kind of skills they're asking for. Print out several advertisements that describe your ideal job and refer to them as you draft your resume. Having a goal in mind will make the task of describing your experience much easier.



## **Do I need to include my entire work history?**

No. When deciding how much of your work history to include, you need to take into account the relevance of the positions you've held to the position you are trying to get. Every time you take on bigger and better responsibilities, your older responsibilities become less important. Your resume needs to reflect that.

There is a general rule that says you only need to include 10 years' worth of experience. Like all general rules, however, there are many exceptions.

For instance, Marcia, a client of mine, worked as a real estate developer for 10 years before entering law school. After graduating from law school, she decided to work in the public sector in order to gain solid litigation experience. She found that she really liked it and consequently spent six years working as a district attorney. Then she decided she was ready to shift gears and combine her experience in real estate with her legal skills by practicing real estate law. Obviously, she would not delete her real estate experience from her resume, even though it was 10 years old. In fact, she might want to highlight this experience by mentioning it in a summary section.

On the other hand, Jamie, another client, worked at a makeup counter at Macy's for three years prior to entering law school. She graduated from law school four years ago. While her Macy's position was fairly recent, it had no bearing on her abilities as an attorney. Even though excluding it left a gap between her graduation from college and her matriculation at law school, I felt it was better to focus the resume on her legal experience because that was what would appeal to employers. To compensate for the gap, we simply labeled the experience on her resume "Legal Experience," indicating that it was not her only experience, just the experience that was relevant to the position she was seeking.

Often, resumes need a dose of tough love. Going through an old resume can be like going through your closet. When it comes to evaluating what belongs on your resume, you need to be harsh with yourself. Those people who hang on to the jeans that they vow to fit into again "someday" are those same people who have trouble eliminating "Winner of 1969 Wichita County Elementary School Spelling Bee" from their resumes.

Sometimes it's just old information. Yes, the internship you scored might have been extremely impressive. Perhaps only the top 10 in your class had a shot at it, or perhaps you were working



under one of the best attorneys in your city. But if that all happened in 1978, people may not care. Just as it's hard to throw out that \$300 what-was-I-thinking neon yellow cashmere sweater because "it was so expensive," it's often difficult to erase years of work from your resume because "they were so hard to get through." This is why an objective friend/professional writer can be of valuable assistance.

Nothing should stay on your resume because of nostalgia, because it was impressive "at the time," or because it was difficult (unless it is universally known by other people to be so).

### **How much description should I give?**

The simplest answer I can give to this question is this: Describe your position until you feel that it fully conveys the breadth and depth of your experience. In some cases, this can be done in two simple sentences. Other times, it requires more detail. Take these two different examples:

#### **Example #1**

**Child Advocacy Clinic, University of Texas School of Law, Austin, Texas**  
*Fall and Spring Semesters, 2003*

#### **Student Attorney**

Interviewed and counseled clients and witnesses. Worked closely with social workers and other professionals involved with each case. Drafted legal documents including motions and responsive motions.

- Negotiated favorable outcomes and zealously advocated for indigent clients in juvenile court during dependency-related and termination of parental rights proceedings
- Presented arguments before school board members at a manifestation review hearing for an expelled adolescent client with special educational needs and obtained a decision for short-term suspension
- Prepared memoranda and presented oral arguments to the court addressing controversial federal and state court jurisdictional issues
- As co-counsel for a court-appointed child advocate, conducted a three-day termination of parental rights trial before a Superior Court judge



## Example #2

**Law Offices of Charles R. Miller, Indianapolis, IN**  
1985–2003

### **Sole Practitioner**

Managed successful civil litigation practice. Participated in approximately 50 jury trials; took scores of depositions; handled approximately 30 appeals; and obtained decisions that have been cited as authority in more than 160 cases.

Both of these examples give the reader a good sense of what the person has done. In the first example, more description was needed in order to differentiate this candidate from the typical law student. In the second example, because the person is obviously an experienced attorney, not as much detail about the day-to-day responsibilities was needed. This person probably indicated elsewhere on the resume what his specialty areas were and perhaps included a list of representative cases so employers would have a better idea of the “meat” of his accomplishments.

Don't be afraid to elaborate! While you don't want your resume to read like you think the person viewing it is uneducated, you also don't want to assume that the person reading your resume has insight into what you've done. There are zillions of jobs in the world, and no two are exactly alike. Two people given the same title and job description are still going to contribute their own uniqueness to the position.

Give as much detail as you need to ensure that the person reading your resume will understand your achievements for what they are. You could be vice president of an organization that consists of two people, or you could be president of an extremely prestigious 200-person organization that requires an IQ of 280 and membership in Mensa. You could have earned an internship that was highly competitive and only given to 2 out of every 700 applicants, or you could have spent the summer sweeping the floor of your dad's law office. Unless you describe your experiences in detail, employers will never know the difference.

### **Highlight Your Accomplishments!**

I can't emphasize enough how important it is to highlight accomplishments in your job descriptions. This is the number-one item that makes or breaks a resume, and it is the one



area that people struggle with the most. First, you need to understand what is meant by “accomplishment.” To have accomplished something in your work, you did not have to negotiate a multi-billion-dollar deal or find the answer to world peace (although those would certainly be worth mentioning). You simply need to have done something that produced a favorable result. This could be as simple as turning in work that wasn’t awful. The main thing you want to get across when describing your jobs is that you did them well. Employers want to hire people who have proven themselves as valuable employees.

**Here are some questions to help you think of contributions you’ve made:**

- Were you commended for your work on a particular project?
- Were you the expert or go-to person in your office for any particular thing?
- Were documents that you drafted used with little or no edits?
- Were you trusted with additional responsibilities—over and above others at your level?
- Did you receive positive performance reviews?
- Did you contribute to marketing efforts?
- Did you have any ideas that resulted in more efficient/streamlined operations?
- Did you develop trusting relationships with clients?
- Did you bring in clients?
- Did you resolve disputes?
- Did you save your employers money?

**What did you do that made your company/firm better for having hired you?**

Think outside of the legal realm for a moment. Instead, think about all of the restaurants you’ve been to and all of the people who have waited on you in your life. There are huge discrepancies between a great waiter and an awful waiter; right?

Say the awful waiter and the great waiter both worked at the same restaurant for the same duration of time. And say both waiters decided to leave the restaurant business behind in order to move on to something else.

Here’s waiter #1’s job description:

**Hank’s Bar and Grill, Santa Fe, NM**

*Waiter*, June 1998–Present



Took orders from customers; relayed orders to kitchen; brought food to customers.

Here is waiter #2's job description:

**Hank's Bar and Grill, Santa Fe, NM**

*Waiter*, June 1998–Present

Generated repeat business by delivering excellent customer service; spearheaded new tip-sharing system; frequently relied upon to cover shifts on moment's notice; promoted to head waiter in a five-month period.

Which one would you hire? Even though waiter #1 and waiter #2 both only have restaurant experience, one gets the impression from waiter #2's job description that he is capable of excelling in other areas as well. That's because his resume shows a strong work ethic, people skills, leadership qualities, and a commitment to excellence. Waiter #1's resume shows none of those things.

If you simply write down the things that you have done, employers have no way of knowing whether you simply did them or did them well. For this reason, you want everything you list on your resume to illustrate one or more of the following attributes:

1. Leadership
2. Responsibility
3. Skill
4. Achievement

You can still list duties and responsibilities, but describe them in a way that highlights these qualities.

To make the assessment of your accomplishments a little easier, I've broken this discussion down into two areas: early career and mid to later career:

**Internships, Clerkships, Summer Associate, and Junior Attorney Positions: How to Make Yours Stand Out**

- Performed legal research and drafted memoranda





- Assisted attorneys with trial preparation
- Wrote client correspondence
- Observed and summarized depositions
- Conducted and responded to written discovery
- Assisted in courtroom proceedings
- Worked with judge to prepare court orders and opinions
- Observed trials and hearings

Sound familiar?

The duties and responsibilities associated with legal internships, clerkships, summer associate, and junior attorney positions tend to be very similar. The practice areas you were exposed to and the types of cases you assisted with might have been different, but for the most part, pre-bar legal jobs consist of a lot of research, drafting, and observing. As a new graduate, how do you set yourself apart?

Here are some questions and examples to get you thinking outside the “researched and drafted” box.

### **Was your position competitive?**

There’s a difference between working for your mom’s friend’s law firm because no one else would hire you and being chosen as only one of 300 applicants for a coveted internship. If your particular position was difficult to obtain, let it be known.

Selected as one of only three interns for one of the Criminal Division’s most intense offices

Chosen for competitive internship offered to only two law students across the nation each year

### **What did you do specifically?**

The more details you can give about what you’ve done, the more real your experience becomes to employers. When you give generalized statements such as “assisted with cases,” you don’t



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impress anyone. How did you assist? Did you bring coffee to the attorneys who stayed up late toiling over the case, or did you find a key issue that helped them win?

Also, the work you did had a purpose. You weren't simply drafting or researching things for your health. What was your work used for?

**Here are some examples of useful specifics:**

Drafted memoranda that were utilized by judges and law clerks to aid in their decision making regarding the future of pending cases

Aided government attorneys in trial preparation for bankruptcy and labor law cases involving companies and unions attempting to avoid labor judgments

Drafted opinion that was used by Pennsylvania Supreme Court on appeal

Critiqued sections of John Daniel's History of Insurance Law, which were utilized in updated versions of the text

Monitored pending legislative bills to ensure that the firm and its clients had the most up-to-date information available when attending committee meetings

Conducted research on sales, leasing, and UCC issues in order to assist professor in developing an online supplement to her sales course

In addition, if you worked in a specific practice area that you want to continue working in as an attorney, the more buzzwords you can include, the better.

**Here are some examples:**

Drafted federal and state pleadings for actions brought under the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (AWPA); Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA); Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA); and the Illinois Migrant Labor Camp Law, among others

Researched issues affecting children's welfare, including proper screening of persons supervising



children, criminal background checks for prospective foster and adoptive parents, permanency planning for foster children, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Provide support to managing partner of practice focusing on wills, trusts and estates administration, estate litigation, real estate, and estate tax matters

It's also a good idea to quantify your achievements. There's a big difference between drafting 2 memoranda and 22.

Researched and drafted more than 10 opinions for employment law actions and more than 30 opinions in civil matters including contracts, social security, habeas petitions, and torts  
Brought three divorce cases to successful resolution during internship

**What did you accomplish? How did your work contribute to the overall success of the case/resolution of the issue?**

As discussed earlier, an accomplishment doesn't need to be major to be worth mentioning. The main questions to ask yourself are these: What did you do that made the company/firm better for having hired you? What did you do in your position that others in the same position might not have?

In a zoning and land use planning case, created original arguments through research and drafted prevailing summary judgment; drafted real estate contract and saw transaction through from start to finish for major corporation, including serving as point person for client

Fostered trusting relationships with child clients and their parents

Received commendation for thoroughness in obtaining information from clients

Received commendation for legal-writing skills, showing thoroughness, conciseness, and ability to synthesize a great deal of information quickly

Received positive performance reviews from all judges

Outstanding performance as intern led to assignment of responsibilities similar to those of judicial law clerks



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Researched and drafted memoranda and pleadings concerning employment discrimination case, which resulted in defense victory for County Counsel's Office

Wrote memoranda in opposition to plaintiffs' award amounts in an industrial accident, toxic tort class action, resulting in increased awards for many of the 125+ plaintiffs

Effectively coordinated claims-collection project, which enabled supervising attorneys to meet difficult filing deadline in numerous plaintiff class actions

Researched and drafted 25-page bench memorandum concerning prisoners' rights case, which resulted in the recognition of several of the prisoners' claims by the court

### **What did you learn?**

Maybe you've wracked your brain and you still don't feel like you accomplished anything at all. At the very least, you had to have learned something during those 12-hour days. Describe what it was!

Gained insight into courtroom procedure, effective legal arguments, and direct and cross-examination of witnesses

Gained exposure to cases involving personal injury, contracts, insurance fraud, land zoning, and construction matters

Gained knowledge of and experience in Massachusetts criminal legal system

Frequently and routinely met one-to-one with Judge Harry to review court activities and debrief on the key issues and events before the court; worked with staff to gain a full understanding of court administrative issues, including bailiff, clerk, and court reporter functions

In addition to playing up accomplishments, you want to downplay the administrative aspects of your work. I'll use myself as an example:

Immediately after graduating from college, I worked at a talent agency. My duties as a talent agent's assistant basically consisted of answering the phone, getting yelled at, answering the phone some more, ordering lunch for my boss, typing up letters that my boss had dictated,



getting yelled at some more, scheduling meetings for my boss, and opening mail. Oh, and once every few weeks, I got to read a film or TV script and offer my opinion on it.

### **Here's how this position was listed on my resume:**

**Popular Talent Agency, Los Angeles, CA**

*Assistant to Talent Agent*

Provided support to agent in fast-paced office; streamlined office operations and implemented new, easy-to-use filing system; presented opinions on viability of feature-film and television projects.

What does this job description get across? That I am capable of handling stress and a high volume of work. That I am organized and can improve the conditions of the place I work. It also shows that I was trusted to give some input on my boss's projects.

And it's all true!

Clerical duties, such as mail sorting, telephone answering, errand running, coffee making, and supply ordering should NOT be listed on your resume, unless you are looking for another clerical position. Why? Because they make you look like a clerical worker. Plus, these responsibilities aren't going to impress anyone. You're capable of looking at a piece of mail, seeing whose name is on it, and handing it to that person? Wow! What a great lawyer you'll make!

Sarcasm aside, if you want to be taken seriously and given real responsibilities, you will need to convey a certain level of prestige through your resume, even if your jobs weren't very prestigious. Most people would say that the functions of their jobs are divided between those things that they enjoy doing, which reflect ability, responsibility, and intelligence, and those things (sometimes a larger percentage) that constitute "grunt work" and are not particularly interesting or challenging.

If this grunt work is something that you hope to never do again, highlighting it on your resume is not a good idea.

**Below** is a before-and-after example of a new graduate's resume that has been rewritten to emphasize accomplishments.



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BEFORE:

## EXPERIENCE

### **Law Offices of Simon E. Williams, Tucson, Arizona**

*Contract Attorney*

October 2003-Present

- Perform research and draft memoranda regarding real property, fraud, embezzlement, and construction law issues
- Conduct and respond to written discovery
- Perform investigations
- Enforce court judgments

### **Janney, Holmes & Carson, Tucson, Arizona**

*Contract Paralegal/Attorney*

May 2003-October 2003

- Performed research and drafted memoranda regarding complex litigation consisting of securities fraud, class actions, and environmental law
- Conducted and responded to written discovery
- Prepared depositions

### **Law Offices of Simon E. Williams, Tucson, Arizona**

*Law Clerk*

November 2002-May 2003

- Performed research and drafted memoranda regarding intellectual property, real property, fraud, and embezzlement
- Conducted and responded to written discovery
- Conducted investigations





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**Collins, Harper, Singer & Mehta, Phoenix, Arizona**

*Law Clerk*

Summer 2002

- Performed research and drafted memoranda regarding class actions, accountant malpractice, fraud, and various corporate issues
- Assisted in drafting treatise concerning defendant class actions
- Participated in client conferences

**United States District Court, Phoenix, Arizona**

*Judicial Extern*

Summer 2001

- Extern in the chambers of James E. Collingsworth.
- Performed research and drafted bench memoranda and court orders regarding criminal and intellectual property issues
- Participated in judicial case conferences and observed courtroom proceedings

AFTER:

**EXPERIENCE**

**Law Offices of Simon E. Williams, Tucson, Arizona**

*Contract Attorney, October 2003–Present*

*Law Clerk, November 2002–May 2003*

Provide support in cases involving real property, fraud, embezzlement, and construction law matters. Conduct and respond to written discovery. Enforce court judgments. Investigated, researched, performed document review, and drafted pleadings for ongoing multimillion-dollar fraud and embezzlement case involving a foreign bank, which resulted in the locating of defendants and recovery of a portion of the funds misappropriated. Excellent work as law clerk resulted in invitation to work as a contract attorney upon passage of the bar exam.



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**Janney, Holmes & Carson, Tucson, Arizona**  
*Contract Paralegal/Attorney, March–September 2003*

Assisted in complex litigation consisting of securities fraud, class actions, and environmental law. Performed document review, drafted pleadings, and prepared depositions for multimillion-dollar environmental law case against a major corporation, which resulted in successful and advantageous early settlement for the plaintiff/client. Received commendation for excellent work.

**Collins, Harper, Singer & Metha, Phoenix, Arizona**  
*Law Clerk, Summer 2002*

Gained exposure to class actions, accountant malpractice, fraud, and various corporate legal matters. Assisted in drafting treatise concerning defendant class actions. Participated in client conferences. Recruited new client, incorporated client's business, and created intellectual property protection for client.

**United States District Court, Phoenix, Arizona**  
*Judicial Extern to Honorable James E. Collingsworth, Summer 2001*

Drafted court orders regarding criminal and intellectual property issues. Researched and drafted 25-page bench memorandum concerning prisoners' rights case, which resulted in the recognition of several of the prisoners' claims by the court.

**Highlighting Accomplishments in the Middle/Later Portion of Your Career**

Once you've been practicing a while, hopefully it will be a little easier to highlight some accomplishments from your positions. At this stage, one important thing to do is to quantify your achievements:

- How many trials have you argued?
- How many cases have you settled?
- How much money did you save your client/company/firm?
- How much did you settle for?
- How much new business did you bring in?



You also want to explain your role in projects and their successful resolution. If you worked in-house, what type of legal problems did you prevent? What types of policies did you implement? How did they make things run more efficiently?

If you've been practicing in a law firm environment, do you have portable business? Are you a rainmaker? Have you settled or won cases that seemed impossible?

**Here is a list of examples to get you thinking about how to convey what you've accomplished in your career:**

Negotiated complex technology and service agreements that saved more than \$40 million

Played a prominent role in developing an innovative plan to coordinate the defense of nationwide products liability litigation

Negotiated enterprise-level agreements with software vendors and implementation partners, resulting in multimillion-dollar savings

Provided employers and their supervisory staff with training designed to help them recognize and avoid sexual harassment, to avoid discrimination lawsuits, and to remain union-free

Maintained close rapport with clients and attracted more than \$30 million in new business

Devised creative solutions in design and structure of asset-backed financing and other structured offerings for Latin American issuers

Relied upon as trusted advisor in partnership with the business, enhancing reputation, effectiveness, and role of legal department within the firm

Managed numerous departments with outstanding efficiency, cutting costs by up to 25%

Saved more than \$14 million to date through innovative deal structuring

Led company through acquisition of major competitor, increasing revenues by 15%



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Successfully led company through Chapter 11 reorganization in six months

Represented clients in more than 150 bench and jury trials

Handled approximately 2,000 civil and criminal cases

Won unprecedented case, obtaining custody of an unborn child for the father

Successfully managed extensive SEC examination of employer's operations, resulting in a regulatory review highly complimentary of newly implemented compliance procedures

Instrumental in negotiating settlement of complex trademark litigation through mediation in federal court, thereby controlling litigation risk, avoiding trial, and saving substantial costs associated with trial and possible appeals

### **Transferable Skills/Translating Non-Legal Work Experience**

In addition to accomplishments, it is also important to highlight transferable skills. Transferable skills are those skills that will be assets in your next position, even if your prior experience doesn't directly relate. Transferable skills allow people to move from practice area to practice area and to change careers completely.

It is especially important to emphasize transferable skills when you are transitioning into law from a prior, non-legal career. Maybe you worked as a teacher for a number of years before entering law. You're bound to have developed strong skills in making presentations, explaining difficult concepts in easy-to-understand terms, and working with a wide range of people, from children to parents to administrators.

Maybe you worked in sales. Certainly you can tout your marketing abilities, which will be a huge asset in drumming up business for the firm. Also, salespeople tend to be very good with people, and maybe you can play up your ability to mediate tense situations.

Instead of including industry-specific buzzwords and going into detail about your day-to-day duties, you want to show how you succeeded and how your prior career will be of value in your legal career. Here are some examples of industry-specific job descriptions that were transformed



to emphasize transferable skills:

**Huh?**

Private contractor managing application testing and implementation at all U.S. locations for a large Windows XP desktop/network migration. Project scope involved 500+ applications supporting 3000+ office and high-tech manufacturing users. Scope included implementation of hundreds of business applications in the new environment via SMS. Provided upgrade and replacement strategies.

**Oh...**

Invited to manage large-scale software upgrade project as a private contractor after successfully completing three projects for Baker, Inc., while affiliated with consulting company. Provided upgrade and replacement strategies, ensuring that each business function was maintained or improved. Completed project on time and under budget. Received commendations from Global Project Director.

**Huh?**

Responsible for the daily funding of all subsidiaries and the broker-dealer. Produced monthly financial statements in accordance with U.S. GAAP, International Accounting Standards, and Swiss Banking Regulations. Worked with senior management of Treasury, Financial Accounting, and Financial Operations on funding integration, subsidiary integration, and the tracking of merger-related restructuring costs during merger. Reviewed and verified post-closing adjustments to the branch financial statements.

**Oh...**

Worked closely with senior management and various departments on the implementation of new business strategies. Introduced and implemented systems that reduced headcount, controlled costs, and increased efficiency. Assessed costs and risks involved with project development and implementation. Negotiated with legal/compliance, financial control, operations, tax, and treasury departments to gain approval of transactions. Ensured that projects conformed to legal regulations.

One of the most interesting clients I worked with was a nationally acclaimed figure-skating coach who was looking to enter the legal profession. He had earned his J.D. in the midst of his 20-plus-



year skating career, but waited to pursue an attorney job until he felt he was really ready to leave the coaching world behind.

Because his only legal experiences (an internship and some pro bono work) were almost 10 years old, we really had to use his transferable skills to sell him as a candidate. This was quite a challenge. How in the world do you translate 20-plus years of ice-skating experience into something that would attract a law firm? Well, one of his major selling points was his extensive ties to the community. Because he was well known and respected within his community, he would be able to bring in clients. In addition, he had experience working with a very demanding clientele (it doesn't get much more demanding than dealing with a stage—er “rink” mother). Finally, he had excelled in his field. Even though his accolades didn't directly relate to law, they established him as someone who had achieved excellence and recognition. Going back to the waiter example at the beginning of this chapter—if you are a proven performer, you will be attractive to employers, even if you are changing fields.

### **Too Much of a Good Thing**

Now that I've harped on including accomplishments, I'm going to tell you that you also need to self-edit a bit when it comes to tooting your own horn. While some people struggle to come up with even a few decent things to say about themselves, others have trouble whittling down the vast, excellent experience and accomplishments they've garnered over the years. It is worth it to whittle away, however, because there can be too much “good” on your resume.

Remember, employers have short attention spans. Because of this, you need to make sure that they see what's most important about you up front and quickly. You'd rather have the employer take note of five or six of your most significant and noteworthy accomplishments than have him/her barely skim your two-page list of accomplishments.

This is when it helps to have a second opinion. Some of the accomplishments that you find impressive might not come across very well on paper. For instance, if the accomplishment is fairly firm- or company-specific, employers might not understand the true impressiveness of it. However, if it's something that virtually anyone could understand (saved employers \$400,000 by streamlining office procedures), then it should stay.





Joan worked in finance management for approximately 10 years prior to going to law school. She had quite an accomplished career, but she was having a tough time making the transition from regional finance manager to first-year associate. After looking at her resume, I could see why. At first glance, it looked like the resume of a senior executive. It was only after I checked out her admission to the bar and her graduation dates that I realized she was looking for an entry-level attorney position.

I advised Joan to trim her job descriptions from her pre-law work and to beef up the descriptions of her summer associate and law clerk positions. While her accomplishments were noteworthy, they didn't really apply to the job she was seeking. In addition, they probably scared away employers, who were afraid she was at too high a level for what they were seeking.

I advised Joan to hold on to those descriptions, however, as they would come in handy down the road. While they weren't appropriate for someone seeking her first attorney job, should she eventually decide to go inhouse or move to another law firm after several years of practice, her list of corporate accomplishments would give her an edge. Remember: Know your audience!

## Order of Description

As with virtually all things on your resume, the various facets of each job description should be listed in order of importance. You do not need to put them in the order of what you did most, what you did longest, or what your employer thinks is most important about your job.

For example, if you divided your time between intellectual property and corporate work and you want to focus solely on intellectual property in your next position, go ahead and focus your job description on your IP experience. This doesn't mean you should exclude your corporate work altogether, but you should minimize it in relation to the IP work you've done.

If you feel that the things you want to highlight aren't representative of your overall position, you may want to start with one general description that encapsulates your responsibilities. Then you can follow that with a bulleted breakdown of your accomplishments.



Here's a job description for someone whose solo practice concentrated on family law, bankruptcy, and immigration law. Because he wants to focus on immigration in his next position, the description was edited accordingly:

**Law Offices of Harold White, San Diego, CA, 1998–Present**

*Sole Practitioner*

Successfully manage independent practice focusing on family law, bankruptcy law, and immigration law. Responsible for all day-to-day operations of thriving firm; handle all managerial aspects and accounting for the business.

- Immigration practice encompasses asylum, labor certification, suspension of deportation cases, and cancellation of removal cases
- Represented clients successfully in the following types of interviews/hearings: naturalization, adjustment of status, marriage fraud, removal of conditions, asylum, and master calendar
- Made hundreds of BCIS (formerly INS) appearances in adjustment interviews to obtain lawful permanent residence for clients, to obtain expedited interviews on “aging out” adjustment cases, to obtain emergency advance parole visas, to secure work authorizations for permanent residence removal of conditions and for naturalization of lawful permanent residents
- Also made numerous BCIS appearances to follow up on problematic, lost, or delayed cases, resulting in quick resolution and lawful permanent residence approvals.

**Dates**

When giving the timeframe of your work experiences, you do not always have to include the months with the years. If you've been in the workplace and/or held a position for a long time, it will make your resume look cleaner if you include years only.

Use your discretion when deciding if it's appropriate to exclude months. For instance, if you held a position from December 2002 to January 2003, saying “2002-2003” would be misleading. However, if you were an associate at a firm from September 1981 to January 1992, simply saying “1981-1992” is clearer and more concise.



## Alternative Headings

While “Experience” or “Professional Experience” is the norm for this section, there are some alternatives that can also be effective. Obviously, “Legal Experience” would be a likely choice. This heading is particularly effective if you have significant non-legal experience and you want your legal experience to stand out.

If you have experience that is not in the legal field, you can either name the non-legal section “Other Professional Experience,” or you can name it after the type of field. For instance, if you worked as a professor for a period of time, you can label that work “Academic Experience”; if you worked in the business world for a while, you can name that section “Business Experience.” This can be useful if you’re applying for legal jobs in which a background in another field is an asset. For instance, if you’re applying for patent or IP attorney jobs and you worked as a research scientist for a number of years, having a section labeled “Scientific Experience” will highlight that relevant part of your background. In addition, it will break up the list of jobs so that it is more easily digestible to the person reading your resume.

Having separate categories also allows you to play with the chronology of your positions. Perhaps the chronology of your legal experience is broken up by non-legal work, as in the following example:

### LEGAL EXPERIENCE:

**PAUL E. NEWMAN, ESQ.**, Kalamazoo, MI  
*Law Clerk* (January 2003–September 2003)

- Worked closely with sole practitioner in family law practice
- Researched and drafted legal memoranda on child custody and support issues
- Participated in creating legal strategies for trial
- Observed child custody and support hearings

**ROBERTS, STILES, AND MAY, LLP**, Lansing, MI  
*Office Clerk* (1998–2000)



- Provided legal support for firm specializing in telecommunications law
- Participated in preparation of filings for FCC
- Conducted complex legal research
- Outstanding performance led to supervisory responsibility over junior clerks
- Became highly familiar with meeting the demands of a law firm environment

## **OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:**

**SOUTHERN ELECTRIC COMPANY**, Lansing, MI  
*Accountant/Analyst* (Summers 2002 & 2001)

- Drafted correspondence for the supervisor of the customer service department
- Helped update and improve accounting system by analyzing efficiency of accounting codes
- Worked within tight deadlines
- Selected for most complex assignment out of all summer hires in office

Creating a separate “Other” heading allows you to place your most relevant positions consecutively when they otherwise wouldn’t be.

Another option is to use the heading “Relevant Experience.” This heading is useful if you have some positions that you’d just rather not include, as it will compensate for the gap you’ll leave by deleting them. Maybe you took a few years off to deliver pizzas because you needed a break from law firm life. Rather than include “Pizza Delivery Boy” between law firm positions, you’re better off leaving the gap and having the employer simply think you did him/her a favor by only including the experience that is relevant to your candidacy.

## **Show That You’ve Been Moving Up, Not Across or Down**

The most recent position on your resume should carry the most weight in terms of space allotted, and your oldest position should carry the least. This shows a trend of upward mobility in your career. Before an employer even reads a word of your resume, he/she will get the sense that you have held increasingly responsible positions as you’ve made your way through the working world. If each of your job descriptions is the same length, it will give the impression that you’ve just



moved laterally and haven't advanced. If an older job description has more meat than your recent description, it will seem as though you've taken a professional nosedive.

Even if you hate your most recent position and loved the one you had before, indicating this on your resume tells the person reading it that you've stalled in your career. An exception would be if your most recent position is temporary or short-lived and your last position was significantly longer. In that situation, it's all right to shift the balance.

Remember, first impressions are very important when it comes to your resume, so make sure you take advantage of visual tricks to make that impression as strong as it can be. Here is an example of how your job descriptions should grow proportionally as your positions increase in importance:

**Broward County District Attorney's Office, Miami, FL, 1997–Present**  
*Assistant District Attorney*

Responsible for all aspects of heavy felony caseload, including preparing cases from indictment to motion practice to representing the people of the state of Florida at pre-trial hearings and trial. Successfully litigated drug-related cases and general crimes in both Criminal and Supreme Courts. Conduct numerous grand jury proceedings. Draft motions, search warrants, and arrest warrants.

- Selected by drug bureau to serve as senior investigative attorney, responsible for conducting extensive long-term investigations into firearm and narcotics sales, among other crimes
- Served as both lead prosecutor and part of a team of prosecutors directly involved in more than 10 major investigations, culminating in numerous arrests and prosecutions
- Commended by the District Attorney for effectiveness as lead prosecutor on highly publicized narcotics case
- Excellent success rate in complex felony trials with multiple defendants
- Received promotions and additional responsibility more rapidly than other attorneys of the same level



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**Eighth Judicial District Court of Florida, Miami, FL, 1996–1997**

*Judicial Clerk to the Honorable Dianne Johnson*

Researched and drafted more than 100 memoranda to date, providing recommendations utilized by Judge Johnson in making decisions regarding cases. Heard motions for civil cases pertaining to personal injury, employment, construction defect, property disputes, contracts, and insurance law. Briefed judge on petitions for habeas corpus, pre-sentence investigation reports, and various other motions, with regard to criminal cases.

**State Attorney's Office, 11th Judicial Circuit, Miami, FL, Spring 1995**

*Certified Legal Intern*

Participated in interviewing witnesses, conducting depositions, and second seating trials. Researched and drafted motions and memoranda of law.

**Hahn & Hahn, Sarasota, FL, Summer 1994**

*Summer Associate*

**Jones & Barker, Orlanda, FL, 1993–1994**

*Legal Assistan*





## CHAPTER 6:

# BAR ADMISSIONS / COMMUNITY SERVICE / PUBLICATIONS / PRESENTATIONS / PERSONAL / REPRESENTATIVE CASE OR TRANSACTION LISTS / OTHER MISCELLANEOUS SECTIONS

In addition to those things discussed in Chapters 3 through 5, there are other items and/or categories you may want to include in your resume. Bar admissions, community service activities, volunteer work, publications, memberships in certain professional associations, presentations and lectures, CLE coursework, and personal information such as hobbies and interests are among the things you might consider adding. When deciding whether or not to include supplemental information, ask yourself how relevant it is to the position you are seeking. Make sure to keep in mind that you want everything you list on your resume to illustrate one or more of these attributes:

**1) Leadership 2) Responsibility 3) Skill 4) Achievement**

**If you can't think of any reason to put something on your resume other than the mere fact that you did it, it shouldn't be there.**

### **Bar Admissions**

Legal resumes often feature a section that indicates a candidate's bar status. If you've been practicing a while, this is a no-brainer. Simply list the state(s) in which you are licensed, followed by the month and year of admission.

**Massachusetts State Bar, October 2000**

**Pennsylvania State Bar, October 1999**

If you are a new law school graduate applying for jobs, you will want to indicate which state's bar exam you plan on taking and when you plan on taking it:



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## **Sitting for July 2003 New York State Bar Examination**

Once you've taken the bar exam, you can indicate that as such:

### **Sat for July 2003 New York Bar Examination; awaiting results**

If you are applying to jobs after passing the bar, but before being fully admitted, you can convey your status as follows:

### **Passed July 2003 New York Bar Examination; admission pending**

Finally, you can also indicate if you have been admitted to practice in certain courts:

## **ADMISSIONS**

State Bar of Texas, December 2003

State Bar of South Dakota, October 2003

State Bar of Montana, January 1999

Admitted: United States Supreme Court; United States Court of Claims; United States Courts of Appeal for the Fifth, Eighth, Ninth, and Eleventh Circuits; United States District Courts for the Southern and Eastern Districts of Texas; District of South Dakota; and District of Montana

If you don't have room on your resume for a separate bar admissions section, your bar admissions can also be included in a summary section at the top of your resume.

## **Community Service/Volunteer Work**

This is a section that can drastically vary in importance and length depending on the job-seeker. If you have volunteered a day or two at a soup kitchen or walked dogs at an animal shelter, this section is unnecessary (unless you lack experience). Rather than create an entire section for this type of work, you should place it in your Education section (if you participated in these projects during school) or add it to an Activities section, if you include it at all.

If you have done extensive community work and/or you are planning to pursue a career in public



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interest law, you will want to focus on this section more heavily. You may want to include it in your Experience section, particularly if you don't have much work experience. Or you can create a separate category in which to highlight your work in the community.

A typical community service section might look like this:

### **COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS**

Volunteer, **Dress for Success Vermont**

Member, **Vermont Safety and Health Council**

Fundraiser, **Central Vermont Youth Association**

Member, **Vermont Pro Bono Association**

An expanded community service section might look like this:

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

SIERRA CLUB LEGAL COMMITTEE, Portsmouth, NH

Volunteer: February 2003 to Present. Review proposed litigation and make recommendations to executive committee regarding case intake.

WILLIAMS INSTITUTE FOR DOCUMENTARY STUDIES, Portsmouth, NH

Board and Steering Committee Member: January 2002 to Present. Contribute to fundraising activities and attend monthly meetings in support of documentary filmmakers.

SAINT JOAN'S CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER, Portsmouth, NH

Advisory Board Member of Catholic Charities program: August 2000 to Present.

SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD BANK, Portsmouth, NH

Board Member and Volunteer: December 1998 to Present. Provide leadership to food bank participants. Participate in weekly donation gathering and food distribution throughout low-income communities.

PORTSMOUTH SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND, Portsmouth, NH

School Board Member: August 1998 to 1999. Head of successful Superintendent Search Committee. Raised \$500,000 in donations through grant-writing efforts.



## **Publications**

Publications are more important in some fields than in others. If you are looking for an academic position in particular, you will want to emphasize your publications as much as possible. Intellectual property is another field that values publication. In general, publishing an article on a particular topic helps define you as an expert in that field. Also, if you are a recent graduate, a publication will help vouch for your research and writing skills.

If you meet any of the following criteria, you should consider creating a separate Publications section in your resume:

1. You have published more than two works;
2. You are looking for a position in a particular field, and you have published on topics pertaining to this field; or
3. You lack experience and need to fill up your resume as much as possible.

If you are looking for an insurance position and you published an article on copyright law in 1980, that publication is not going to be of much importance. Whereas, if you've published frequently on the topic of insurance law, you will want to create a publications section that prominently displays that information. Here's an example of a typical publications section:

### **PUBLICATIONS**

"Implementation of the TRIPs in China," China Law Journal, 14 (2003): 19-25.

"Comparative Studies of Laws on Foreign Investments," Investment & Law Annual Report, 88 (2002): 35-43.

"The Evolution of Dispute Resolution Techniques," California Journal of Politics & Law, 112 (1999): 100-105.

"The Differences in Divorce Laws in Asian Countries vs. the United States," Law Science Journal, 39 (1999): 18-23.



Kaku, Sito. International Legal Reform, edited by Jones, Howard, et al., Publishing House of Law, China (publication pending).

- Chapter 4: “The Application of Tax Law”
- Chapter 5: “The Application of Insurance Law”

If publications play less of a role in your particular situation, you should still include them, but you may not need to give them much space on your resume. If you published a note or comment in a law review or a journal you worked on, for instance, you can include the publication in the Education section underneath the journal name:

**University of Tennessee College of Law, Knoxville, TN**

*Juris Doctor, cum laude, December 2003*

- Blackwell Scholar
- Articles Editor, Tennessee Law Review; Note, “Cross-Examination and Legal Ethics,” 13 Tennessee Law Review 550 (1989)

Or if you authored an article as part of a particular position, you may want to include it as part of your job description:

**O’Donnell, Cole & Barney, New York, NY**

*Intern, Intellectual Property Group, Summer 2001*

Assisted two partners and a senior associate on a variety of trademark matters.

- Conducted complex research on trade dress case law; wrote synopses and holdings of cases
- Reviewed trademark applications
- Co-authored (with patent partner) “The Future of Trademark Litigation,” which was published in IP Today, September 2001

Remember to stick to relevant and/or impressive publications. If you published something that doesn’t directly relate to law, but that would still be deemed impressive, such as an article in a



known magazine or a book, then go ahead and include it. If you wrote a poem that's posted on your friend's website, however, it doesn't belong on your resume.

## **Presentations/Lectures**

If you have given presentations and/or lectures on topics in the legal profession, including this information on your resume will help to establish you as an expert in a particular field. In addition, it will show that you are a confident public speaker.

Here is how you might go about listing your lectures and presentations:

### **LECTURES/PRESENTATIONS**

#### *Healthcare Fraud*

American Bar Association Annual Convention, Chicago, IL, September 2003

What Took Look for in a Compliance Plan

Compliance Conferences sponsored by Healthworld Compliance Incorporated /Conferences held in New Orleans, Atlanta, Chicago, Miami, Seattle, and Philadelphia; 1999-2003

#### *The Growth and Change of Alternative Dispute Resolution*

Judicial Conference of the United States Court of Federal Claims, 2001

#### *New Developments in Healthcare Prosecution*

Annual Conference of Healthcare Providers, Seattle; 2000 and 2001

Depending on the number of presentations or lectures you've given, you can either combine these with your publications in a dual "Publications/Presentations" section; or if you have an extensive list, you can summarize and/or quantify your presentations as follows:

### **PUBLICATIONS / PRESENTATIONS**

- Contributing Editor, Changes in Labor Law; 2000, 2003
- Taught Employment & Labor Law as Adjunct Professor of Business Law, Fordham University



- Conducted more than 60 presentations and training seminars for HR managers, supervisors, employment facilities coordinators, and other groups on topics including:
  - ADA & FMLA
  - Zero-Tolerance Harassment
  - How to Avoid Liability
  - How to Avoid Discrimination/Harassment in National Origin and Religion Claims
  - Management Techniques for Controlling Workers' Compensation Claims
  - Age-Related Safety Concerns
  - Coordinating Employee Benefits

## **Hobbies/Interests/Personal**

The Hobbies/Interests/Personal section of the resume is the section that usually sparks the most debate. Some argue that this section generates the most interesting conversations in an interview. Others feel that anything not having to do with professional experience, particularly legal experience, is useless and irrelevant.

There are points to be made for both of these arguments. As far as the true benefit of including this section, however, I see only one: It's possible that the person reading your resume will connect with one of your interests, and in that event, it's possible that he/she will be more likely to call you in for an interview because of that connection.

Yet, this is a notion that has been blown way out of proportion. Perhaps if you have a really unique hobby like glass blowing and the person reading your resume shares that hobby, he/she will take an interest in you. But the majority of interests that appear on resumes—basketball, football, baseball, cooking, jogging, hiking, reading, movies, guitar, etc.—aren't going to strike a major chord with anyone, at least not one powerful enough to get you an interview.

Your resume needs to present you as a qualified candidate for a job. Even if you are fluent in Swahili and a gourmet chef specializing in white truffles and the interviewer happens to have those exact same talents, he/she is not going to give you a job for which you are completely unqualified.

## **But it shows that I'm well rounded!**

A lot of people cite this as a good reason for including interests. They believe that it's important to





show employers that they are not just one-dimensional. My response is this:

**1) Most people assume you have things you are interested in besides law, whether or not you include those things on your resume.**

If an employer sees that Bob has included “Enjoy playing tennis and cooking hamburgers” on his resume, while John has not included anything of a personal nature, the employer is not going to assume that John just sits around and writes legal memoranda for fun on his days off.

**2) Employers don’t really care if you’re well rounded.**

This is sad, but true. Employers care about whether or not you will be a good employee. Heck, for their purposes, it would be a good thing if you did sit around writing legal memoranda for fun on your days off.

**But it’s a conversation piece!**

A notion that mothers and teachers frequently point out is that there is such a thing as “good attention” and “bad attention.” Along these same lines, there is such a thing as a “good conversation piece” and a “bad conversation piece.”

People frequently argue for including something on their resumes because they have been asked about it at prior interviews. What I always ask in response is this: “Did it get you the job?” Usually, the answer is no.

Just because something on your resume generates a conversation doesn’t mean it should be there. In an interview situation, employers will sometimes scan your resume and just ask about everything that they see. Sometimes employers will ask about random things on your resume just to get you talking so that they don’t have to. It’s easy for an interviewer to glance at a resume and say, “So, you like to jet ski?” and then sit back for a few minutes while the interviewee blathers on about this topic. It doesn’t mean the employer is impressed.

In general, I advise against including hobbies or interests on your resume, with a few exceptions. In addition to being fairly irrelevant, this section of the resume also lends itself most easily to ridicule. In the interest of trying to appear “unique,” people list some pretty wacky interests that



most likely do them more harm than good. Here are some examples of those I've seen:

Parrots	Eraser collecting
Eating food	"Men's" interests
Collecting antique measuring cups	Weather enthusiast
Law	Driving Jeeps

There are a few exceptions. An exception would be something that is a big part of your life and/or shows notable qualities such as perseverance, dedication, or talent. For instance, if you are a triathlete, marathon runner, black belt in karate, successful artist, novelist, or competitive horseback rider, it would be worth including your particular interest/skill in your resume. These activities all show some level of perseverance, dedication, or talent and therefore may make you a more attractive candidate. Be careful, though, that you don't portray any particular interest or hobby as too big a part of your life. If so, employers may worry that your hobby will interfere with your commitment to your legal job.

### **Indicating Race/Religion/Political Affiliations/Sexual Orientation or Any Other Personal Information on Your Resume**

This is one of the touchiest subjects with regard to resumes. By "indicating" I am not referring to outwardly stating these things by writing something like "Republican, Heterosexual, White, Catholic Male" on your resume. Rather, I am talking about inadvertently revealing personal characteristics about yourself through the activities you include on your resume, such as membership in certain organizations, volunteer work, activism, church affiliations, etc.

While we'd like to think that the person evaluating your resume is basing his/her opinion solely on your qualifications, we all know that external factors often come into play. For that reason, if you have information on your resume that gives away personal attributes, it may be in your best interest to exclude it. Maybe you participated in the Christian Law Students' Association or the Muslim Students' Association in law school, the Federalist Society, the Young Democrats' Organization, or the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Student Association. Or maybe you volunteered with a particular church group or lobbying group.

If these affiliations will not play a role in your professional life, it's best not to include them on your resume. Not because they're bad or wrong, but because they do not have any bearing on



who you are as a professional.

There are certain situations in which this advice does not apply. If you spent the last 10 years working for a political organization or a religious nonprofit, obviously you will not exclude this from your resume. Another exception would be if you know that a particular law firm or organization shares your political or other beliefs. For instance, if you are applying to a public interest law firm, then your work as an activist might work in your favor.

One thing to consider is that even if the person reading your resume shares your personal attributes, he/she may view your disclosure of them as an indication that you cannot separate your personal life from your professional life. In addition to evaluating what you've done, employers will also be analyzing your resume to see what kind of choices you make. A well-thought-out resume shows intelligence, self-awareness, and insight. For this reason, you should know that you will be judged on the choices you've made with regard to your resume as well as by your experience itself.

Just as in the illustration about hobbies and interests, when employers read a resume that does not mention religion, they do not assume that the job seeker is not religious, they just assume that the job seeker did not feel the need to mention religious affiliation on his/her resume. Conversely, if an employer sees a resume that mentions religion several times, he/she may assume that the job seeker is deeply religious and wanted that fact to be clear to the person reading his/her resume.

Either of these assumptions could be false. That's the nature of an assumption. But you should be aware of how the inclusion/exclusion of certain personal information can be construed by the person reading your resume.

## References

It is recommended that you not include references on your resume. As a courtesy to your references, you should wait to provide their names and contact information until the interview stage—at which point you can inform them of who will be calling and give them some background information on the job you interviewed for. Although employers would rarely ever contact your references before speaking with you first, you don't want to run the risk of having your references caught off guard, as it may negatively affect the quality of the reference. If you want to mention a



particular reference because you know that this person has a connection to the company/firm you are applying to, or is very renowned, include this person's name in your cover letter instead.

You also don't need to state "References available upon request" on your resume. It is assumed that you will be able to provide references if asked for them.

See Chapter 10 for an example of a reference list.

### **Representative Transactions/Cases Lists**

In the same way that recent law school graduates find themselves stuck in the "researched and drafted" rut, experienced attorneys often find themselves in the "settled, negotiated, litigated, and/or mediated" rut. Their resumes become either too long, as they try to account for everything they've done, or too short, as they simply give a broad overview of the types of cases they've handled.

If you have had a significant career as a transactional or litigation attorney, one way to convey the breadth and depth of your experience is to create an addendum to your resume that gives details about some specific cases/transactions you've handled. This way, you can keep your job descriptions concise while providing supplementary information that will give the reader additional insight into what you've done.

### **Is it all right to name clients?**

If your case or transaction is public information, it is all right to name the clients involved. Otherwise, you should simply describe the type of client you represented, i.e., "top U.S. automobile manufacturer" or "Australian soda-bottling company with \$50 million in assets."

### **Representative Cases**

If you have worked on a lot of high-profile or published cases, you can simply list these cases as follows:

#### **United States Court of Appeals**

*Admiral Gasoline Corp. v. Retro Food Serv. Equip.*, 911 F.2d 32; 1992 U.S. App. LEXIS 7058; 31 ERC (BNA) 1925; 18 ELR 22878 (2d Cir. 1993)



*R.E. Martinez Corp. v. United States*, No. 88-5127, 539 F.2d 192; 1992 U.S. App. LEXIS 1536; 9-2 U.S. Tax Cas. (CCH) P22, 314; 168 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 2218 (2d Cir. 1993)

*In re Banner*, 767 F.2d 207; 1991 U.S. App. LEXIS 1550; Bankr. L. Rep. (CCH) P14, 101; 14 Collier Bankr. Cas. 2d (MB) 100 (2d Cir. 1993)

### **United States District Court**

*Grimm v. Richards*, 2002 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 14755 (N.D.N.Y. 2001)

*Manufacturers' Local No. 200 Health Care Fund v. Manufacturers' Local No. 14 Health Care Fund*, 2000 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 1124 (N.D.N.Y. 2000)

*Lombardi v. Duxbury*, 1992 U.S. Dis. LEXIS 14329 (N.D.N.Y. 1991)

*Rose v. Tulip*, 1990 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 19479 (N.D.N.Y. 1989)

*R.E. Martinez Corp. v. United States*, 1990 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 1536; 9-2 U.S. Tax Cas. (CCH) P22, 314; 168 A.F.T.R.2d (RIA) 2218 (N.D.N.Y. 1989)

*Horton Constr. Co. v. Pershing Square Associates*, 431 F. Supp. 121; 1990 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4325 (N.D.N.Y. 1991)

*American Bank for Finance & Sav., GSB v. Finance Associates, Inc.*, 1989 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 2459 (N.D.N.Y. 1992)

*In re Himalaya F. Corp.*, 86 B.R. 957; 1987 Bankr. LEXIS 104 (N.D.N.Y. 1988)

If your cases weren't published or high profile, a little more "meat" may be necessary to convey what you did. You will want to briefly describe each case, your role in it, and the outcome. Here is an example:

### **Supreme Court Cases:**

*Nebraska v. P.O.*, 409 U.S. 211 (2000). Rejected proposition that there is a gun exception to the reasonable suspicion test to Fourth Amendment Terry stop; however, Court recognized when



there is a clear and present societal danger, less reliable facts are needed to support a stop.

*Nebraska v. Pimento*, 210 U.S. 198 (1991). Established rule of law that the scope of Fourth Amendment consent searches are governed by the same standards as probable cause searches and that the search entails all locations in which the item sought may reasonably be found.

*Nebraska v. Drain*, 265 U.S. 143 (1990). Established rule of law that the scope of Fourth Amendment inventory searches can be as broad or as narrow as the law enforcement agency desires, as long as it is contained in a written policy.

### **Selected Cases From Other Courts:**

*State v. Spangler*, 230 So.2d 642 (Neb. 1994). Upheld constitutionality of the Hate Crime Statute from First Amendment challenge.

*Broughton v. State*, 179 So.2d 105 (Neb. 1995). Upheld constitutionality of the Stalking Statute from vagueness and overbreadth challenge.

*Eberson v. State*, 43 So.2d 425 (Neb. 1st DCA 1994). Upheld constitutionality of malicious mischief to religious property statute from establishment clause challenge.

*Glenn v. Platter*, 272 So.2d 194 (Neb. 1996). Reversed the District Court's holding that Omaha County Circuit Court's Domestic

Violence Division was established in violation of the powers granted to the Chief Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit by the Supreme Court of Florida.

If you have a few very notable cases in which you played a major role, or you want to highlight your work in a particular area, you may want to forgo a lengthier list in favor of a few fleshed out case descriptions. Here's an example of how that can be done:

### **REPRESENTATIVE CASES:**

**Gained swift and substantial settlement in civil matter.** Represented class of beneficiaries to a Florida trust in which another class of beneficiaries was dispersing assets contrary to the terms



of the trust. Won summary judgment motion tracing bank accounts, motor vehicles, and real estate in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina back to the trust. Matter settled shortly thereafter, including payment of clients' sizable legal fees.

**Handled age discrimination lawsuit.** Represented a class of plaintiffs in an age discrimination case against a large, publicly traded company, arguing that they were targeted for layoff due to their perceived proximity to retirement age. Matter settled favorably for a confidential amount.

**Earned positive result for client enduring hostile work environment.** Represented first female employee of Wackman County DMV in a gender discrimination and hostile environment claim against DMV management after she was subjected to repeated unwelcome comments and advances and refused a promotion after nearly 20 years of service. Case settled for a favorable confidential amount.

**Successfully defended claims filed under the Fair Labor Standards Act.** Successfully defended owners of local motels against claims filed under the FLSA claiming that motel management should be paid for their on-call time while living on the premises. Argued that the motel managers are exempt employees under the statute and that on-call time is de minimis.

### **Representative Transactions:**

A representative transaction list is essentially the same as a representative case list. In it, you want to briefly discuss the type of transaction, your role in it, and the outcome. You should also provide dollar amounts whenever possible to give the employer an idea of the level of the transaction. There's a big difference between negotiating a \$200 soda-vending contract and closing a multi-billion-dollar merger.

Here's an example of a representative transaction list:

### **LIST OF REPRESENTATIVE TRANSACTIONS**

Fox Entertainment Group. Worked closely with partners and senior associates to prepare the filing of the registration statement in anticipation of the initial public offering of Fox Broadcasting. 2003





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*Junet Inc.*. Represented the underwriter in a \$325-million 144A debt offering by Suburbia Cellular, a national cell phone service provider. 2003

*Learningville*. Assisted client, a telecommunications company that provides online educational services, in establishing a wholly foreign-owned enterprise in connection with Learningville's partnership with Synet to provide Internet services to more than 1,000 universities in China. 2003

*The R.A.K. Taipei Fund*. Advised the NASDAQ-listed investment company and drafted "fight letters" to SEC in a proxy contest in which a dissident shareholder submitted proposals to terminate the investment advisory contract and convert the trust to an open-end investment fund. The client prevailed convincingly at the annual meeting of shareholders. 2002-2003

*Heller International Corporation*. Assisted client in negotiating and revising its credit facility in anticipation of future acquisitions. 2003

*Corporate Resources and Securities Service Center*. Assisted pro bono client in incorporating his Harlem-based business and assisted him in negotiating a commercial lease to set up the operations. 2003

If you are listing a fair amount of transactions, it is advisable to group them by transaction type, as in the following example.

## SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIVE TRANSACTIONS

### MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS:

*The Lionhead Group, Inc.*, The Lionhead Group, Inc. (NYSE, commercial finance company with \$50 billion in managed assets) in its acquisition of Oldtown Credit Group Inc. in the largest U.S.-Canadian acquisition transaction of 2000, valued at \$5.3 billion.

*Centrale Renfersen-Beranlienbank B.A. ("Renbobank")*. Represented Renbobank (global Swiss bank with total assets of EUR \$344 billion) in its acquisition of Bay Capital, valued at \$476 million.

*ICN AMPA Bank*. Represented ICN AMPA (global Swiss bank with total assets of EUR \$523 billion) in its acquisition of Trust Leasing, valued at \$122 million.



*Finco International.* Represented Finco (global Swiss investment management company with assets under management of EUR \$100 billion) in its acquisition of Boston Partners Asset Management, valued at \$65 million.

## **SECURITIES:**

*The Lionhead Group, Inc.* Represented The Lionhead Group, Inc. in a secondary offering of 45,000,000 shares of its common stock, valued at \$1.6 billion.

*Lynch Securities.* Represented Lynch Securities (global investment division of Merrill-Lynch Financial with total assets \$556 billion), lead underwriter, in an initial public offering of common stock of Coastal Wireless Technologies, Inc., valued at \$99 million.  
(Transaction abandoned).

*Cisnos Inc.* Represented selling shareholders of Cisnos (NASDAQ – internationally-based business intelligence and performance planning software company) in a secondary offering of 3,600,000 shares, valued at \$63 million.

*Credit-Based Appendage Securities Systems LLC (“C-BASS”).* Represented C-BASS (New York-based securitization company) in an offering of its 15.91% Senior Substantiated Form, valued at \$50 million.

Whether you give brief or lengthy descriptions of your cases or transactions, make sure that your list does not exceed one page. Employers won’t bother reading beyond that point. By the same token, if you’re going to create a separate page for transactions or cases, you should make sure that page is at least half full. If there are just a few notable things you’d like to highlight, you can either put them in a section of their own within your resume or highlight them within your job descriptions.



## CHAPTER 7:

# ADDRESSING RED FLAGS AND COMPENSATING FOR WEAKNESSES IN YOUR RESUME

A red flag is anything that might cause an employer to question your work history or think poorly of you as a candidate. This could be an employment gap, frequent job changes, a particularly short tenure at one or more positions, or the termination of a position. Other factors that may weaken you as a candidate include lack of experience, too much experience, age, or an unfocused work history. The cover letter is often your best forum for addressing flaws in your candidacy because it allows you to explain yourself directly. But there are some things that can be done within your resume format and layout that are also effective in minimizing any weaknesses. What follows in this chapter are some of the most common things that cause employers concern, along with advice on how to handle your resume with regard to each situation.

### Job hopping

Employers seem to be in denial of reality, which is that employees are changing jobs with increasing frequency. The concept of working for the same employer from graduation until retirement is becoming more and more of an oddity, yet employers still name job stability as one of the most important factors they seek in a candidate. Anyone who goes into an interview saying “I think I’ll give this job a year or two and then jump ship for a higher salary” will be immediately shown the door.

Therefore, a resume that is “all over the place” is a turnoff. If you’ve changed jobs frequently, changed career paths more than once, or lived in a different state every year, you need to recognize that you will appear somewhat unstable to employers. Not unstable in a mental or emotional sense, but unstable as an employee.

For this reason, you want to focus on either structuring your resume in such a way that your instability is not apparent or explaining your moves so that employers understand your motives.

If the reason for your move was due to the sale, merger, or closing of your company or firm, it’s perfectly fine to indicate as such on your resume. A simple parenthetical that says (company/firm



disbanded in July 2000) will be enough to convey that you were a victim of circumstances beyond your control.

If the reason for your frequent moves was due solely to your own devices, however, you may want to employ some of the following techniques to minimize your peripatetic nature.

### 1) Don't make dates/locations the center of attention.

This is where layout comes into play. One popular layout is to use a right-aligned tab for dates and/or geographic locations,

like this:

<b>Smith Construction Company</b> , Atlanta, GA <i>In-house Counsel</i>	2002–Present
<b>Honeywell &amp; Jones</b> , Atlanta, GA <i>Staff Attorney</i>	2000–2001
<b>June, Hale &amp; Miller</b> , Washington, DC <i>Associate</i>	1999
<b>Nevins &amp; Bloch</b> , Boston, MA <i>Associate</i>	1998–1999

Anyone glancing at the right side of the page would automatically be alerted to the frequency of this candidate's job changes.

Now look at the format below:

#### IN-HOUSE COUNSEL

**Smith Construction Company**  
Atlanta, GA, 2002–Present

#### STAFF ATTORNEY

**Honeywell & Jones**  
Atlanta, GA, 2000–2001



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## ASSOCIATE

**June, Hale & Miller**

Washington, DC, 1999

## ASSOCIATE

**Nevins & Bloch**

Boston, MA, 1998–1999

This layout puts more emphasis on the job titles and less on the geographic and timeline information. While the information is still given, it's not quite as prominent.

## 2) Don't make your resume look like a laundry list.

If you find your list of jobs extending beyond five or six, you should either eliminate some of the older positions or create a format that places more emphasis on accomplishments and less on dates and employers. If you have worked in the same capacity, but for different companies, one approach is to emphasize titles over company names. Take the following example. This candidate worked in a paralegal/law clerk role for a number of years before attending law school.

ORIGINAL:

### EXPERIENCE:

January 2002 – March 2002

**Law Clerk, Harris & Black, San Diego, CA**

Researched case law for attorneys.

Drafted answers and briefs for trial preparation.

Second chair to counsel in personal injury litigation.

July 2001 – January 2002

**Paralegal, Darren Y. Cook, P.C., San Diego, CA**

Prepared and drafted motions, pleadings, discovery.

Prepared cases for trial, hearings and depositions.

Assisted attorneys with family law cases.

Client consultation and interaction.



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January 1998 – July 2001

**Paralegal**, *Kinney, Ziegler & Yinkle*, San Diego, CA

Prepared and drafted motions, pleadings, and discovery

Assisted attorneys with family law cases

Client consultation and interaction

October 1996 – January 1998

**Paralegal**, *Urdell & Garret*, San Diego, CA

Drafted real estate purchasing contracts and other commercial real estate closing transaction documents

Researched issues in real estate and workers' compensation law

September 1995 – October 1996

**Law Clerk**, *Brice, English & Strickler*, San Diego, CA

Represented various governmental municipalities and city departments

Researched real estate law issues

Attended hearings and depositions

June 1994 – September 1995

**Law Clerk**, *Law Offices of Diane E. Cummings*, San Diego, CA

Prepared and drafted trial litigation folder for lead attorneys

Drafted lawsuit petitions, answers, briefs and other legal documents in preparation for trial

This long list of jobs not only draws attention to the frequency with which the candidate changed jobs, but it also repeats a lot of the same information, as her responsibilities in each position were very similar. The format below eliminates the need to repeat job descriptions, while also minimizing the long list of positions.

REVISED:

## EXPERIENCE:

### **Law Clerk/Paralegal 1995 – 2002**

Extensive experience providing comprehensive legal support to attorneys in firms and solo practice. Gained both broad and deep knowledge of various areas of law, including Litigation,



Personal Injury, Workers' Compensation, Contracts, Insurance Law, and Family Law. Drafted numerous documents, including briefs, memorandums, motions, pleadings, and discovery with great attention to detail, resulting in little to no editing. Attended hearings, depositions, and trials in support of attorneys. Second-chaired personal injury litigation. Substantial client contact.

Employers included:

- Harris & Black, San Diego, CA
- Darren Y. Cook, P.C., San Diego, CA
- Kinney, Ziegler & Yinkle, San Diego, CA
- Urdell & Garret, San Diego, CA
- Brice, English & Strickler, San Diego, CA
- Law Offices of Diane E. Cummings, San Diego, CA

This format is only recommended if you have quite a lengthy work history or a long list of employers, however. Contract and temporary work can be portrayed this way, as can a non-legal work history.

Remember that there is a fine line between being creative and being misleading. If you modify your resume format in order to conceal the frequency of your job changes, you still need to accurately portray what you've done. One former client, Holly, was a real estate attorney who went through a rocky period in her career, which lasted for about five years. First, she was a victim of downsizing at a small firm after working there for only six months. After that, she spent a year unemployed and looking for a job. When she finally found a new position, she soon discovered that she was not doing the type of work that she'd been promised, so she quit after only four months. Then she did some contract work for several months before finally opening her own practice. She wanted to know if she could label this entire five-year period as "Solo Practitioner" so that she could avoid being perceived as flaky.

Looking for work might feel like a full-time job, but labeling it as such is a severe misrepresentation. In addition, you're not a solo practitioner when you're a full employee of another firm. There are other ways to get around having to list all of those employers chronologically, however. Because she was doing only real estate work throughout this period, we revised her job description as follows:





## REAL ESTATE ATTORNEY 1995–2000

Handled a wide range of real estate matters as a contract attorney and an associate with firms Johnson & Howell & Knull and Reaves & Jabir, and as a solo practitioner. Yearlong hiatus from 1996 to 1997.

Below this basic description, we included a bulleted list containing details of specific projects Holly worked on, in order to draw employers' attention to her achievements. This format enabled Holly to visually consolidate her positions while remaining true to what she'd done. In an interview situation, she would most likely be asked about the chronology of that time period, but in that setting, she would be better able to explain the reasons behind her moves.

Another way to avoid the “laundry list” look is to vary the amount of description for your positions. As discussed in Chapter 5, the most recent position on your resume should typically carry the most weight, and the amount of description for each subsequent job should gradually decrease as the positions get older (an exception would be if you had a lengthy tenure in a position and only a brief tenure in your most recent job, or if an older position is highly relevant to the work you're seeking). In addition to showing upward mobility, this enables you to bring the employer's focus to what you've achieved in your recent work, as opposed to how many different jobs you've had.

Last, but not least, you can effectively minimize the appearance of job hopping by using one or more summary sections. Look at the before and after of this next candidate's resume. The “before” format draws attention to the numerous jobs he's held. The “after” format puts the candidate's achievements at the front, which not only emphasizes those achievements, but takes attention away from his frequent moves.

## FAGAN R. HOROWITZ, ESQ.

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913 El Pueblo Real ▪ Santa Fe, NM 87777  
(555) 555-5555; fhorowitz@horowitz.com

### BAR STATUS

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Member, New Mexico State Bar, California State Bar

### EDUCATION

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**UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA**, Vienna, Austria  
*Diploma in Law*, 1998

**SOUTHWESTERN SCHOOL OF LAW**, Los Angeles, CA

- GPA: 3.6
- Business Administration, Dean's List

### EXPERIENCE

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**BIGGERS, NATASHE, RAMBALDI & GOMER**, Santa Fe, NM (July 2001 to Present)

*Associate Attorney*

Practice Areas: Commercial and Business Litigation, Construction Litigation, Insurance Coverage, Employment, General Liability and Personal Injury. Counsel for Lennar Homes of California, Inc., and Greystone Homes, Inc. Law and Motion, Discovery, Mediation, and Settlement.

**JULIO & ASSOCIATES**, Santa Fe, NM (July 2000 to July 2001)

*Associate Attorney*

Provided in-house counsel to Reliable Insurance Company. Practice Areas: Construction Litigation, General Liability Litigation, and Insurance Coverage. Law and Motion, Discovery, Mediation, and Settlement.

**TIMMER & JEFFRIES**, Riverside, CA (July 2000 to July 2001)

*Associate*

Practice Areas: Construction Litigation and Insurance Coverage. Law and Motion, Discovery, Mediation, and Settlement.

**SPREWELL & HOBBS**, Riverside, CA (January to July 2000)

*Associate*

Practice Areas: Public Entity Defense, Commercial and Business litigation, General Liability and Personal Injury, Real Property, Employment, Environmental, Products Liability, Appellate. Law and Motion (drafting and appearances), depositions and discovery, and research and writing. Provided counsel for County of Riverside and City of Perris.

**GOLDMAN SACHS TRUST COMPANY OF CALIFORNIA**, Newport Beach, CA (August 1999 to January 2000)

*Trust Settlement Associate*

Practice Areas: Public Entity Defense, Commercial and Business Litigation, General Liability and Personal Injury, Real Property, Employment, Environmental, Products Liability, Appellate. Law and Motion (drafting and appearances), depositions and discovery, and research and writing. Provided counsel for County of Riverside and City of Perris.

**ALLENS MAJORS**, Vienna, Austria (1996 to 1998)

(12 offices in 7 countries, with approximately 1,300 lawyers)

*Graduate at Law: Litigation and Insurance Section*

Practice Areas: Commercial and Business Litigation, Insurance Coverage, Securities Litigation, Corporate, Commercial Transactions, Products Liability, Intellectual Property, and Taxation Litigation. Engaged in all facets of commercial and general litigation, including discovery and documents, motions and briefs, legal research and writing, and preparation for arbitrations and trials.

**FOGGY & JOHNSON**, La Jolla, CA (1992 to 1995)

*Attorney Intern and Law Clerk*

Practice Areas: Commercial and Business Litigation, Savings and Loan litigation, General Liability and Personal Injury, Public Entity Defense, Insurance Coverage, Corporate, and Commercial Transactions. Litigation (Plaintiff and Defense): Performed legal research, analysis, and writing, including evaluating merits of legal claims.

# FAGAN R. HOROWITZ, ESQ.

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## PROFILE

Skilled attorney with strong business background and experience in all facets of litigation (both plaintiff and defense). Adept in the adversarial process as well as legal research, writing, and analysis. Citizen of the U.S., Austria, and the European Union (United Kingdom). Two years of experience at one of the world's largest and most prestigious firms, Allens Majors, in Vienna, Austria.

## AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Commercial and Business Litigation
- Construction Litigation (Complex)
- Insurance Coverage
- Commercial Transactions
- Corporate and Finance
- Securities
- General Liability Litigation
- Public Entity Defense
- Toxic and Mass Tort
- Environmental Law
- Employment Law
- Products Liability

## SELECTED ACHIEVEMENTS

- Negotiated settlements of multi-million-dollar trusts, including transactional work of liquidating securities and investment accounts, life insurance, and preparation of trust tax returns.
- Defended an \$800,000 construction claim for Hearth Homes and forced a plaintiff's dismissal for \$0.
- With Allens Majors, performed high-level legal work for multi-national corporations, including Dole, Credit Suisse, Vivendi Universal, RJ Reynolds, Merchant Bank, and Eastpac Banking Corporation.
- Built plaintiff's case from \$30K to a \$202K settlement as an attorney intern by aggressive case management, including drafting and filing 87 special jury instructions when defendants filed none.

## BAR ADMISSIONS

Member, New Mexico State Bar, 1999  
Member, California State Bar, 1998  
Orange County Bar Association, 1999  
United States District Court, Central District of California, 2003

## EXPERIENCE

### **BIGGERS, NATASHE, RAMBALDI & GOMER, Santa Fe, New Mexico**

*Associate Attorney (2001 to Present)*

Practice Areas: Commercial and Business Litigation, Construction Litigation, Toxic Tort, Insurance Coverage, Employment, and General Liability & Personal Injury.

- Handled all facets of case management, including client contact, pleadings, experts, law and motion, negotiation, mediation, MSC, trial preparation, and settlements.
- Drafted and argued motions (summary judgment, compel discovery, good faith settlement, enforce settlement).
- Handled all discovery, including depositions (expert, PMK, percipient), interrogatories, requests for admissions, production and analysis of documents, and inspections.

### **JULIO & ASSOCIATES, Santa Fe, New Mexico**

*Associate Attorney (2000 to 2001)*

Practice Areas: Construction Litigation and Insurance Coverage.

- Handled all facets of case management, including law and motion, discovery, mediation, and settlements.



# FAGAN R. HOROWITZ, ESQ.

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## EXPERIENCE (CONT.)

**GOLDMAN SACHS TRUST COMPANY OF CALIFORNIA**, Newport Beach, California

*Trust Settlement Associate* (1999 to 2000)

Practice Areas: Securities, Real Property, Trusts and Estate Planning, Probate, Banking, Insurance, and Taxation.

- Completed settlements of high-value trusts, including liquidation of assets, trust taxation, and disbursements.

**ALLENS MAJORS**, Vienna, Austria

(12 offices in 7 countries, with approximately 1,300 lawyers)

*Graduate at Law: Litigation and Insurance Section* (1996 to 1998)

Practice Areas: Commercial and Business Litigation, Insurance Coverage, Securities Litigation, Commercial Transactions, Corporate and Finance, Products Liability and Toxic Tort, Environmental, Intellectual Property, Construction Law, and Taxation.

- Engaged in all facets of commercial and general litigation, including discovery and documents, motions and briefs, legal research and writing, and preparation for arbitrations and trials.
- Liaison to Vienna Supreme Court (original jurisdiction) on commercial litigation cases.
- Represented Dole in worldwide breast implant class-action litigation.

**FOGGY & JOHNSON**, La Jolla, California

*Attorney Intern and Law Clerk* (1992 to 1995)

Practice Areas: Commercial and Business Litigation, Savings and Loan Litigation, General Liability and Personal Injury, Public Entity Defense, Corporate and Commercial Transactions, and Insurance Coverage.

- Represented Southeast Asian Resolution Trust Corporation in Home Fed Bank litigation.
- Represented AMOCO and Mid-Transit in general liability defense.
- Assisted in Los Angeles Gas and Electricity Bond Issuance (\$300M).
- Drafted bylaws for a national political action committee.
- Drafted a buy/sell agreement for the sale of a business.
- Drafted contracts, joint ventures, and agreements.
- Participated in four trials and four arbitrations.

## EDUCATION

**UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA**, Vienna, Austria

*Diploma in Law*, 1998

**SOUTHWESTERN SCHOOL OF LAW**, Los Angeles, California

*Juris Doctor*, 1993



## Layoffs/Termination

If you are not currently employed, your resume needs to reflect this by listing an end date with your most recent job. Don't try to mask your unemployment by including "[year]-Present"; you could get yourself into a lot of trouble.

Instead, you should structure your resume so that the end date is not the first thing that employers see. You want to give the employer an opportunity to see the best that you have to offer before he/she notices that you're not presently employed. If you start your resume off like this...

**Highway, Inc.**, Miami, FL  
*General Counsel*, 1993 – 2001

...the very first thing employers will think when looking at your resume is "What has this person been doing since 2001?" This is not the response you want to generate. Instead, you should start your resume with your Education section (if you are a fairly recent graduate) or a summary section. This will draw the employer's attention away from the fact that you are currently unemployed.

The following example illustrates how this can be done:

# AMANDA GOLDBERG

1119 Rocking Chair Road ▪ Wray, CT 06114 ▪ (555) 555-5555 ▪ agoldberg@goldberg.com

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## BAR ADMISSIONS

Connecticut, 1995; New York, 1996

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## PROFILE

Attorney with extensive in-house counsel and private practice experience, able to serve the legal needs of a major corporation. Knowledge in the following areas:

- Contract negotiations/drafting
- Corporate governance
- Financial Services
- Privacy issues
- Regulatory compliance
- Technology and e-commerce
- Litigation management
- Mergers and acquisitions
- UCC Article 9
- Real estate transactions

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## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Borsey & Drowsy, P.C.**, Farmington, CT

June 2001 – June 2003

*Associate*

- Drafted, reviewed, and negotiated transactions and agreements, including asset acquisition/purchase, buy-sell, limited liability company operating, option, redemption, licensing, warehousing and fulfillment, service provider, consulting, employment and non-compete, lease agreements, promissory notes, and security agreements.
- Handled mergers of closely held corporations, limited liability companies, and partnerships.
- Responsible for formation, qualification, dissolution, and corporate governance for various entities.
- Prepared 1023 applications and related documentation to obtain tax-exempt status.

**American Mutual of Connecticut, Inc.**, Farmington, CT

August 1996 – June 2001

*Associate Counsel*

- Provided general legal counsel and representation to financial services corporation with approximately 1,300 employees and \$40 billion in assets under management, now a part of Goldman Sachs.
- Drafted, reviewed, and negotiated wide variety of transactions and agreements, including venture capital, software licensing, content licensing, hyperlinking, web hosting, consulting, distribution, service provider, third-party administrator, and lease agreements.
- Advised officers and directors of American Mutual Group companies on matters of corporate governance and general corporate issues and provided recommendations pertaining to policies and procedures affecting the companies and personnel.
- Created privacy policy and counseled management on privacy issues, compliance with applicable law and/or regulation, and the development and implementation of necessary infrastructure; earned reputation as “go-to” person for compliance with privacy requirements of Gramm-Leach Bliley Act.
- Established necessary legal entities and assisted with corporate restructuring.
- Provided legal guidance on issues relating to technology and e-commerce.
- Managed outside counsel and actively participated in formulating strategy and drafting documents pertaining to regulatory and litigation matters.
- Creatively resolved contract negotiations/disputes with software and hardware vendors so that key infrastructure could be implemented to meet critical deadlines for project launches.
- Minimized potential costs and risks of Y2K legal efforts by effectively leading cross-functional, intra-organizational team to identify exposure and implement solutions.

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## EDUCATION

**Albany College of Law**, Albany, NY

*Juris Doctor, cum laude*, May 1996

- GPA: 3.56; Class Rank: Top 11%

**University of Michigan**, Ann Arbor, MI

*Bachelor of Science in Accounting, summa cum laude*, May 1993

- GPA: 3.8; Class Rank: Top 2%



## Lack of Experience

Regardless of how inexperienced you are, you need your resume to fill up one page. Nothing highlights lack of experience like a resume that is only 75% full.

First, make sure that you've fleshed out your content as much as possible. Keep in mind that "experience" doesn't have to refer to professional experience in the workplace. Maybe you've participated heavily in volunteer activities or held a significant role in a campus organization. Take a look at the example below of a law student who did a lot of community service work. Even though she doesn't have legal experience, she comes across as a leader who takes initiative.

## EXPERIENCE

### **Protect the Ducks**, Sullivan, New Hampshire

Summer 2003 – Present

*Founder*

Formed and ran lobbying group for the purpose of changing New Hampshire laws regarding the treatment of ducks. Conducted statewide publicity campaign to raise awareness of duck abuse, which was reported upon favorably by Government Regulations Committee.

### **City Music Project**, St. John, New Hampshire

Summer 2002

*Volunteer*

Participated in creation of program addressing the need for musical instruments for disadvantaged children. Located sponsors and secured \$13,000 worth of used instruments. Paired volunteer music teachers with local children.

### **Sullivan Medical Center**, Sullivan, New Hampshire

1997 – 1999

*Volunteer*

Spearheaded volunteer organization that received book donations, distributed books to patients, and expanded hospital library.





ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney  
Search and Placement*

**If you lack experience, you can also emphasize any activities you participated in during law school, particularly if they involved legal research or writing. See the resume on the following page.**

This job seeker, Damon, was very concerned about the fact that he did not have one lick of experience outside of his law school walls. Within his law school walls, however, he had worked on several journals, taken advantage of study-abroad programs, and worked as a research assistant to one of his professors. After he realized that this, too, was experience, he was able to flesh out his resume by describing each of his activities in detail. The result is a resume that rivals that of a law student who has held several legal internships.

# DAMON M. SULLIVAN

1241 Honeyoat Ave. ▪ Columbia, South Carolina 28292 ▪ (555) 555-5555 ▪ dsullivan@sullivan.com

*Will Sit for South Carolina Bar Exam, July 2003*

## EDUCATION

**Ohio State University Moritz School of Law**, Toledo, Ohio

*Juris Doctor*, May 2003, GPA: 3.12/4.00

- *Ohio State University Journal of International Law (JIL)* (2001 – 2003)  
Production Design Editor  
Laid groundwork for the publication of symposium commentaries in a book series.  
Associate Editor  
Proofread and footnote-checked articles for publication. Recreated and maintained the JIL web page: researched design elements, coded website, designed layout of web elements using Macromedia and Adobe software packages, and wrote webpage content.
  - Author, Note: “Interstate Adoption: Toward a Dictate that Recognizes the Rights and Liberties of Adoptive Parents” [to be published in 30 OSU J. Int’l Law (2003)]
- *Canadian International Law Journal* (2001 – 2003)  
Editor-In-Chief/Executive Editor  
Coordinated conference speakers and edited 54 text transcriptions for publication. Researched and created more than 1,100 footnotes for documentation. Mentored first-year JIL associates through the note-writing process.
- *Technology and Internet Law Journal* (2001)  
Associate Editor and Section Editor  
Researched, wrote articles and headlines, and edited student articles for online publication.
  - Author of the following articles: “Congress on Cybercrime: What Every ISP Should Know”; “HIPAA Gives Regulatory Some Privacy, But Practical Concerns Remain”; “Update: City of Fort Lauderdale Fails in Its Quest to Shut Down Pornography Web Site.”
- *Canadian International Law Institute* (2001 – 2003)  
Student Assistant  
Created database of potential contacts. Designed conference pamphlets and materials. Developed the Canadian International Law Institute website: designed layout of web elements and wrote webpage content.

**University of South Quebec**, Quebec, Canada

Exchange Student, Spring 2003

Participated in an exchange program and completed coursework in Public International Law, Wills, European Union Law, and Company Law.

**St. Thomas’s College, University of Oxford**, Oxford, England

Summer Law Program, Summer 2001

Completed coursework in comparative criminal sentencing and punishment and comparative trial practice.

**Orchard City College**, Orchard City, Hawaii

*Bachelor of Science in Business Economics*, 2000

## EXPERIENCE

**Ohio State University Moritz School of Law**, Cleveland, Ohio

Legal Research Assistant (2002 – Present)

Conducted legal research and acted as a liaison between professors and publishers.

Webmaster/Web Designer (2001 – 2003)

Created and maintained the websites for the following law journals:

*Ohio State University Law Review* (<http://www.osu.edu/academic/lawreview>), *Ohio State University Journal of International Law* (<http://www.osu.edu/academic/jil/>), and *Ohio State University Journal of Law-Medicine* (<http://www.osu.edu/academic/jlm/>).



If you have fleshed out your content as much as possible and you're still struggling with filling up a page, here are some layout tricks you can try:

## 1) Bullet points

Breaking your experience up with bullet points is a quick way to make it look more substantial on the page. Look at these two examples:

**QETA Systems, Inc.**, Harris, Wisconsin  
*Legal Intern*, Summer 2003

Drafted, negotiated, and reviewed license agreements; service and partnership contracts; and non-disclosure agreements. Provided counsel on technology trends in the open source community relating to IP and privacy issues. Drafted and reviewed contracts for HR, accounting, and marketing departments. Commended for legal research skills.

**QETA Systems, Inc.**, Harris, Wisconsin  
*Legal Intern*  
Summer 2003

- Drafted, negotiated, and reviewed license agreements; service and partnership contracts; and non-disclosure agreements
- Provided counsel on technology trends in the open source community relating to IP and privacy issues
- Drafted and reviewed contracts for HR, accounting, and marketing departments.
- Commended for legal research skills

## 2) Tabs

Using tabs to center your text on the page can also make your resume look fuller. Here's an example:

### EDUCATION

**University of Georgia School of Law, Athens, GA**

*Juris Doctor*, May 2002

- Legal Research & Writing Award for Excellence in Oral Advocacy



- Member, Moot Court Board
- High Pass in Trial Advocacy

**Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN**

Bachelor of Arts in Communication, May 1998

- Community Service Committee, Sigma Chi Fraternity
- President, Vanderbilt University Singers

**LEGAL EXPERIENCE**

**St. Joseph County Prosecutor's Office, Atlanta, GA**

September 2003 – Present

*Law Clerk*

Responsible for litigating municipal appeals

- Prepare briefs for motions to be heard before the Georgia Superior Court
- Argue municipal appeals weekly before a Georgia Superior Court judge
- Research legal issues for senior prosecutors
- Currently the only law clerk of similar seniority to remain “undefeated” in all court appearances
- Commended for strong advocacy and organizational skills

In addition to tabs and bullets, margins, spacing, fonts, and headings can be adjusted in order to make your resume fit evenly across the page.

**Age**

The issue of age comes up very frequently when discussing job seekers' concerns about their candidacy. Almost all of the time, the issue has to do with being too old, as opposed to too young. By “too old” I’m not referring to someone being too old to actually perform a job at a high level; I’m referring to the stereotypes and prejudices that some employers have against older candidates.

In today's job market, it is becoming increasingly common for the recent law school graduate to be well over the age of 25 and for people to change careers (sometimes several times) after many years in the workforce. Nevertheless, there are some perceived concerns about hiring older candidates:



1. Older candidates aren't as "fresh" and enthusiastic as younger attorneys.
2. Older candidates won't be able to take direction from other attorneys—especially if those attorneys are younger.
3. Older candidates aren't as computer/technology savvy.
4. Older candidates will want too much money.

**There are also some perceived benefits associated with maturity:**

1. Older candidates will be less likely to hop from firm to firm.
2. Older candidates have life experience.
3. Older candidates have spent time in the workforce and will therefore be more "professional."
4. Older candidates have already done the "family thing" and therefore won't be taking long periods of time off for marriage, baby, etc.

Of course, these issues are all relative to the type of position you are seeking. If you are 40 years old, have 15 years of experience, and are seeking a senior counsel position, then your age and experience will be a boon, not a hindrance. However, if you are 40 and just entering the legal profession, or you want to make a career change within the legal profession, you will face larger obstacles.

What you need to evaluate is whether you think age will be a problem for you and, if so, whether you should try to conceal it or bite the bullet and wait for a non-discriminating person to hire you. Keep in mind, when I speak of "concealing" I mean for the purposes of your resume only. I certainly don't advise trying to live a lie within the workplace.

**To Hide or Not to Hide**

Some things can be hidden well, others cannot. For instance, if you have a blemish on your face, some nicely applied concealer will probably do the trick, and no one will be the wiser. However, if you have two heads, trying to cover one with a hat will just make you look ridiculous.



The same rules apply to hiding your age. At a certain point it's feasible and advisable. If you graduated from law school 25 years ago, but only the past 17 years of your experience have been of real value, go ahead and leave off those last 8 years along with your graduation dates.

However, just as a 70-year-old college student stands out from the crowd, so will a 70-year-old lawyer trying to appear like a recent graduate. If you're 70, don't make your resume look like that of a 25-year-old. In that case, you will only be shocking and most likely angering the interviewer when you walk through the door. Remember, a resume can get your foot in the door, but you want to make sure that the door isn't slammed on your foot the second it gets in.

If you feel that your age may stand in the way of your dream job, you should strategize a way to minimize your age on your resume. The most obvious way to do this is to remove the graduation dates. It is generally assumed that the date you earned your undergraduate degree represents the time you were about 22 years old. This assumption can work either for you or against you, as illustrated by the following examples:

Frank was an attorney who had worked as a waiter for a number of years before going to college and earning his bachelor's degree. He entered college at 26 and graduated when he was 30. Frank then entered law school immediately after earning his B.A.; so when he earned his J.D., he was 33.

Because Frank's work in the restaurant industry did not relate to his career as an attorney, there was no need to include it. In addition to being irrelevant, it would immediately tell employers that Frank was almost eight years older than his peers. If Frank limited his resume to his experience since earning his bachelor's degree, however, his resume would look like that of any other 25-year-old recent law school graduate. Is this a bad thing? I don't think so. There's no reason for an employer to know that Frank worked as a waiter before college or that he's older than everyone else in his graduating class.

Janice is a different example. She was an attorney who went to college right out of high school and graduated four years later, at age 22. Right after college, Janice got married, and she didn't work for 10 years after that. Then she went to law school. In Janice's case, it was to her advantage to leave her graduation dates off of her resume to lessen the obvious gap. She could still convey that she was a recent law school graduate by the dates of any internships or



law clerk positions and by mentioning it in her cover letter. But by not drawing attention to her undergraduate dates on her resume, she would be putting herself on an even playing field with those who were 10 years younger than her.

Keep in mind that the absence of dates might cause someone to think you're even older than you are. If you're only 35, you don't want to give someone the impression that you're 65 and concealing it. The best way to decide what to do is to have someone objective view your resume and tell you what he/she infers about your age from reading it.

There are also ways to minimize dates without removing them completely. As mentioned in the section on job hopping, including dates beside job titles or degrees rather than separating them will make them less obvious.

Also avoid quantifying your experience. If your resume starts with "More than 30 years of experience handling complex litigation," you are immediately pointing out your age to the reader.

Finally, it is important is that you have an up-to-date, sharp-looking resume. Often, I can guess an attorney's approximate age simply by looking at the format of his/her resume. Certain outdated fonts, word usage, and layouts can give you away as "out of touch." Invest some time and energy (and perhaps money) in making your resume look as "hip" as possible. Check out the before and after of this candidate's resume:



## WILSON D. WHITING

892 Tanner St.  
Berks, PA 18346  
(555) 555-5555  
wwhiting@whiting.com

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- Admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- Performed extensive research on legislative issues such as the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and CERCLA.
- Managed environmental organization's political campaign for Pennsylvania Governor.
- Developed a successful lobby for Pennsylvania paper manufacturers.
- Ensured compliance with government agencies for regulatory purposes.
- Managed defense for insurance liability cases and performed legal research for plaintiff in workers' compensation cases.
- Computer literate: GIS, MS Word, Excel, Lexis, PowerPoint, and Internet

### EDUCATION:

F. Murray Simpson College <b>Bachelor of Arts, Environmental Science</b> Courses: Biology, Environmental Pollution and Physical Geography	Portsmouth, NH graduated 2000
Georgetown University School of Law <b><i>Juris Doctor</i></b> Concentrated in Intellectual Property Law	Washington, DC graduated 1994
American University <b>Bachelor of Arts, Political Science</b>	Washington, DC graduated 1990

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

#### Consultant

Philadelphia, PA and Washington, DC      May 1997 – Present  
Managed and advised small businesses through regulatory compliance and daily operations. Responsibilities included supervising staff, negotiating leases, lobbying, and developing business strategy. Organized an absentee ballot campaign for the 2001 judicial elections in Pennsylvania. Also performed legal research for clients such as Foggy & Murdock.

#### Lobbyist

*Pennsylvania Environmental Organization*  
West Chester, PA      April – November 2002  
Organized and implemented the gubernatorial election strategy for Ted Mendosa, a supporter of the organization. Responsibilities included speaking to groups of more than 400 members on the importance of the election, volunteerism, and political fundraising. In addition, ensured a coordinated effort from 600 locals.

#### Adjunct Professor for Environmental Law

*F. Murray Simpson College*  
Pomona, NJ      Summer 1999

#### Management Trainee

*First Pennsylvania Insurance Company*  
Hershey, PA      January 1995 – August 1996

# WILSON D. WHITING

892 Tanner Street • Berks, Pennsylvania 18346 • (555) 555-5555 • wwwhiting@whiting.com

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Versatile attorney who has experienced the law from the administrative, legislative, and private sector standpoints. Able to navigate a variety of government regulations and quickly become expert in a given industry in order to understand clients' particular needs. Skilled in motivating others and spearheading initiatives. Admitted to practice in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### **LAW AND CONSULTING OFFICE OF WILSON D. WHITING, Berks, PA**

*Consultant*, 1997 – Present

Provide representation and counsel to various small business clients on matters ranging from regulatory compliance to daily operations to contract negotiation to business strategy.

- Performed contract legal research for law firms such as Foggy & Murdock and Wells, Hammer & Plummer.
- Served as Pennsylvania Environmental Organization (PEO) Field Political Operative:
  - Managed union's political campaign for Pennsylvania Governor Ted Mendosa; organized efforts of 600 locals, headquarters staff, campaign staff, and PSEA members.
  - Assisted in raising \$500,000 for the campaign, the highest amount raised by PEO to date for an election.
  - Made numerous presentations to audiences of 400+ people during gubernatorial campaign.
- Worked with housing project administrators, attorneys, and police to negotiate contracts which resulted in increased safety and reduced illegal drug activity in low-income residential areas.
- Assisted political organization by spearheading and strategizing absentee ballot campaign for 2001 judicial elections in Pennsylvania; plan resulted in registration of 9,000 new voters throughout the state.
- Assisted several local businesses in obtaining business licenses, incorporating businesses, and managing income for tax purposes.
- Successfully lobbied Pennsylvania State legislators on behalf of small paper manufacturing companies affiliated with state union to block bill, which would increase the cost of paper production.

### **FIRST PENNSYLVANIA INSURANCE COMPANY, Hershey, PA**

*Claims Adjuster*, 1995 – 1996

Handled all aspects of claims, including liability assessment, fraud investigation, and vehicle appraisal.

- Consistently negotiated favorable settlements.
- Streamlined operations by creating a more organized claim-assignment process, which was implemented across the company.

## EDUCATION

### **F. MURRAY SIMPSON COLLEGE, Portsmouth, NH**

*Bachelor of Arts in Environmental and Marine Sciences*, 2000

- Dean's List, two semesters
- Specialized in Biology, Environmental Pollution, and Physical Geography.
- **Adjunct Professor for Environmental Law** (Summer 1999): Provided instruction on fundamental principles and cutting-edge issues in environmental law to undergraduate students.

### **GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW, Washington, DC**

*Juris Doctor*, 1994

- Law Clerk, **EEOC, General Counsel's Office**, Washington, DC (Spring 1994)
- Law Clerk, **Tanner & Snell**, Alexandria, VA (1993 – 1994)
- Law Clerk, **Congressional Subcommittee on the Internet**, Washington, DC (Fall 1992)

### **AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, Washington, DC**

*Bachelor of Arts in International Political Science*, 1990

- Dean's List, four semesters



If you don't think it's in your best interest to mask your age because all of your experience is highly relevant, but you still think age might be a concern, go ahead and make a point of addressing it. Chapter 9 on cover letter techniques offers some suggestions for turning your age into a positive attribute.

Whatever you decide, remember that this is for the purpose of your resume submission only. As discussed in detail in the chapter on misrepresentation, you should be prepared to explain everything that is or isn't on your resume. If you feel confident that your resume accurately portrays you as a candidate, regardless of what it says about your age, then you should feel comfortable submitting it to employers.

### **Unfocused Work History**

You took Position A because it was the first thing you were offered out of law school. Then you moved to Position B because you wanted more money. Then Position C came along, and it gave you an opportunity to do what you really wanted to do—or so you thought. Position C wasn't all it was cracked up to be, so you went on to Position D because the skills you developed in Position C lent themselves pretty well to D type of work.

Now you're in a position where you have experience and you really know (this time) what you want to do, but your resume portrays you as someone who's a little too well rounded.

It's important that your career path make sense to the person reading your resume—even if it doesn't make sense to you. The employer should get the sense that each thing you've done has been part of an overall plan, not just the result of random happenstance. If you worked in-house, then with a law firm, then as a zookeeper, then with a public interest organization, it was because you wanted to explore the law from all angles (even the animal point of view) so that you could give the best possible representation to clients, not because you simply lacked direction.

Therefore, it is essential that you create a summary section that ties together your experience. You should play up your versatility. Point out that you're experienced in both litigation and transactional work, or that you've practiced extensively in diverse areas of law. You should also play up your ability to quickly learn new legal areas. Mention that you can assist on a wide variety of cases as needed.



ATTORNEY SEARCH

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If you have some positions on your resume that you think will give people pause, go ahead and remove them. While legal job seekers tend to fret over gaps in employment, sometimes a gap is a lesser evil than a position that raises a red flag. If you did some housecleaning or took a temporary job in a dentist's office between jobs, it will just confuse employers to see that on your resume.

The before-and-after examples on the following pages show how "all over the place" experience can be effectively streamlined.



Xavier Y. Zaszewski, Esq.  
31 Windofford Place  
Shot Rock, New Hampshire 39404  
(555) 555-5555

New Hampshire Supreme Court Certified Civil Trial Attorney with 20+ years of experience in the preparation, management, and trial of substantial personal injury, medical malpractice, products liability, and commercial litigation matters in the New Hampshire State and Federal Court systems; New York University (B.A., Communications, 1977); Rutgers University Law School (J.D., 1980); Law Secretary to the Honorable James Jones, Chancery and Assignment Judge, Superior Court of New Hampshire (1980-81).

August 1994 to Present:

Successful solo practice in civil litigation with emphasis on serious personal injury, medical malpractice, products liability, and commercial litigation.

December 1990 to August 1994:

Senior litigation associate of Michaels, Whimsical & Fairmont; preparation, management, and trial of high-volume and complex catastrophic injury, medical malpractice, and products liability matters.

December 1988 to September 1990:

General Counsel to Brettcorp, Inc.; management of regulatory compliance, risk exposure, and litigation.

January 1990 to Present:

Designated by the Supreme Court of New Hampshire to hold the title Certified Civil Trial Attorney, a designation held by a very small percentage of all attorneys presently licensed to practice law in the State of New Hampshire.

May 1987 to November 1988:

Senior commercial and personal litigation associate for Simpson, Lovejoy & Wiggum.

August 1981 to May 1985:

Commercial litigation associate for Simpson, Lovejoy & Wiggum.

## **XAVIER Y. ZASZEWSKI**

31 Windofford Place • Shot Rock, New Hampshire 39404  
(555) 555-5555 • Xzaszewski@zaszewski.com

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### **NEW HAMPSHIRE SUPREME COURT-CERTIFIED CIVIL TRIAL ATTORNEY**

**Commercial Litigation ~ Medical Malpractice  
Personal Injury ~ Products Liability**

#### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

##### **Law Offices of Xavier Y. Zaszewski, Hewitt and Shot Rock, NH**

*Sole Practitioner, August 1994 – Present*

Founded and single-handedly maintained successful litigation practice with emphasis on plaintiff's personal injury, medical malpractice, products liability, and commercial litigation, including long-term, temporary *per diem* project services for Spinkey Del Oro, Liberty Mutual, Woodworker Bent & Vanmoor, and others.

- Generated average gross revenues of approximately \$200,000 per year through the personal initiation, cultivation, and settlement or trial of several sizable, highly contested medical malpractice and serious personal injury cases valued at approximately \$4 million.

##### **Michaels, Whimsical & Fairmont, Wilford, NH**

*Senior Litigation Associate, 1990 – 1994*

Prepared, managed, and tried high-volume and complex catastrophic injury, medical malpractice, and products liability matters. Independently handled average volume of 150 plaintiff's personal injury, products liability, and medical malpractice files from inception to conclusion, while providing guidance to younger associates.

- Won all but one of a dozen or more cases tried to conclusion, including two matters receiving full-page write-ups in the *New Hampshire Jury Verdict Review and Analysis*.
- Received the 1993 Top Grossing Associate Award for generating the most new-business revenue.
- Received the 1992 Best Producer Award for successfully settling in excess of 100 litigated cases in one calendar year, with an aggregate value of more than \$2 million.

##### **Brettcorp, Inc., Ramsey, NH**

*General Counsel, 1988 – 1990*

Responsible for hands-on maintenance and disposition of all regulatory, risk exposure, and litigation matters for multi-million-dollar luxury home-improvement and general contracting operation.

- Successfully resolved major business-threatening dispute involving the company's commercial lease/purchase option in relation to environmental cleanup responsibilities to the NJDEP.
- Successfully resolved major litigation involving the company's insurance coverage structure.
- Successfully navigated company through contentious hearings and communications with municipal agencies regarding multiple land use and development issues.

##### **Simpson, Lovejoy & Wiggum, LLP, Hawthorne, NH**

*Senior Commercial Litigation Associate, 1985 – 1988*

*Commercial Litigation Associate, 1981 – 1985*

Worked closely with firm's chief litigation partner, Homer Sampson, a renowned trial attorney.

- Personally managed and successfully settled major plaintiff's sex/religious discrimination litigation against a large, publicly traded international corporation defended by a nationally known litigation firm in 1985.
- Successfully tried and settled several complex business and land use matters before the Chancery Division.
- Authored multiple substantive briefs and motions before the State and Federal Courts, including the Supreme Court of the United States and the Third Circuit.

#### **EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND**

**Rutgers University Law School, Newark, NJ**

*Bachelor of Arts*

**New York University, New York, NY**

*Juris Doctor*



In addition to the examples in this chapter, there are plenty of other resume scenarios that might merit some significant brainstorming and strategizing. While it would be impossible to cover them all, the tips in this chapter should be enough to get you thinking in the right direction. Almost any weakness can be effectively minimized, or even turned into a strength. Remember that there is rarely such a thing as a perfect candidate for a position and that legal employers are human beings who have had their own ups and downs in their careers. Legal employers have also left positions, been victims of downsizing, and/or made career moves that weren't the smartest. So don't dwell on what is lacking in your resume. Instead, focus on making your strengths so prominent that your weaknesses are completely overshadowed.





## CHAPTER 8:

# COVER LETTER BASICS

The one statement I hear over and over again from clients is this: “I have absolutely no idea what belongs in a cover letter.” To take some of the confusion out of it, I tell them to compare a cover letter to a movie or a book. The best movies and books are compelling, make us think without being over our heads, and are only as long as they need to be. The same goes for your cover letter. Effective cover letters come in all shapes and sizes. As with a resume, the length and content of your letter should be dictated by how much you actually need to tell the person you are writing to. If you feel that your resume speaks for itself, you probably don’t need a lengthy cover letter. If you feel, however, that your resume doesn’t fully showcase your potential, despite having fleshed out your experience and strengths as much as possible, then you might require a longer letter to get your point across. While your resume should contain everything that’s vital to your candidacy, there are some things that just cannot be fully expressed by a resume alone. An effective cover letter will step in where your resume leaves off and further highlight your strengths and diminish your weaknesses.

### The Five Qualities of a Fantastic Cover Letter:

1. It briefly addresses “who you are” and “what you want.”
2. It highlights your most relevant experience and skills.
3. It tells employers what you can do for them.
4. It delves into any attributes that cannot be explained in full on your resume.
5. It addresses any “red flags” that will be raised by your resume.

**Read on for a more detailed discussion of each of these aspects:**

#### **1) Your cover letter needs to briefly address “who you are” and “what you want.”**

One important thing that you need to accomplish in the first paragraph of your cover letter is to tell the reader who you are and what you are looking for. In other words, why are you writing



to this person? It doesn't always have to be in the first sentence, but at some point in your first paragraph, you should provide this information. Employers don't like to hunt for the meaning of your letter, so don't beat around the bush.

The standard sentence is usually "I am an X seeking X," but there are many forms that this type of sentence can take. Here are a few examples:

I am a third-year law student looking forward to applying my legal training to a position with a dynamic intellectual property firm.

I am a skilled labor and employment attorney interested in a position with your company.

My unique combination of experience in both the education and legal settings makes me an ideal candidate for the senior counsel position with the Cromwell County School District.

As an experienced and successful litigator, I feel well prepared to take the next step in my career by assuming a senior associate position with your firm.

You can also phrase this in the form of a question:

Could your firm use a talented negotiator who has spent seven years increasing profits and satisfying clients?

Many of these sentences highlight the job seekers' strengths in conjunction with describing who they are—which leads to the next important attribute of a cover letter:

## **2) Your cover letter needs to highlight your most relevant experience and skills.**

In addition to stating who you are and what you want, you need to hook the reader with your first few sentences. Otherwise, why should he/she bother reading on?

Things you may want to highlight early on in your letter include the following: big/prestigious firm names, strong academic background, specialized experience, and/or notable achievements.



**Here are a few examples:**

I previously practiced law at both White & Case and Davis Polk & Wardwell in New York before moving to Baltimore and my current position at Piper Rudnick.

Since graduating in the top 10% of my class from Fordham Law School, I have gained significant experience in the legal and international business fields.

I offer expertise in securities law, and I am adept at helping companies navigate the increasingly complex web of state and federal securities regulations.

Make sure you keep in mind the employer's particular needs when choosing which strengths to highlight. If the job you are responding to asks for an intellectual property litigator with 5-7 years of experience who is licensed in California, what better way to grab the employer's attention than starting your letter with: I am a California-licensed intellectual property litigator with six years of experience.

You don't want to spend a paragraph talking about your abilities in the courtroom if you are targeting a transactional position, or your immigration experience if you're seeking a job in employment law.

One way to ensure that your letter passes this test is to match it up with an actual job description. Take a look at this description:

Fantastic opportunity! Outstanding law firm needs an intelligent, talented real estate associate. 3-5 years experience. Perhaps a bit more senior if you can be flexible with your year group. Significant experience in leasing, financing, purchase, and sale. Top schools desired, as well as top grades. Will consider lesser schools if top 10%. Must be California licensed. Firm offers a great working atmosphere. This is an outstanding opportunity to make a difference.

Now, here would be an ideal letter for this position, assuming you possess all of these qualifications.

Dear X:

I am a cum laude graduate of New York University School of Law with eight years of experience



practicing real estate law. Having recently relocated to California and earned admission to the California Bar, I am seeking an opportunity to lend my skills to a dynamic firm such as yours.

I offer extensive experience in leasing, financing, purchases, and sales. As I realize I may be a bit senior for the position you advertised, I am willing to be flexible with regard to year classification to avail myself of the fantastic opportunity you've described.

I hope to meet with you to further discuss my potential to benefit your real estate practice.

Sincerely,  
Qualified Real Estate Attorney

This letter addresses each and every requirement listed. Now not all job descriptions are going to be this concise. In those cases, you should try to hit the most important requirements.

In addition, not all attorneys will be as perfectly qualified as Mr. Real Estate Attorney. In this case, you may choose to omit mention of those requirements you don't meet. Or if you think you offer experience that is commensurate with the requirements, albeit not a perfect match, you should explain why that is so.

### **3) Tell employers what you can do for them.**

A good cover letter supplements, not reiterates, a resume. Instead of giving a condensed version of your job descriptions, you want to tell the reader how your experience makes you qualified to do the job you want. In other words, translate your experience. Here are some examples of how that might be done:

As a seasoned legal professional, I offer:

- keen legal analysis and drafting skills;
- diplomacy in working with and negotiating with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds;
- an ability to litigate aggressively if needed; and
- the foresight to prevent the vast majority of matters from reaching that point.



OR

As a general counsel, I have demonstrated my ability to determine the relevant issues, negotiate cost-effective contracts, draft error-free documents, and successfully manage and foster relationships. I have an insider's perspective on client needs, a finely honed business sense, and an entrepreneurial approach to client development.

OR

My career has been marked by accomplishments in which I provided benefit through cutting costs, ensuring regulatory compliance, streamlining operations, and counseling senior management on matters of strategy. I am confident that the skills and qualities that permitted me to excel in my endeavors to date will allow me to add value to your business as well.

Sheila wanted to make a switch from a law firm to an in-house position. She wanted a job with more regular hours that would allow her to spend more time with her family. She also wanted to work closer to home. Her third reason for wanting to make a change was that she was growing bored of her position, which she'd held for 10 years. In addition, she didn't feel that she would make partner, and she thought she'd have a better chance of growing within a corporate environment.

This was Sheila's original cover letter:

I am an experienced corporate attorney, writing to express my interest in obtaining a position with your company. As indicated on the enclosed resume, I have 10 years of experience representing corporate clients as an associate with Bloc & Wolff, LLP. While this has been a valuable experience, I now desire a less rigorous position that will enable me to spend more time with my family. I am also looking forward to being more challenged and learning a new set of skills as an in-house attorney. Finally, I am seeking a position that provides significant growth potential, as I hope to earn a promotion after proving my abilities.

If your company offers such an opportunity, please contact me at your earliest convenience to arrange an interview. I look forward to hearing from you.



Sheila's reasons for seeking a new position are perfectly understandable. But should she have conveyed these reasons in her letter? No way! An employer's aim in hiring a new employee is not to make that employee's life better. Sure, employers hope that by virtue of working for their firm or company, employees will be happy and fulfilled. But an employer's primary ambition is to hire someone who will improve the company or law firm (and increase its bottom line). Therefore, you need to focus your letter on what you have to offer, not what you have to gain.

Here is the revised version of Sheila's letter:

I am an experienced corporate attorney, writing to express my interest in obtaining a position with your company. As indicated on the enclosed resume, I have 10 years of experience representing corporate clients as an associate with Bloc & Wolff, LLP. In addition, I spent three years prior to law school managing all facets of my family's real estate business. As such, I offer a combination of legal and business experience that will enable me to:

- Deliver timely, practical legal advice and representation to senior-level management;
- Develop effective litigation strategy and direct litigation counsel in a cost-conscious manner;
- Assist in achieving regulatory compliance;
- Perform general legal transactions, such as contract review, negotiation, and drafting;
- Provide value-conscious oversight of outside counsel;
- Maximize the investment return on intangible assets through management of your intellectual property; and
- Deliver legal training to management and employee groups.

#### **4) Your cover letter needs to delve into any attributes that cannot be explained in full on your resume.**

Sometimes there are elements of your experience that are very difficult to get across in a resume. You may have gone to a school that has a unique curriculum. Maybe it's known for its intensive writing program; maybe it has a unique externship program; or maybe you participated in a class with a particular professor who had a great impact on you. In these situations, a cover letter is a good outlet for providing this extra information.



Consider Northeastern University Law School, for example. Northeastern has a unique curriculum that allows students to gain hands-on experience outside of the classroom in place of typical courses. Here is how that can be explained in a cover letter:

Through Northeastern's highly individualized course of study, I have been able to acquire exposure not afforded to most law students. The program employs an intensive system whereby half of each student's time is spent in full-time legal environments (referred to as "co-ops") in which we earn increased responsibility.

You can also use your cover letter to give more details about a particular project you worked on, commendations you received, particular areas you excelled in, etc.

**Here's an example of how your experience might be expanded upon in your letter:**

As a law clerk, I was frequently trusted to perform complex research and drafting without supervision. I played a critical role in a products liability case, as my findings resulted in a significantly reduced settlement for the plaintiff. Another highlight during my clerkship was a contract dispute case I could truly call my own. I was almost exclusively responsible for all aspects of it: meeting with the client and witnesses, ascertaining the facts, vacating a default judgment, pleading an answer to breach of contract claims, and asserting 16 counterclaims.

You will want to highlight any transferable skills in your letter as well, particularly if you are coming to the law from a different profession or switching practice areas:

In addition to my academic credentials, I come to you as a proven performer with an extensive business background that has provided me with highly transferable skills: I am a creative problem solver and consensus builder; I am skilled at conflict resolution and mediation; I readily earn the trust and respect of clients and colleagues; I keep confidences well; and I am adept at structuring plans to meet people's unique objectives.

In essence, you want to use the middle paragraph(s) of your letter to make your experience more "real" to employers.





## **5) Your cover letter needs to address any “red flags” that will be raised by your resume.**

One very important function of a cover letter is to address any potential negatives surrounding your candidacy. This is a tricky notion. There are some things that are better left unaddressed. For instance, if you have a gap in your employment history because you were taking time to develop your shopping and poolside lounging skills, this is not something to mention. However, if you have a gap in your employment because you took one year off immediately after law school to build homes for the poor in Mexico, this is something worth mentioning, lest employers assume you were shopping and lying by the pool.

When deciding whether or not to explain a potential red flag, you should solicit the advice of someone unfamiliar with your situation. Allow that person to read your resume and cover letter, and ask him/her what conclusions he/she has drawn. Maybe that person didn't even notice the two-year gap in your employment because it was 10 years ago. Maybe that person didn't see the absence of a GPA as a bad thing because you'd won a number of awards in law school and participated on Law Review.

Once you've decided that something does need to be addressed, it's time to put on your “spin doctor” cap.

### **Avoid negative words!**

Here is a portion of a cover letter that I came across recently:

I've been fortunate to have found the occupation I love—the law. Although I do not have extensive experience in this field, the experience I do have has only furthered my commitment. As a second-year student, I have begun to refine my research and analytical skills. While they are not yet as refined as they need to be, I am confident that they will quickly develop as I begin working in a law firm environment.

When you are addressing red flags in your cover letter, avoid words such as “although,” “despite,” and “notwithstanding.” These words automatically signal that something negative is to come. Even if you are discussing something negative, you want to put a positive spin on it. Check out these two examples:



### **Bad:**

Although my cumulative GPA was not very high, my academic performance consistently increased each semester.

### **Good:**

The fact that my academic performance continually improved throughout law school demonstrates my perseverance and commitment to growth.

You don't need to point out the negative in order to make your point. Instead, you want to present any negative situations in as positive a light as possible. Showing a positive attitude about your given situation conveys to employers that you will also be able to "roll with the punches" in the workplace.

Additionally, if you have issues to address, don't address them in the first paragraph. Beginning your letter with "After taking a five-year hiatus from legal practice, I am ready to resume working," is not going to hook your reader in a positive way. If you show the employer what you have to offer first, however, that five-year hiatus might seem a little more palatable.

Whatever your situation may be, if you keep in mind the following three things, you will successfully spin your negative into a positive.

1. Keep it brief—the longer your explanation, the more defensive you'll sound.
2. Be optimistic—give the employer the impression that you're eager and ready to move on to bigger and better things.
3. Always remember, avoid negative words —you don't need to tell the employer what you don't offer to convey what you do offer.

Chapter 9 provides examples of how specific red flags can be addressed in your cover letter.

## **Frequently Asked Cover Letter Questions**



## 1) What is the proper tone of a cover letter?

When an employer reads your cover letter, he/she forms a certain impression of who you are—both as a professional and as a person. The tone and content of your cover letter might give employers the impression that you're smart, ambitious, obnoxious, stodgy, funny, arrogant, meticulous, crazy, etc. These impressions can be part stereotype, part knowledge, and part gut feeling. But the fact is they can sometimes have tremendous bearing on your ability to get an interview.

While it is important that your cover letter highlight your professional and academic achievements, you also need to be aware of the less tangible message it sends: Does it talk down to the reader? Does it make you sound immature? Does it give the reader a sense of your personality? Does it overwhelm the reader?

Those same intangible qualities that draw people to you as a friend are those qualities that may draw people to you as an employee. You want employers to come away from reading your cover letter and say "This is someone I want to meet."

Dan was an experienced attorney who was having trouble with his job search. He sent me a copy of the cover letter that had generated no results. He chalked this up to the fact that he was looking in a different geographic location from where he lived at the time.

### Here is Dan's original letter:

I am an extremely accomplished litigation attorney who has won countless trials, achieved status in the community, and outperformed all of my colleagues. In the near future, I will be relocating to the South Florida area, and I would like explore what opportunities your firm might offer an attorney of my caliber. I will contact your office in the near future to schedule that meeting.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dan Simmons, Esq.



When I spoke to Dan on the phone, I was surprised to find that he was very humble, funny, and easygoing. These weren't the adjectives that came to mind after reading his letter. He said he had written it according to the advice of a colleague, who said that aggression works well in a cover letter. While some aggression is a good thing (you want to appear confident in your abilities), too much can frighten or turn off the reader. Drawing on what I learned of Dan's personality, I revised his letter to convey what he offered in a less aggressive manner:

I am a seasoned attorney with extensive experience in litigation, trial, and appellate work. In the near future, my family and I will be relocating to the South Florida community from Vermont, and I am looking to bring my skills and expertise to a dynamic firm such as yours.

Throughout my career, I have had considerable success due to my discipline, ability to forge trusting relationships with clients, and willingness to take on new challenges. In addition, I have been able to balance the adversarial nature of my work by maintaining my sense of humor. I feel that these traits can be of value to your practice. Furthermore, I have established many ties in my community through volunteer work and service on community boards, and I look forward to displaying a similar dedication to my new hometown.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you in person regarding any positions you may have available. If you would like to arrange a meeting, please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dan Simmons

There is much debate about the proper tone of a cover letter. There aren't many things that can be labeled right or wrong in this debate—it is largely a matter of personal style. A sentence that one person feels is too aggressive might be considered perfectly suitable by someone else. Therefore, this is a situation in which you want to solicit the opinion of others. If you have a fairly aggressive personality, you may not be the best person to judge how your letter comes across.

Conversely, if you have trouble selling yourself, a third party can help you play up your experience for what it's worth.



For the most part, you want to appear assertive without being pushy. If you oversell yourself, it will be a turnoff. If you undersell yourself, you will be overlooked.

**See these two examples:**

**#1**

Perhaps, if you decide that my credentials aren't too awful, you would consider possibly thinking about calling me to see if you might want to interview me at some time convenient for you—even if it is inconvenient for me.

**#2**

I am positive you will find me to be a beyond-perfect candidate for your associate position, and I expect to hear from you ASAP. I will be available next Thursday at 3:00 pm, and assuming I don't hear otherwise, I will be at your office, prepared for an interview.

Obviously these are two extreme examples. But it goes to show you how the same basic request can be worded in drastically different ways.

Your goal is to fall somewhere in the middle of these two examples:

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and further discuss my credentials and the needs of your firm. Please contact me at your convenience to arrange an interview.

For the purposes of a general cover letter, you want to be fairly conservative in your tone. Focus on what appeals to the masses vs. the individual. When you are applying to advertised positions or positions that require certain personality traits, however, it is fine, even recommended, to adjust the tone of your letter depending on the employer or the type of job.

**Check out these two job descriptions:**

**#1**

Are you sick of big-firm bureaucracy and administrative headaches? We're your answer! Small, congenial, and successful law firm seeks a junior bankruptcy attorney with experience and a real aptitude for bankruptcy work. Sense of humor is a must! Candidates for this position must be members of the California Bar and have 2-4 years of solid bankruptcy litigation experience,



as well as excellent verbal and written communication skills. We offer a laid-back environment—partners wear Hawaiian shirts to work!—with in-house happy hours every Thursday.

## #2

Attorney needed for in-house legal department of a NYSE-listed corporation. Four to six years of experience required drafting and negotiating various types of contracts (including manufacturing, supply, and design agreements), leases, and license agreements. Must be able to communicate issues concisely and effectively to business people and executive management, both verbally and in writing. Fast-paced work environment requires strong time-management skills, ability to work independently on multiple projects at the same time, and willingness to work long hours as necessary to respond to constantly changing demands, priorities, and deadlines.

Obviously, description #1 is written in a very different tone from the second. If you were applying to this firm, you would want to make your letter a little less formal in order to match this tone. In addition, because a sense of humor is listed as a requirement, you would want to infuse your letter with some character.

Likewise, your letter for #2 would be more professional in accordance with the tone of the job description.

For the purposes of a large job search, you want to create a letter that is fairly conventional, with just a few touches of personal flair. Chances are, for every person who finds that “wacky” opening line great, there will be 50 who just think it’s strange.

## 2) What length should my cover letter be?

Your cover letter should never exceed one page. Within that limit, the length of your cover letter should be dictated by how much you absolutely need to say. If you need four paragraphs to convey pertinent information, so be it. If you need only two sentences, so be it.

As a general rule, if your resume is fairly long, your cover letter should be fairly short, and vice versa. You don’t want to bombard someone with a lengthy resume and then have him/her read a long letter on top of it. If your resume is long, let your experience do the talking. On the other hand, if your resume doesn’t have much to say, then your cover letter probably needs to explain why.





### **3) What is the protocol for requesting an interview? Should I tell the employer that I will contact him/her at a certain time, rather than asking to be contacted?**

Somewhere along the line, this piece of advice became widely popular, and it is still told to job seekers on a fairly frequent basis. I think this is a bad idea. Here's why:

Most people are extremely annoyed by telemarketers, and it's usually not because they have no interest in what the telemarketer is selling. Almost anyone would like to save money on his/her telephone bill or to subscribe to a popular magazine for half the usual subscription price. The reason telemarketers are annoying is because they're interrupting your life and your schedule to pitch their product. Even if they're offering long-distance telephone calls for one cent per minute, you're not going to want to hear about it if you're in the middle of dinner or your favorite TV show. You'd rather contact them on your own time.

The same goes for employers. An employer might think you're a great candidate, but if he/she is on a tight deadline, in a meeting, traveling for business, eating lunch, or just plain not in the mood to deal with the hiring situation, he/she will not appreciate your phone call. Employers would rather set aside a period of time to phone any candidates they are interested in.

The second reason that indicating you will call is a bad idea is that it promotes procrastination on behalf of the employer. If someone reads a cover letter stating "I will call you next week to further discuss my application," he/she may just put your letter aside, figuring that he/she will deal with it whenever you call.

But, you say, I've heard of stories where someone called an employer and was offered an interview on the spot, just because the employer was tired of wading through applications or had simply been too busy to begin calling people.

There is definitely something to be said for following up. If you've submitted an application to an employer and three weeks have gone by without a response, it can't hurt to give a quick call just to put yourself on the employer's radar (see Chapter 10 on follow-up for some phone call tips). But you should give employers a chance to contact you at a time of their convenience. If you've done your job and convinced an employer he/she needs what you have to offer, it won't be a problem for that person to pick up the telephone and push a few buttons.



#### **4) Do I need to show I've researched the firm/company I'm applying to?**

A lot of people are very concerned with making their cover letters specific to each company/firm they apply to in order to show that they've researched the employer. Spending some time exploring the ins and outs of a particular firm or company is something that is very important at the interview stage, but less so at the cover letter/resume stage.

Of course, you don't want to say "I'm eager to work in a small-firm environment" if you're applying to a large firm. In addition, you should try to address your letter to a hiring point person, not just to "Sir or Madam." But outside of ascertaining some basic facts, the time it would take to research specifics about each employer solely for the purpose of inserting this information into your cover letter is time that could be better spent in other ways.

If you are completely in love with a particular company/firm for a particular reason, then go ahead and tell that entity why. A letter that is very personalized and shows that you really know what the company/firm is about is appealing. In addition, if you know someone within the organization or have been referred by someone to this particular organization, you should definitely include this person's name in your cover letter.

Things such as inserting firm/company names into the letters or mentioning practice areas and/or firm size, however, do not make your letter seem any less "generic." Especially when you just make it seem as though you've researched the firm without really saying anything substantial. Here's an example of a type of sentence that crops up frequently in cover letters:

My interest in Blackwell & Harrison is based on many factors, including the size of your firm, your firm's practice areas, and Blackwell & Harrison's status as a highly reputable firm.

Does this really convey that the author knows anything about this firm? In the age of mail merge and speedy word processing programs, every employer with half a brain knows that it's not difficult to quickly insert a firm name into the body of a letter. Have you ever received one of those solicitation letters in the mail that says something like "You, Bob, are sure to be impressed by the discount vacuum cleaners in our warehouse. Bob, your floor will be the cleanest on the block!"



Does the fact that your name has been inserted into a form letter make you want to rush out and purchase a vacuum from those people? No.

In almost all cases, when an attorney or law student is looking for a job, he/she is looking at more than one place of employment. Employers know this. They do not think that they are the only ones receiving a letter and resume from you, and including a few specific details will not fool them into thinking this. Therefore, don't spend too much time finding out little details or creating mail merges just for the sake of "personalizing" each cover letter. If you're not what an employer is looking for, the fact that you've included "mid-sized law firm" in your letter is not going to convince him/her otherwise.

#### **5) Should I mention salary requirements in my cover letter?**

You want to have an opportunity to impress the employer and convince the employer that his/her law firm or company needs you before you negotiate your salary. For that reason, salary is something that should only be discussed after an interview, once you've received an offer.

Some legal job seekers think that mentioning salary requirements in their letters will save them the hassle of interviewing for a job that offers less than they'd be willing to take. But this possible negative is outweighed by the possible positives. It's possible that after meeting you and seeing what a great employee you'd be, the person doing the hiring would be willing to give you a salary above and beyond what he/she had initially set as a maximum. In addition, as I will discuss in more detail at the end of this book, I don't think there's such a thing as a "wasted interview." Even if things don't work out and you don't take the position because the salary is too low, you will have learned something from the experience.

If you worry that employers might deem you overqualified based on your past positions, you may want to mention your flexibility with regard to salary. Here's an example of how to do this:

As I realize that this is somewhat of a career change, I am willing to be flexible regarding starting salary.

OR

I am aware that my fifteen years of experience exceeds the seven to ten years the position requires. As such, I am flexible with regard to year classification and compensation.



You need to be careful here. If you're not positive that this will be a concern, you may be selling yourself short by mentioning this. You don't want an employer to lowball you because you expressed that you were willing to take a lower salary. Only mention this if 1) you can truly afford a lower salary and 2) you are confident that your experience doesn't match up with that of your competitors.

There is definitely room for some ingenuity with regard to cover letter format. This doesn't mean that you can doodle pictures in the margins or use purple ink, but you can deviate a bit from the standard layout if you don't feel that it best conveys your strengths. Below is the standard format for a cover letter:

Employer's Address

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Sincerely,

Signature

*Your name (typed)*

Enclosure

While this three-paragraph, left-aligned format is the most popular, you don't always need to use it.

The same rule that applies to resume format applies to cover letter format: The format of your cover letter should be dictated by your particular experience. Aside from the basics—date, address, salutation, body, closing, and signature—you are free to use some creativity in presenting what you have to say.

Bullet points allow you highlight some specific aspects of your experience. They can be used to separate entire paragraphs (as in Example 1) or to emphasize certain qualifications or skills (Example 2).

### **Example #1**

Dear X:

I am a recent graduate of the Georgetown University Law Center, writing to express my interest in joining your firm. As my enclosed resume illustrates, I offer a substantial professional background in project management and finance with JPMorgan Investment Bank, where I have proven myself as a high-performing employee. Although I have greatly enjoyed my tenure with JPMorgan, I elected to go to law school because my true desire was to pursue a dynamic career in litigation—a goal which I am now eager to fulfill. A few of the skills that I believe will make me an asset as an associate include:



- Time-management skills: I graduated in the top 15% of my law school class while maintaining full-time employment (often exceeding 60 hours per week) and volunteering my time with Legal Aid in Washington, DC.
- Ability to assume heavy responsibility: During my time with JPMorgan, I quickly progressed from an entry-level accountant position to managing a staff of 15 employees. I have also managed large projects, such as an implementation of a foreign bank branch, and the roll-out of a new travel and entertainment expense system to all of JPMorgan's North America locations.
- Ability to increase efficiency: The nature of my job with JPMorgan requires me to constantly seek out ways to streamline operations, cut costs, and negotiate expeditiously between parties in order to reach the best possible compromise.

I would welcome the opportunity to further discuss with you my qualifications and your current needs. If you would like to arrange a meeting, please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

R.P.

## **Example #2**

Dear X:

As an experienced corporate counsel with strong business and negotiation skills, I have a lot to offer your company. Having worked as an attorney in various divisions of Microsoft, I am well versed in all facets of in-house practice. Now, I would like to bring my expertise to your company's legal department.

A brief and partial listing of my qualifications and accomplishments includes:

- Extensive contract-negotiation and drafting skills, as well as effective legal support of sales, marketing, procurement, and human resources functions;
- Developing a practice that became principal legal support for all marketing and sales activities in a \$2 billion per year division;





ATTORNEY SEARCH

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- Working closely with Microsoft's senior management on strategic decision making;
- Recognition by both peers and supervisors, as evidenced by numerous Microsoft awards; and
- A history of active community involvement with charitable and nonprofit organizations.

I look forward to discussing your company's objectives and my ability to help you achieve them.  
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

M.Y.



## CHAPTER 9:

# DRAFTING A COVER LETTER FOR ANY SITUATION

You failed the bar exam—four times. You quit your last position because you thought your boss was an unethical scumbag. You took time off to backpack through Europe after graduation, unexpectedly fell in love, and spent the next three years frolicking through the streets of Paris with your amour—all before he/she vanished into thin air and you decided it was time to practice law. These may be extreme examples, but most job seekers have something that they feel might keep them from obtaining their ideal job, even if their resumes are in great shape. That’s where the cover letter comes in. The following pages will help you to assess what your cover letter needs to say based on your own unique situation.

### When Your Resume Speaks for Itself

Congratulations! The five years you put in at X and the three years you put in at Y have led you to exactly where you want to be. There’s nothing on your resume that you need to explain away, and you’re utterly confident in your ability to effectively handle the job you want. When you read job descriptions, not once do you think, “Well, that doesn’t exactly describe me, but I still think I could do the job.” In fact, you feel like those job descriptions have been written just for you.

If you were nodding yes while reading this, consider yourself very lucky. In general, the more qualified you are, the less information you need to put into your cover letter. Keep it short and sweet. Your goal is to get the employer’s full attention on your resume, so he/she can discover just how perfect you really are. An effective cover letter for you might be something as simple as this:

Dear X:

I am an ideal candidate for the Bankruptcy Associate position. My enclosed resume illustrates why.

Yours truly,

Confident Attorney



Of course, your letter doesn't have to be quite this short to be effective. Here's an example of a brief letter that has a little more meat on its bones:

Dear X:

I am a highly skilled legal and business professional with experience conducting high-level, multi-million-dollar negotiations with companies such as IBM and Unisys, saving my employers and clients millions of dollars on licensing and procurement agreements.

I am now seeking an opportunity to use my versatile skill set and the knowledge I have gained through helping to grow several businesses for the benefit of your company. To that end, I ask to be considered for an in-house counsel position. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to further outline how my experience can be of value to your business and its bottom line. If you would like to arrange a meeting, please contact me at your earliest convenience. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Concise Attorney

Enclosure

If you don't feel that your resume speaks for itself, you will have a little more convincing to do. The following examples will provide you with tips on how to use your cover letter to compensate for what your resume lacks.

### **The Inexperienced Attorney**

Trying to get your first job can be a bit of a Catch 22. It's hard to find a job without any experience, yet you can't get any experience until you find a job.

If you are in this situation, your cover letter is important. Because your resume doesn't reflect the kind of experience that your ideal job requires, your best shot is to convince an employer of your greatness through a heartfelt and well-written letter.



Your number-one selling point is going to be your enthusiasm. Of course, experience often wins in the enthusiasm vs. experience battle, but enthusiasm puts up a good fight. You want let the person reading your letter know that what you lack in practical experience will be more than made up for by your work ethic, determination, and excitement about the position. Does it guarantee you the job? No, but maybe it will get you an interview. And if it comes down to you and someone who seems bored, chances are you'll win.

Here are some examples of letters from job seekers with virtually no practical legal experience:

**#1**

Dear XXX:

My passion for litigation led me to a career in law. I am happiest and most productive when presented with an adversary; however, I am able to view situations objectively in determining how to advantageously continue or conclude an ongoing confrontation. Nothing excites me like the thrill of besting an opponent, but I find victories resulting from team efforts all the more satisfying.

My passion is apparent through my performance in courses such as Civil Procedure, Federal Courts, Evidence, Pretrial Advocacy, and Trial Advocacy and through my remarkable success to date as a persuasive writer. Even when operating in areas in which I had little or no prior knowledge or when arguing a position with which I did not agree, I have been able to craft cogent and persuasive arguments to great success.

I am eager to begin my legal career at a firm such as yours and would welcome the opportunity to speak with you in person regarding my potential to benefit your practice as a first-year associate. Please contact me at your earliest convenience if you would like to arrange an interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Impassioned Litigator



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**#2**

Dear XXX:

I am a third-year law student at the University of Arizona College of Law, interested in joining your firm as an associate. Upon my graduation in May, I will be relocating to California and sitting for the July bar exam. Given my passion for and commitment to the field of employment law, I am confident that I would be a valuable addition to your legal team.

Since I began my undergraduate studies at Southern Methodist University, it has been my unwavering goal to pursue a career that will lead to long-term improvements in the condition of employment relations in this country. My fascination with the employment field has led me to explore many different aspects of employer/employee relations, and now I am eager to use the knowledge I have gained to bring my goal to fruition by joining the ranks of employment lawyers nationwide.

I have come to realize that a true understanding of the law can only come from an appreciation of the larger context in which it exists. To that end, I have studied labor and corporate economics, the evolution of team-processes and human resource management, the history of employment conditions and workplace organizations, the approaches of different countries and business entities to complicated labor issues, and the competitive pressures that management must address.

Employment attorneys are in the unique position of being able to shape policy, both by addressing clients' problems and by providing policy advice to those with the power to make meaningful changes in existing laws and management policies. In addition to advocating on behalf of clients, I look forward to making a difference on a larger scale as a representative of your firm.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss my qualifications and the opportunities offered by your firm. If you are interested in a hardworking, dedicated associate, please contact me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Dedicated Attorney



## **The Not-Quite-Qualified Attorney**

If you are in this group, you often find yourself reading job descriptions that almost describe your skill set. They want five years of experience; you have three. They want top-25 law school graduates; your school was ranked 35th. They want someone with defense litigation experience; you only have plaintiff's experience.

You know you can do the job given the chance. So how do you beat out those who also want the job AND have the perfect qualifications?

First, be aware that few of those perfect candidates actually exist. When employers write job descriptions, they are describing their ideal candidate. But as we all know, ideal is hard to come by. Most employers expect to receive applications from those a little less qualified than the description asks for, and they will consider those candidates if they show potential. So don't be put off if the job description doesn't describe you exactly.

If you feel that you're not quite meeting the requirements of the job you want, you need to really sell your accomplishments—even if they don't have to do with the legal profession. Every job comes with a learning curve. No one has ever arrived on his/her first day, sat down at his/her desk, and never asked a question about anything. For this reason, you can make up for what might be lacking in your candidacy by showing that you are a fantastic employee who will be able to learn the ropes in no time—even faster than that guy with eight years of experience. If an employer can look at your resume and say "Wow! This person is an achiever," he/she will believe you have the potential to learn anything you might not already know.

If you truly feel confident that you can do the work the position requires, then it will just take a little creativity and perseverance to convince employers of the same. You need to hype up the responsibility you've held and show how you've exceeded expectations in past positions. Here's an example:

Dear XXX:

I am currently practicing as an associate with the AmLaw 100 firm of Blackwell, Crow & Johnson. While the firm is extremely pleased with my work product and professional development, I find that a litigation-oriented practice is not the best fit for my interests and strengths as an attorney.



As such, I am looking to move into a transactional practice, where I can build solid client relationships. I believe that I am extremely well suited to make this transition and to benefit your team of attorneys.

In my current position, I participate in the defense of major insurance carriers in high-dollar litigation. I entered the firm knowing nothing about this area of law and quickly became an expert in it, to the point that I am now frequently called upon as a resource by junior associates. I performed a similar feat in my prior position as a contract attorney with Barney, Cohen & Collinsworth. Here, my assignment involved complex preferential payment actions connected with the Wexler bankruptcy, and I brought myself up to speed rapidly in this area as well. The result was more than \$1 million in pre-filing settlements.

I am now looking forward to applying my keen ability to absorb and analyze information to fresh challenges in a transactional practice. Please contact me to further discuss the contributions I can make to your firm.

Sincerely,

High Achiever

In addition to playing up your overall excellence, you should emphasize any specialized skills you possess in the area(s) you are interested in. Give details about projects you've worked on in those areas and the regulations you're familiar with as a result. Buzzwords and in-the-know phrases are key—if you are applying for a job as a labor and employment attorney and you misuse ERISA, you will be seen as inexperienced.

Perhaps your qualifications for the job you want aren't clearly represented by your primary job descriptions or your educational background. Maybe you went through something with your family that required you to develop expertise in wills and estate planning. Or perhaps you and your brother decided to develop a patent for a device that dispenses beer from a television remote control, and you spent months reading up on patent law as a result. The cover letter allows you to provide this information.

Again, enthusiasm is a valuable tool in this situation. Because you are lacking some qualifications, you want to convince the employer that you would quickly and easily pick up any





unfamiliar skills due to your love of this particular field, as well as your demonstrated track record in past positions.

The following is an example of a letter of a candidate who's just slightly underqualified for a patent/intellectual property position due to his lack of a bachelor's degree in the sciences.

Dear Hiring Coordinator:

I find the intellectual challenge of working at the intersection of law and technology to be quite rewarding. Having explored various areas of law, I found that patent law provides the right combination of challenges and payoffs to keep me engaged. For that reason, I returned to school after earning my J.D. to become qualified to take the USPTO registration exam. I have recently completed nearly 90 hours of technical coursework, including nearly 50 hours in physics and several courses at the graduate level, and I am proud to announce I am finally sitting for the patent exam later this month.

With the final obstacle soon to be cleared, I would like to channel my excitement for intellectual property into a legal career working in patent prosecution, patent litigation, technology licensing, or some combination thereof. To that extent, I believe your firm may be a good place to pursue this goal. Here is what I can offer you:

- A law degree from a top university and a solid history of academic achievement
- The technical expertise to prosecute patent applications in the electronic arts, the mechanical arts, and the associate physical sciences
- Experience as a summer associate at a top IP firm
- A solid work record with references from many satisfied employers
- Seven years of trial-seasoned paralegal experience in a variety of complex litigation settings
- An unparalleled enthusiasm for intellectual property law

If you believe we may be of mutual benefit to one another, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Enthusiastic, mostly qualified attorney

Notice that this letter does not mention what is lacking in the candidate's application. There's no need to point out a negative in order to make your case. As discussed in Chapter 8, try to avoid saying things like "Even though I only have three years of experience..." You're just playing up what you need to play down.

### **Lay-offs/Quitting/Termination**

When an employer sees that your last position carries an end date, he/she will make one of three assumptions: 1) you were fired, 2) you were laid off, or 3) you quit or resigned. Of these three, lay-offs are viewed most favorably and firings most negatively. Therefore, if you were fired, this is definitely not something you want to point out to prospective employers.

When it comes to quitting, resigning, or lay-offs, you need to figure out whether to let employers come to their own assumptions or to explain the situation yourself. There is a big difference between running out of the office in a fury, never to be seen or heard from again, and resigning from a position because you are relocating, your office is relocating, you are going back to school, or you have a family illness or another family situation that requires your attention. If you simply quit your position because you hated it, you should keep this information to yourself. Even if you think your reasons were highly understandable (and they very well could have been), there is a stigma surrounding quitting that may impede your getting another position. Starting your letter with "I hate my current job" isn't going to win you any fans either.

As a general rule, if you have fallen victim to circumstances beyond your control, this is something you should convey in your cover letter. The more employers understand your motivations, the less suspicious they will be about that end date. Lay-offs, for example, are often viewed sympathetically, particularly during an economic slump. For this reason, if you were laid off, you should mention it briefly in your letter; otherwise, employers may assume that you quit or were fired.

Note the word "briefly." If you dwell too much on the explanation, you will seem defensive. You also want to avoid badmouthing your employer or giving too many details surrounding the reasons for your departure.



Here are a few examples of good and bad explanations for the end of a position:

**Good:**

After graduating from the University of Alabama School of Law, I worked as a litigator for Hardey & Michaels, LLP, for 10 years. In 1999, I chose to leave Hardey & Michaels for the unique opportunity to serve as in-house counsel and treasurer for a multi-million-dollar travel agency owned by my wife's family. I enjoyed working in this capacity, but unfortunately, the economic downturn hit the travel business particularly hard. As a result, my wife and I sold our interests in the company and relocated to North Carolina.

**Bad:**

Unfortunately, my supervisor at Hardey & Michaels, LLP, was a mean-spirited, tyrannical psychopath who was known to fire people for no reason at the drop of the hat. I decided to get out before I was next.

**Good:**

After an enjoyable five-year tenure with Howard, Inc., my position unfortunately was eliminated due to a restructuring within the organization. I am taking advantage of this transition period, however, to reinvigorate my career in a challenging new position.

**Bad:**

After putting in five years with Howard, Inc., I was disappointed to learn that my hard work was for naught, as the company was forced to terminate its lowest-performing employees due to financial hardship.

If you've been laid off with some cushion time and you're presently still employed, it is probably in your best interest not to mention the lay-off, unless you've been at your position a short time. Job hopping can be construed negatively, so if a lay-off occurs after a brief time on the job, it is a good idea to explain that to employers. Otherwise, they'll wonder what happened that led you to leave after only a few months. See the section on short tenures for tips on explaining this.

**Age**

If you don't want to eliminate positions or dates from your resume, another way of dealing with the age factor is to address it outright in your cover letter. If you dismiss the common misperceptions about older attorneys outright, what will employers have left to misperceive?



### **Here are some ways of addressing the age issue:**

I realize that I am not a traditional candidate for a first-year associate position. That said, I believe my strengths are considerable: an excellent academic record, exceptional aptitude for legal reasoning, superior writing skills, extensive court-connected mediation experience, and familiarity with computer legal research via both LexisNexis and Westlaw.

I know when to lead and when to be led, and I look forward to receiving guidance from experienced attorneys.

The law represents a second career for me. For nearly 15 years, I worked as a research scientist for a number of pharmaceutical companies. Through this work, I developed a passion for intellectual property law and the confidence to know that I would excel in this type of work. The advantage I offer, as an experienced candidate, is that I understand my strengths, can compensate for my weaknesses, and know that a career in law is truly what I want for the rest of my life.

I have handled hundreds of depositions, made hundreds of court appearances, and drafted and argued hundreds of law and motion matters, as well as scores of appellate briefs. Please do not rule me out as overqualified, however. What I am seeking is a permanent position in which I can serve in a diligent and occasionally brilliant fashion. In exchange for such, I offer professionalism and loyalty. If you are looking for someone to assume significant responsibility immediately, then I am the ideal candidate.

Just make sure that what you write in your cover letter reflects what's in your resume. For example, if you removed 5 of your 10 years of administrative work experience from your resume in order to conceal your age, don't refer to your 10 years of administrative experience in your cover letter, or you will confuse the reader.

### **Employment Gaps**

If you've been out of work for a while, or there is a significant gap between prior positions, you may want to address this in your cover letter. Don't worry about gaps that are over a few years old, however. When employers look at your resume, they are concentrating primarily on the last 5-10 years of your experience. Therefore, if you were out of work for a period of time several



years ago, but you've been working steadily ever since, it probably won't be noticed. You will only be highlighting the fact that you were out of work by bringing it up. Remember, only mention those things that you are fairly certain will raise a red flag and have direct bearing on your candidacy.

**Here are some examples of ways to address employment gaps:**

For eight years, I practiced as a successful commercial litigator. I left my practice at Tyson & Neiman to have a baby, and now that my child is old enough for me to return to work, I would like to transition my commercial litigation skills to a position as in-house counsel with a dynamic company.

I obtained my J.D. in 1998 and passed the Nevada Bar Exam in 1999, but until recently, I have focused my energies in a direction other than law. With a legitimate chance at qualifying for the professional golf tour, I devoted most of the past three years to training for that goal. After an injury made that pursuit untenable, I returned to the law with renewed passion, and I am now seeking a position that will capitalize on my legal and business training.

Over the past three years, I took some time to assist with my family's business and teach in Puerto Rico, while forming a concrete plan for my career. I have come to the conclusion that a move to Florida and a position with a U.S. law firm is what best suits my goals, talents, and interests. Consequently, I am eager to explore opportunities offered by your firm.

In 1996, I was diagnosed with an illness that left me unable to walk unassisted or work for several years. I am now fully recovered, including being back to training for my beloved Los Angeles Marathon, and I am delighted to have my interrupted career again on track. I mention my prior illness solely to address any concerns that might undermine my otherwise first-rate credentials.

**Short Tenure at Position**

If you have been in a position for a short period of time (less than a year), employers will be curious as to why you are leaving so soon. Exceptions are those positions, such as judicial clerkships, that are only meant to last for a limited period of time.

If you left your position because of an unexpected circumstance, you should convey this in your



cover letter. Otherwise, you run the risk of being labeled flaky by prospective employers, who may assume that you just quit or grew tired of your position after only a few months. Below are some examples of how to explain a short tenure:

Shortly after being admitted to the Illinois Bar, I was excited to accept my first associate position with the litigation firm of Smith & Associates. Unfortunately, due to the downturn in the economy, Smith had to reduce its staff just five months after I began. I did, however, gain valuable experience, upon which I am now eager to expand.

I accepted a position with the Philadelphia firm of Johnson, Jones & Howard in early 2002, unaware at the time that the opportunity to relocate to San Diego would present itself so quickly. During my brief tenure with the firm, however, I familiarized myself with client-management techniques and furthered my knowledge of construction litigation.

My experience with Nathan & Company, while brief, has been extremely valuable and positive. Unfortunately, the office has decided to relocate to Dallas next month, thus necessitating my search for a new position.

## **Career Change**

If you're switching from practice area to practice area, or from a non-legal career to a legal career, you want to be sure to highlight your transferable skills in your cover letter. Because you will essentially be starting over in your new career, you will also want to express some flexibility. Even if you were "top dog" in your last position, you have to accept that you will now be in the position of being led instead of doing the leading.

Zach was a corporate litigation attorney who dreamed of practicing entertainment law in Los Angeles. He had two obstacles to overcome: 1) he lived in Milwaukee, and 2) he didn't have any entertainment experience. What he had going for him, however, was the fact that he worked at a renowned firm, had done well in law school, and had successfully handled some major cases in his career to date.

Because Zach knew he would have a difficult time getting a strictly entertainment-focused position, he decided to seek out firms that practiced entertainment law and those areas of law in which he was already experienced. Here is how Zach approached those firms:



Dear XXX:

I am writing to express my sincere interest in joining your firm as an associate. Currently, I am an associate with the firm of Favre, Starr, Hornung & Nitschke, LLP ("Favre Starr"), in Milwaukee, where I have worked since September 2002. At Favre Starr, my practice has focused primarily on securities and litigation, and I have proven myself as a competent and effective attorney. Now, I am planning a long-awaited move to Los Angeles, where I hope to utilize and expand upon the experience I have gained by becoming a member of your legal team.

My long-term goal has always been to practice entertainment law in Los Angeles. I realize that this is a goal shared by many other attorneys, and as such, my short-term goal is to join a firm at which I can utilize my established knowledge of litigation and corporate law while building experience in my desired field. What is most important to me is the opportunity to "get my foot in the door" of an entertainment practice, and for such an opportunity, I am very flexible with regard to year classification and starting practice area.

I am confident that the pattern of achievement I have established in both my academic and professional endeavors thus far will allow me to similarly achieve success on behalf of your clients. Please contact me to further discuss my ability to benefit your legal team.

Sincerely,

### **Career-Changing Attorney**

This approach made Zach a much more attractive candidate than if he had just asked for an entertainment position. Because he expressed his willingness to slowly make the transition to entertainment law over time, he was putting forth a win-win situation in which he would eventually work in the area he wanted and the firm, in return, would reap the benefit of his corporate expertise.

Another client, Howard, was a retired police officer who was just entering the legal profession.

Howard knew that he would face obstacles as a 50-something job seeker transitioning to his first attorney position. To compensate for this, he explained his reasons for making this choice so late in his career, as well as his openness to receiving guidance from other (most likely younger) attorneys.





Dear XXX:

When I retired from the City of St. Petersburg Police Department in 1998, I had to make an important decision regarding my career. After completing more than 20 years of service and achieving the rank of Lieutenant, I left the Department and my platoon, knowing that I had given my best. As the kind of person who continuously sets new goals, however, I immediately wanted to find another challenge that would allow me to continue to be productive and to benefit my community.

I chose to study law because I enjoyed the legal and analytical challenges present in police work. I began pursuing my degree and found that I had a natural aptitude for legal thinking. I graduated from the New York Law School with a 3.33 GPA, putting me in the top 20% of my class. While completing my coursework, I also held positions as a law clerk and legal intern. In June 2003, I earned my license to practice in Florida.

I am now an entry-level attorney, seeking my first legal employment in my hometown of St. Petersburg, Florida. I am looking for a small firm that values a strong work ethic and seasoned professionalism in which I can practice general civil litigation and/or wills and estates law. I am interested in receiving guidance from experienced attorneys, and I feel confident that my background and training have prepared me to be of good use to my employer.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss the possibility of employment. If that sounds agreeable, please contact me at your earliest convenience. I greatly appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Attorney B

If you are making a change in your career, you need to actively and accurately assess the concerns that employers might have and counteract them in advance through your cover letter. You want to make your choices seem logical so that the employer has a strong sense of where you are coming from.



## You Have a Story to Tell

Sometimes people have unique stories behind their reasons for pursuing a certain career, changing careers, or taking a break from the law—or the working world altogether. If you feel that you have a story that you need to tell in order to make your experience understandable to employers, go ahead and tell it. Just make sure that you don't go overboard. You want to give enough information that the employer understands where you're coming from, but you don't want to write a novel in the process. Below are some examples of cover letters that address unique circumstances in a job seeker's background:

### #1

Dear Hiring Coordinator:

Since graduating cum laude from University of Connecticut Law School in 1996, I have gained significant experience as a corporate attorney and, most recently, as a pro bono attorney helping to advise small businesses in disadvantaged Connecticut communities. In 2002, I left work for several months, as my husband was fighting cancer, and I wanted to focus all of my energy on battling his illness. In light of that experience, I have reevaluated my goals and am now focused on transitioning to a practice in the areas of trusts, wills, and estate planning. As such, I hope to explore opportunities for employment with your firm.

While it was extremely difficult for me to assist my husband with his estate planning needs, drafting his will, naming beneficiaries of his life insurance policies, selecting a healthcare proxy, applying for social security benefits, and managing his disability insurance gave him a sense of control in the midst of all the chaos. I want to give this sense of comfort and control to others.

I am now seeking a new challenge, where I can utilize both my corporate law experience and the legal skills that I have acquired relating to estate planning and administration. I am looking forward to engaging in work that will allow me to pay close attention to clients' needs and help them achieve personal goals.

Please contact me to further discuss my qualifications and your firm's current needs. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Attorney X



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**#2**

Dear X:

Life's greatest opportunities can sometimes come disguised as its toughest challenges. Recent events in my professional life reflect exactly such a situation.

After four years of service, I was recently laid off from Spears, Daugherty & Poor. I began as a summer associate with the firm and continued as an intern; and as an associate, I excelled with the real estate work to which Spears assigned me. As a first-year associate, I was already bringing new clients to the firm. Unfortunately, the changes in the economy made it simply impossible for Spears to maintain all of its numerous real estate attorneys. In 2002, it was found necessary to conduct a third round of massive nationwide layoffs, and I, as a junior associate, was among those who left the firm.

As distressing as this turn of events was, there was a hopeful aspect. I resolved almost immediately to use this opportunity to begin my practice anew in the field that had originally motivated me to become an attorney—environmental law.

I feel well prepared to enter into this practice area. As an undergraduate, I earned simultaneous degrees—a B.A. in Spanish and a B.S. in Geology. Prior to attending law school, I worked as a science research assistant, and while pursuing my law degree, I enrolled in numerous environmental and land use courses. Furthermore, as my previous practice at Spears was primarily real estate-oriented, I have had extensive exposure to site assessments, toxic torts, and construction litigation. Since my layoff, I have been sharpening my expertise in environmental law, as well as taking time out to get married. I am now ready and excited to take on a challenging new position.

As I am entering a new legal area, I am flexible as to year classification and compensation. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you in person my potential with your firm. Please contact me at your earliest convenience if you would like to arrange a meeting.

Sincerely,

Environmental Advocate



### #3

Dear X:

I am a recent law school graduate with extensive real estate experience and an unparalleled work ethic who is interested in joining your firm. Since earning my law degree cum laude from the University of Texas School of Law, I have taken and passed the North Carolina Bar Examination. Now, I am eager to apply my dedication, passion, and motivation as a first-year associate.

As my enclosed resume indicates, I split my legal education between Texas and the Duke University School of Law. This unique circumstance was a result of my having to return home to the North Carolina area after my first year of law school to care for a critically ill family member. Despite the situation at home, however, I maintained a 3.2 at one of the nation's top law schools, refusing to defer my dream of a successful legal career.

Since relocating to the United States with my family at age 12, I have played a crucial role in managing my family's business—a real estate leasing company. As a result, I have developed a keen business sense, excellent communication skills, and the ability to work under pressure.

I truly enjoy the business aspects of legal issues and transactions, and I am confident that my experience, both personal and professional, prepares me to handle your clients' needs. I am no stranger to hard work and know the importance of caring about the work product that is produced. I can adapt quickly to new environments, step up to challenges, and see projects through to successful completion. Additionally, I believe my bilingual skills are an asset given the rapid growth of the Hispanic community in North Carolina.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to personally discuss my qualifications and the ways in which I can benefit your firm. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,

Attorney Z

Not all stories should be told—even if they do help someone understand your plight. If you received poor grades, in particular, the best remedy is to omit any mention of them from both



your resume and your cover letter. If an employer asks for a transcript, at that point, you can provide an explanation. But even then, you should make sure that you don't get into too many personal or intricate details, as they may hurt rather than help. Here is an excerpt of a cover letter I read, which serves as an example of what not to do in telling your story:

Unfortunately, my law school grades were not what they should have been. I became severely stressed after moving out West, away from my family. Then I got wrapped up in a bad relationship with a boyfriend whom my parents hated. I then underwent breast augmentation surgery because I thought it would help my low self-esteem. It didn't. I started having anxiety attacks because of my stress, and I started eating less and less. Plus, there were complications with the surgery, which meant I spent a lot of time away from campus, and I lost many of my friends. This exacerbated my stress even more.

I actually had a very high LSAT score and had excellent grades as an undergraduate. But all of the things that happened during law school caused me to drop to the bottom of my class. I promise that I would do excellent work as an attorney, however, and I would welcome the opportunity to prove it.

Hopefully these examples gave you some insight into how to present yourself in the most flattering light possible, regardless of your situation. It's okay to let a bit of your personality come through in your cover letter. If you can get employers to view you as someone who works hard, who is truly committed to the work you do, and who has succeeded in the past, then you've done your job.



## CHAPTER 10:

# APPLICATION AND FOLLOW-UP PROTOCOL

Applying for a job is a scary thing. It means opening yourself up to the possibility of rejection. It means that you'll be moving beyond what might feel comfortable. You may be experiencing last-minute feelings of guilt or disloyalty toward your current employer for wanting to leave. Or you might be feeling anxiety about where you fit into the legal marketplace. Knowing and understanding that it's scary, however, is the first step in overcoming any fears you may be experiencing. One bit of advice that I've found helpful in my career is this: "If you're never being rejected, you're not aiming high enough." It's true. Finding a job that you like is not easy, but if you approach your decision with a sense of purpose, you will be one step ahead a competitor who puts it off. Don't let your newly drafted resume and cover letter sit on a shelf collecting dust. You've completed the difficult part. Now it's time to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

### Apply! Apply! Apply!

With a few rare exceptions, I don't think you can ever hurt yourself by applying for too many jobs. Perhaps if you're in a very small town, where everyone knows you (and your current boss), this is not a good idea. Or if you are applying for so many jobs that you haven't the slightest clue to whom you're writing or why, you should probably slow down.

But outside of these situations, you should be open to exploring as many jobs as possible before settling on one. See what kind of responses you get. If you're looking in more than one geographic area, is one area "biting" more than another? Are you having better luck with small firms vs. large firms? In-house vs. nonprofit? Applying for numerous jobs will give you a good feel for the job market and how you fit into the current demand.

In addition, each interview you go on will be a valuable learning experience. Interviews can teach you about the effectiveness of your resume and cover letter, what works and what doesn't as far as interviewing techniques, the types of questions asked most frequently, how to handle yourself under pressure, and the differences between various employment environments. Even if all you learned from your interview was that you would rather die than work for firm X or company Y, you still learned something.



Another parallel can be drawn to car purchasing. Those in the market for a car are advised never “to fall in love” with a particular car. This is so that you can walk away if the deal isn’t right. The same goes for jobs. If you wait to send out that lovely resume until the absolutely perfect job comes along, you are only going to hurt yourself. Yes, maybe you’ll land that job and live happily ever after. But it is more likely that 1) you will nervously sit by the phone every night, accuse your roommate/wife/kids of losing messages that never came, and attack your mailman until you drive yourself into a sleepless stupor, only to never even get an interview or 2) you will excitedly go on the interview sporting a new \$1,000 suit only to find that the \$120,000 job in an office overlooking the Pacific is a \$20,000 job (the “1” was a typo) overlooking the Pacific Gas Company.

The more job descriptions you read, letters you write, people you speak to, and interviews you go on, the more you will learn about yourself, your needs, your qualifications, and your marketability. Many people have said that they learned a certain thing was misconstrued on their resume because of an interview. So maybe they didn’t get that particular job, but chances are they fixed the problem and got the next one.

The key is organization. Keep a chart with the name of the employer, the type of position, and the date you applied. This way, when someone calls, you can quickly find out who it is and what position he/she is calling about.

### **Don’t Become a “Resume and Cover Letter Obsessor”**

Equally as dangerous as the resume and cover letter slobs are the resume and cover letter obsessors. Obsessors are those who nitpick and question every single word in their materials. They spend hours debating whether to use “effectively” or “successfully,” “simultaneously” or “at the same time.” They circulate their resumes at dinner parties and take polls on whether their name should be in 18- or 20-point font in their headings.

A little obsessive-compulsive attention to detail isn’t always a bad thing, but the danger is that while you are getting opinions from everyone from your manicurist to your neighbor’s dog walker’s friend whose cousin is an attorney, someone else is sending out their materials and getting the job you might have been perfect for.

Is it important to convey your achievements and strengths in a concise, well-organized resume that’s appealing to the eye? Yes.





Is it important to write a coherent, substantive cover letter that flows well? Yes.

Are employers going to decide whether or not to hire you based on your selection of “Sincerely” over “Very truly yours?” No way.

## **Following Up**

Following up is one of the easiest, least time-consuming things you can do in your job search, and it probably has one of the biggest effects. All too frequently, job seekers spend months perfecting everything—the resume, cover letter, interview suit, hairstyle, etc.—only to land an interview, do well in the interview, and completely drop the ball afterwards.

You should follow up after you apply and after you interview. Remember, an interview is not a one-way street. While you are hoping to impress the interviewer, the interviewer is also hoping that you will find the job appealing and want to take it (if offered). An absence of follow-up usually conveys to the interviewer that you aren’t very interested. And if it comes down to you and someone who sent a thank you note expressing his/her continued interest in the job, why wouldn’t the interviewer go with the sure thing?

Your follow-up or lack thereof also conveys something to employers about your work ethic. Someone who follows up on a job he/she is interested in is more likely to follow up with prospective clients, cases in progress, and every other aspect of his/her work.

## **Following up after the application**

After you’ve applied to a position, you should give the employer(s) two to three weeks to respond. If you follow up too soon, you will seem desperate and most likely annoy the employer, who has probably just been swamped and unable to go through all of the resumes he’s received.

If you’ve applied to an advertised position, chances are a lack of a response means that you ended up in the rejection pile. With the volume of applications received for advertised positions, it’s virtually impossible for employers to respond to all applicants. Still, it doesn’t hurt to call. Here are a few examples of what you might say.

“Hi, this is Brian Smith. I submitted a resume to your firm a few weeks ago, and I was just calling



to make sure it was received and to see where you are in the hiring process.”

OR

“Hi, this is Brian Smith. I submitted a resume to your firm a few weeks ago, and I was calling to see if there’s anything else I can provide, such as a writing sample, or if there are any questions I can answer.”

**This will give the employer an opportunity to give a quick answer:**

“No, we have everything we need,” or

“I’m sorry. We’ve already filled the position,” or

“To tell you the truth, I haven’t even begun to weed through applications yet,” or

“Brian Smith? Hold on a minute. Why, yes, I have your resume right here. It looks good! When can you come in for an interview?”

**Here’s what you shouldn’t say:**

“Hi, this is Brian Smith. I submitted a resume to your firm a few weeks ago, and I was wondering if I could come in and interview for the associate position.”

This will just put the employer on the defensive.

**Also, don’t say:**

“Hi, this is Brian Smith. I submitted my resume to your firm a few weeks ago, and I’m calling to follow up.”

This might seem like a reasonable thing to say, but the open-ended nature of this statement will just irritate the employer. What exactly does “follow up” mean in this context? When you say this, you are not giving the employer a question to answer. Instead, you’re just throwing the ball in his/her court and letting it bounce there.



Don't put the employer on the spot. If you want a positive response, the way to go about eliciting one is not to act like you are entitled to a positive response.

### **Following up after an interview**

After your interview, you should send a thank you note to show courtesy to the people who interviewed you. Even if you don't think they deserve to be thanked for anything, you should indicate that you appreciate the time they took out of their day to speak with you.

Ideally, the thank you note will be handwritten on tasteful stationery and mailed or hand-delivered. In the note, you should mention some of the specifics that you talked about. Name some of the things you learned about the firm/company. Reiterate how your experience ties in to the work they described. This will show interviewers that you were paying attention during the interview. Finally, reiterate your interest in and enthusiasm about the position.

You should write notes to each person that you met with and vary them each a little. Chances are they will be compared; if you wrote exactly the same thing on all of them, it will reflect poorly on you.

### **Here's an example of a concise, effective thank you note:**

Dear Jim,

It was a pleasure meeting you on Thursday. I enjoyed learning more about the real estate associate position, and I am now more confident than ever that it would be a perfect match for my skills. The work I've done in leasing and sales would allow me to immediately assist with the ongoing project you described, and I think my background in construction would be an asset as well.

Please let me know if there is anything else I can provide to assist you in your decision-making process. I was extremely impressed by the collegiality, professionalism, and motivation of everyone I met at Smith & Jones, and I would love to be part of such a team.

Sincerely,

Grateful Attorney



## References

At the interview stage, you will most likely be asked for a list of references. It's a good idea to prepare this list ahead of time on a nice sheet of paper. Here's an example of how your references should be presented:

### References for John B. Attorney

John R. Simpson  
Managing Partner, Simpson & Rauch  
388 Attorney Dr.  
Clearwater, FL 00000  
(555) 555-5555  
jsimpson@sandr.com

Jim Rauch  
Managing Partner, Simpson & Rauch  
388 Attorney Dr.  
Clearwater, FL 00000  
(555) 555-5555  
jrauch@sandr.com

Sally Breathwaite  
Professor of Intellectual Property Law  
Fordham University Law School  
456 University Rd.  
New York, NY 00000  
(555) 555-5555

If you have any references with whom you feel very comfortable, and who you know will speak very highly of you, you might not want to wait for the employer to contact them. Sometimes employers don't bother with references or they put them off until they're ready to give an offer. If a fantastic reference is one of your selling points, be proactive in making sure the employer hears from this reference. If the employer sees that you impressed a past employer so much that he/she made a point of calling on your behalf, your star will shine that much brighter.



## CONCLUSION

I realize that a book offering general resume and cover letter advice will elicit all sorts of “But I did X (with ‘X’ referring to something that is the opposite of what I’ve said to do), and it worked for me” stories. This is a good thing. The creativity inherent in the resume and cover letter writing process allows you to compensate for your flaws, highlight your achievements, and get an edge over someone who might be more experienced. If your gut strongly tells you to do something, take a chance. The worst that can happen is that you’ll learn what not to do the next time around.

Whether you’re a new graduate or you’ve been in the workforce for decades, it’s never too late to start putting some serious work into your self-marketing materials. The problem many experienced attorneys run into when trying to write a resume is that their heads start to spin when they begin to think about what they’ve done over a 10- or 20- year career. That’s why it’s a good idea to start early.

You don’t have to do this every day, but once every few months, stop and take inventory of your job. What have you accomplished in the past few months? What have you done that your peers haven’t? What areas are you excelling in? What types of cases are you handling? Write this information down, and store it in a file somewhere. The small amount of time it takes to do periodic self-assessment will save you a lot of time in the long run.

You should also be constantly assessing the legal marketplace. Certain types of jobs come into and fall out of demand. New fields may be opening up or becoming extinct. How do you fit into the big picture? What is out there that might be perfect for you that you aren’t even aware of yet?

More important, make sure you are always taking a fresh and forward-thinking approach. An attorney once told me that he felt his resume was perfect as it was and he didn’t want to make any changes to it at all. The reason he felt so confident was that he had developed his resume in collaboration with a hiring partner at a major firm, and it contained all of the things that this hiring partner looked for in a resume. The problem? He’d done this collaborative revision in 1996, and he was telling me this in 2004.

You should never submit a resume you used several years ago, even one year ago, to a job you’re applying for now. Even if it was fantastic at the time and your position hasn’t changed since you last revised it, the job market will have changed, marketing techniques will have



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changed, and something about your perspective on your experience will have changed.

Those who remain open and flexible with regard to their job searches, who give careful thought to where they've been and where they're going, and who aren't afraid to go after what they want are those who will meet with continued success in the legal marketplace.

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Does your resume catch the employer's eye in 20 seconds? Well, that's all the time a prospective employer spends on a resume.

A well-written resume is the single most important factor that opens doors to that perfect position. It is in fact a marketing brochure that highlights the scope and depth of your experience and communicates a compelling reason for the prospective employer to need and want your services.

The purpose of your resume is not to land you a job, but to get you an interview. A huge number of job seekers make the mistake of putting far too much detail into the resume. The interview will land you the job itself, so you must effectively use the resume to get that elusive interview.

In the current scenario of self marketing where it is essential to show off your work, it is equally important that it should be done without a hint of bravado. There are various dignified and appropriate ways to let prospective employers know how good you are without sounding haughty.

**Attorney Resume Secrets Revealed** gives you expert guidance on writing the most important document of your career. Learn to market yourself effectively and aggressively through this book.