Résumés—the Long and the Short of 'em!

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The résumé you handed to a potential employer 50 years ago, ten years ago, and even two years ago, won't—or *shouldn't*—be the same one you submit today.

Recently, I helped two people at completely opposite ends of the career ladder prepare presentable résumés. Clara is the 15-year-old daughter of a friend of mine. Driven by the urgent need to keep up with current teenage fashion, Clara decided to apply for a job wiping down tables at a local fast food restaurant. This is her first foray into the working world and she brings to it absolutely zero experience (particularly in cleaning, according to her mother!). Her significant life achievements thus far include coaching the rep soccer team and playing a mean oboe. She is a diligent student, a personable young lady and will probably be off to university in a couple of years. None of these precious qualities are going to help her land this job and fleshing out her résumé was a definite challenge.

At the other end of the spectrum is the older job seeker whose résumé has the potential to spill over into many pages developing into more of an autobiographical dissertation than a presentation of significant career strengths and highlights. You cannot allow your Curriculum Vitae to become a cumulative account of your entire working life because, no matter how cutting edge your career seemed to be in 1962, no one in 2010 is necessarily interested at first glance.

It is often tempting to stuff every accomplishment, special interest and seminar attended into the document to show a prospective employer what a thoroughly well-rounded and versatile person you are. However, he/she is unlikely to read beyond the first page if the specific experiences and abilities required to fulfill the position being advertised are not immediately and obviously apparent.

Although it is difficult to edit one's own writing and, in this case, one's own *life*, here are a few tips to help organize your process:
1. Create headings for your résumé: personal/contact information, education, employment history, special skills, references and any other categories that seem appropriate.
2. Sift through your employment history and include *only* those positions and/or contracts that relate most closely to the job you are applying for. Tailor your résumé to fit specific jobs and enquiries. In this day and age, with the 'cut 'n paste' capabilities of computer software, you can easily tweak content to fit.
3. Research thoroughly the position, company and employer you are applying to. Before laying out your résumé, jot down the specific job requirements (certificates, education, etc) as well as any general requirements noted in the advertisement ('*must be a self-starter'*, '*needs to be computer savvy'*, or '*must demonstrate strong sale skills*'). Place a check mark beside each of the criterion you meet and add an example or two of specific work you have done that support your claim. Include this information in your job history.

Avoid the following:
1. Generic salutations on cover letters – make sure you know exactly whom you are submitting your enquiry to and that you have spelled the name and title correctly.
2. General statements – a classic example of one of these is: '*enjoys working with people'*. What does that really mean? You enjoy working with people as opposed to what … chimpanzees? Be

more specific and provide examples—perhaps you love working in sales, or are experienced in negotiating contracts—again support your claim with specific examples.
3. Listing your hobbies – unless you are young Clara and in desperate need of filler, no one really needs to know that you enjoy walks on the beach beneath the moonlight with your dog, or that you love to collect Victorian postcards. Remain focused on your immediate goal; i.e. to get past the gatekeeper for an interview.
4. Providing way *toooooo* much information – unless—or until—someone asks you why you left your previous position after only three weeks, there is no need to mention it in your letter or résumé. Remember, a résumé is a fact sheet—editorials and explanations do not belong on it.

There are many ways your can submit a résumé and cover letter these days—by e-mail, post, fax, or even in person. Often an employer requests a specific method of delivery in which case you must follow instructions. However, whatever method is used, you are always entitled to follow up either to confirm that your application has been received, or to verify the position is still available. In this day and age where everyone e-mails and texts or leaves messages on voice mail, any form of personal contact will stand out.