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Career Ink: Let Roberta Gamza help you write the perfect resume

By Barbara Hey for *Camera Careers*

With a resume, it's all about presentation. And when it comes to presenting yourself, it can be hard to know what to say and how to say it effectively. That's where a professional can help. How can you distill the experiences of a lifetime, represent your abilities and qualifications in a way that will attract the eye of a potential employer? Just ask Roberta Gamza, founder and president of Career Ink. Her job is to look at a resume and transform it into a clear and concise document that will get you the interview and the job.

Gamza's background is in marketing, and her passion has always been resumes – at first just fixing them for friends and family and now doing it as her business. She brings her breadth of experience to what she does. A resume, she says, is after all a marketing tool, and the critical one when it comes to searching for a new job. If a resume doesn't impress, you won't get in the door.

"You need to sell yourself, like you would a product," she says. "You have to convey your benefits, not just your features." How is that done? "I apply my marketing and sales techniques to help people market themselves to employers," says Gamza.

When signing on with Career Ink, the first step is an extensive face-to-face interview with Gamza, which usually lasts 90 minutes. "We talk, determine what is the next job they want, figure out which skills need to be highlighted and what strategy we should employ to get the interview," she says.

Then it's time for a critical look at the original resume. A common mistake is organizing a resume to read like a chronology of your working life. Better, she says, to start with the highlights.

The fact is, your resume may be scanned for only 15 seconds before being tossed aside, so you have that flash of time to make a good impression. "The top 20 lines of a resume are your most valuable real estate," she says. "Your value must be easily gleaned."

To do that, she likes resumes to lead with a powerful statement – not a vague description of the job you are seeking, but titles or clear descriptive words referring to past responsibilities and skills. She phrases resumes in sound bites – for clear understanding and easy consumption. "I call them value statements," she says, all quickly conveying critical information.

It's essential to include key words as well, because certain human resource departments first sort resumes electronically. "You can be perfectly qualified, but without those keywords your resume may be immediately tossed out," she says.

Sometimes people undervalue all they have accomplished. "I look at what they've stated in their existing resume and prod, ask to hear more. I want to know what they've

Comments from a few of Career Ink's newly employed and grateful clients:

"I found my dream job in October! Things couldn't be better. They told me the reason they hired me was due to the creativity of the resume. I could not be more grateful to you or the services you provide."

– Executive Assistant

"We've recently moved from Colorado to Silicon Valley. There are a lot of postings out here, but a ton of very qualified people, too. I have been lucky to get so many interviews – your great resume-writing obviously helped!"

– Marketing Professional

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actually achieved, how their work has had a concrete impact – what they've done, how they've improved this or reduced that," says Gamza. And sometimes it takes some investigation. "We are so close to what we do, we lose sight of it objectively."

Many people find it hard to accurately articulate their sterling qualities. "We are taught to be humble," she says. Gamza can

help you phrase your resume in a way that graciously and forthrightly brags for you. It's necessary to state clearly and confidently what you can bring to the table, because those attributes are what will make your resume stand out of the pack.

"People also tend to bury their awards and recognitions," she says. And that's a waste of accolades. "They needed to be called out, be separate from the bulk of the resume."

"Sometimes I include quotes or excerpts from performance evaluations on the resumes," she says. "That's another way to demonstrate value."

Facilitating design elements help as well – bullets, shaded boxes, bold type – to hold an employer's attention further down the page.

Many people find themselves in midstream rethinking their career path, due to layoffs or job dissatisfaction. Gamza's expertise can help here as well. She sees many

people who are willing – and eager – to assume positions of lesser authority. Phrasing that willingness in a resume can be tricky. "I've known plenty of high level managers who are now open to entry level positions, just to stay in the same business," she says. That requires a particular approach with resume writing. "I play up their hands-on experience, discuss any specific skills they

have that are related to the job they're seeking."

She calls it message spinning. "You need to separate experiences from work history, and shift attention to skills, away from positions held."

After consultation, Gamza crafts the first draft of a resume within a week, and then the client can work with her on as many revisions as it takes to reach perfection. When it is completed, she provides an editable Word file, a text file that can be easily e-mailed for applying for jobs electronically in a PDF format that can be read by any computer. Clients are also given hard copies of the new resume and a CD for future printings.

All this attention to detail and language clearly works. Gamza's creations have received national acclaim. Some of her best resumes have been selected for publication in such books as "Expert Resumes for Managers and Executives," by Wendy S. Enelow, Louise M. Kursmark; "Best Resumes and CVS for International Jobs: Your Passport to the Global Job Market," by Ronald L. Krannich, Wendy S. Enelow; and "Knock 'Em Dead 2003," by Martin Yate.

"For many people, creating a resume is overwhelming, not at all a comfortable task," she says. To have a resume done and done well is an enormous relief. "A well-written resume is such a confidence booster."