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The perfect resume does more than list name and experience

By Jake Miller • Wausau Daily Herald • February 27, 2011

Out of work for the past year, Missy Szarkowitz has spent hours upon hours sending out her resume with no success.

The Mosinee woman landed one interview, but that was it. Nothing else. No call backs. No e-mails. No letters.

A victim of downsizing at Liberty Mutual insurance in late 2009, the 41-year-old single mom is fairly certain the quality of her resume was holding her back. She last worked as an office assistant and is eager to find a new, similar position.

Down on her luck, frustrated and hoping finally to find work, Szarkowitz decided to take part in the Wausau Daily Herald's three-part "Job Search Makeover."

The makeover is part of the Daily Herald's weekly "Road to Recovery" series, in which a reporter is following Szarkowitz through the process of retooling her job search to help herself and others learn about how best to market themselves. In the first installment, published Jan. 30, Szarkowitz learned how to make a good first impression on employers.

In the second installment, Szarkowitz has her resume revamped while learning what role a professional online profile can play in her job hunt.

An archaic resume

Szarkowitz, like many people, had a firm idea of what she thought her resume should include.

Stripped across the top was an objective statement, followed by sections on her education, qualifications and work experience.

And, like many resumes that need a face-lift, all the information was crammed on one page and typed in a font that would warrant the use of a magnifying glass.

That approach is all wrong.

"One of the biggest myths in a job hunt is the one-page resume," said Julie Walraven, a professional resume writer and owner of Design Resumes in Wausau.

Walraven, who worked with Szarkowitz to draft a new resume, said many people don't understand that a resume is a marketing tool. It should be creative, eye-catching and engaging, not boring and mechanical.

Szarkowitz's old resume changed little during the past decade after she found a template she liked. Only her work history was altered to indicate a new position, including her short-lived tenure at Liberty Mutual from 2008 to 2009. Volunteer experience, professional development and key strengths -- information common on today's resumes -- were absent.

"The general format was, I liked how somebody else's looked, and I was always told to keep it to one page," she said.

Walraven said employers today have no problem absorbing a multipage resume, and she believes the myth that everything has to be crammed onto one page is perpetuated in old textbooks used at colleges and job centers.

Other parts of a resume that have changed or are not necessary include objective statements and listings of job duties, Walraven said.

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Instead of listing duties, job-seekers need to highlight specific accomplishments and skill sets that demonstrate the ability to fulfill duties. Szarkowitz's resume was a perfect example of a stale and outdated resume.

"What she had was basic," Walraven said. "I've seen worse. I've had people come in with nothing and having to start from scratch, so to speak. At least she had one."

A resume worth reading

Over the course of two working sessions, Walraven probed Szarkowitz's life, learning more about her work history, community involvement and professional goals. She prodded like a detective, pulling bits of details out of Szarkowitz, mostly through stories, that would ultimately shape a new resume.

Along the way, Walraven used a simple behavioral assessment to learn more about Szarkowitz's strengths and weaknesses and to uncover what type of person she was. Szarkowitz said she was "blown away" by the assessment when it accurately portrayed her as someone who likes to stay busy and avoid conflict.

Walraven replaced Szarkowitz's original objective statement -- "To secure a challenging Administrative/Clerical position" -- with a banner headline that simply reads: "Receptionist | Office Assistant | Administrative Assistant."

A paragraph about Szarkowitz's background and abilities follows, working as a lead-in for the rest of the resume.

Walraven also dramatically bumped up the font size. "Don't go too small so they can't read it," Walraven said.

And Walraven turned generic job duties into detailed descriptions that better explained what Szarkowitz accomplished at each job.

For instance, Szarkowitz's old resume said she performed "other related support duties as requested to provide excellent customer service," at a law office where she worked from 2005 to 2007. The new resume says she "delivered and picked up confidential documents," which highlights Szarkowitz's **reliability** and trustworthiness.

"Those types of things I would have never thought of before," Szarkowitz said.

Volunteer work, internships and professional development round out Szarkowitz's new resume. Walraven said activities beyond work history help employers see a more complete person when they look at a job application.

"I think this one is going to get me a job," Szarkowitz said.

An online presence

Employers regularly put a job seeker's name into an online search engine to see what they can dig up with a simple hunt on Google, Walraven said.

For that reason, any potential job-seeker should try to ensure that what is unearthed online paints an appropriate picture.

Many professional resume-writers recommend using LinkedIn, a free service that allows users to create profiles for networking and job hunting.

LinkedIn is valuable for an array of reasons: It's a site used by millions of workers and employers each day; job-seekers can share their professional information and career history easily; and it's a strong networking tool.

But LinkedIn also shows up high in Google searches, Walraven said. Therefore, an employer is likely to see a LinkedIn profile before finding old college photos that seem to remain in cyberspace

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forever.

"What you want is that your online presence be positive," Walraven said.

Szarkowitz, who is up to speed with social media sites such as Facebook, only had a vague understanding of LinkedIn and its capabilities before meeting Walraven.

Walraven reworked Szarkowitz's dormant LinkedIn profile to make it more complete, adding her education, work experience and a summary that highlights her strengths.

It's important for a LinkedIn account to be worded differently than a resume, so that an employer finds new information rather than just a rehashed resume, Walraven said.

LinkedIn also is a great place to search for jobs and, as it's most notably known for networking.

"I've had people look at it, which is kind of cool," Szarkowitz said. "I have six (people connect with me), and had lots of people look. I have a lot of people who want to connect."

Going forward

With a new hairstyle, new clothes and now a new resume in hand, Szarkowitz said she is bubbling with excitement she hasn't felt in years. She has transitioned from a lost, despondent job seeker to believing she has employable skills.

Immediately after getting her new resume, she sent out six to local companies. Although none had contacted her as of last week, Szarkowitz remained optimistic, expanding her efforts beyond her comfort zone.

She has applied at local hospitals, where until recently she considered herself underqualified.

"I thought, 'I can always answer the phones and schedule appointments,'" Szarkowitz said. "There's nothing to stop me from applying for those types of jobs except myself."

Since the makeover process began, Szarkowitz has felt a level of confidence that refuses to fade. She no longer bites her nails because of stress and nerves. She gets excited when she thinks about the job hunt. And she is a firm believer that she now has a

resume that will get past the wall of human resource departments who weed out dozens of applicants every day.

In fact, Szarkowitz has dusted off the original goal she had when she lost her job in December 2009: To land a job in three months.

"I'm a believer," she said. "This is a huge change."



Julie Walraven, professional resume writer and owner of Design Resumes in Wausau, asks Missy Szarkowitz of Mosinee questions about her work experiences as they write her resume. (Corey Schjoth/Wausau Daily Herald)

Resume writing resources

Hundreds of blogs, websites and other resources are available online to help job-seekers give their resumes a face-lift.

Julie Walraven, a professional resume writer in Wausau,

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offered some of her favorite blogs and tools — including her site Designresumes.com — that she recommends to anyone looking to improve a resume without the hands-on assistance of a professional.

Professional blogs:

- hireimaging.com
- bestfitforward.com
- cfo-coach.com/blog
- write-solution.com/blog
- careertrend.net/blog
- job-hunt.org

Building a resume:

- Taking a resume from start to finish? One reliable tool is Louise Fletcher's Free Resume secrets. Find help at www.blueskyresumes.com.

Improving your online profile:

- LinkedIn — Having an online presence is critical in today's job market, and most resume writers recommend using a LinkedIn profile to not only highlight yourself online, but also for networking and searching open positions.

Walraven recommends the "LinkedIn for Job Seekers" DVD, which is available at www.Linkedinforjobseekers.com. The DVD is \$50, but Walraven recommends it because it has tons of information and tutorials to help people get the most out of the online networking site.

Source: Julie Walraven, Design Resumes

Common mistakes

Wasted space: Position headings in the center of a resume or align them along the left margin. Don't place them in the left column and then add content two inches into the page; doing so makes the resume look dated and uses up valuable space.

Using objective statements: These, too, are outdated. Instead of making a bland statement about the position you want with a company, get creative. Professional resume-writers prefer banner headlines or graphic banners that could be as simple as "Office Assistant / Legal Assistant" stripped across the top of a resume.

Profiles: Don't forget a profile, which resume writers say will engage an employer immediately. Think of it as a way to sell yourself at the top of the resume. For example, a profile for a construction manager might start like this, according to professional resume writer Julie Walraven of Wausau: Innovative, proactive construction management professional with extensive experience in directing high-producing teams as well as heavy equipment operation. Significant experience in instruction and teaching.

Duty listing: Avoid a laundry list of what you did at your past jobs. Instead list more specific accomplishments that show how you performed those duties. A list of duties is boring and doesn't give an employer specifics, Walraven said.

Makeover partner

Name: Design Resumes

Address: 1202 Elm St., Wausau

Contact information: 715-574-5263;
JulieWalraven@designresumes.com

What it offers: Design Resumes owner Julie Walraven is a professional resume writer with more than two decades of experience. Walraven works with workers and job seekers in every field.

She also provides an array of career services, including cover letter writing, help with the online networking site LinkedIn, interview coaching and more. For a list of services and prices, visit www.designresumes.com.

Keep this out of your resume

Certain words can drive a resume from an employer's desk to the paper shredder before he or she even reads it.

The most important term to avoid? "Responsible for . . ." according to Design Resumes owner and professional resume-writer Julie Walraven of Wausau.

Walraven, who blogs regularly about resume tips and other job-seeking news, said she cringes when she sees "responsible for" on someone's resume, because

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a resume or LinkedIn profile needs to be written in the active voice.

The phrase is considered a "dinosaur" or archaic term to human resources professionals who most often are the first people at a company to see a resume. Instead, tell employers what you did with what you know how to do. Replace responsibilities with accomplishments and successes.

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