OVERVIEW

The resume is the candidate's first interview.

It is the core document in clearly defining a candidate's professional brand.

The resume must be constructed with clarity and accuracy while emphasizing the candidate's progressive scope of responsibility and record of accomplishment. The ideal resume should detail the career progression and accomplishments, beginning with the most recent position. The resume should include all positions of employment. It is critical that the resume be accurate concerning title, dates of employment, scope of responsibility and accomplishments. The standard of honesty and clarity applies to the listing of academic and professional credentials and affiliations as well. Statements that are cleverly (ambiguously) worded – designed to allow the employer or recruiter to make their own assumptions concerning degrees earned or credentials held, are in today's market, easily vetted and almost a certain guarantee of elimination from future consideration.

It is imperative when sending a resume to a recruiter or potential employer that the document be current as of the date it is transmitted. One of the most common mistakes is to send a resume indicating current employment even though tenure with that organization has ended. This speaks to integrity and/or lack of attention to detail.

There are no hard and fast rules concerning the length of a candidate's resume. It should be proportional to the years of experience, number of positions held and accomplishments. It is silly to suggest that a 30-year executive with a successful record of accomplishment can incorporate all relevant information into a two-page resume.

The Importance of Career Journaling

I am a strong proponent of career journaling. The journal not only allows an executive the opportunity to reflect on decisions made/issues resolved with an eye to self-improvement but it is also a useful tool to track beginning and ending dates of employment, salary, job titles and scopes of responsibility. Some of the nation's most successful executives practice journaling because it provides a private forum for reflection. The best executives are those who strive for self-improvement. I find that it keeps me grounded on important issues – developing my Firm, relationships with clients, and how I assess each search and the candidates we recommend.

Leaders who regularly journal say that it is one of the most important and rewarding things that they do.

Organization of the Resume

Use of templates

As a rule, candidates should avoid using templates that come loaded with the computer. Most of these tend to be dated or are inappropriate for a senior level executive. Most professional associations have career centers with online resume tools. There are a number of relatively inexpensive software programs for resume creation for those who are not part of an organization that offers this type of career support.

Formatting the resume

Rule number one: *make it easy to read!* White space is good. Judicious use of boldface and italicized type can help make the document more readable. The operative word is judicious.

In selecting a typeface, be cautious. This document was created using Arial. The font size for this guide is 11 point. If you prefer a more traditional appearance, Times New Roman and Georgia are two excellent choices for traditional fonts. It is important to note, however, that Times New Roman is more difficult to read when using the 10-point size that many candidates select in order to squeeze their career into two pages. After you have read 30 resumes, the smaller the type, the bigger the chance that the researcher who is screening the document will miss something of importance. Remember, there are no hard and fast rules for the length of the resume other than it should be proportional to your years of experience and accomplishments. Far too many candidates find themselves eliminated from consideration because they submitted a resume that did not provide sufficient information concerning experience or accomplishments. Remember, *the resume is your first interview.*

These recommendations are important to consider because, with the use of email to transmit a resume, the first time a recruiter or potential employer looks at your resume will be on a computer screen. As I said previously, make it easy to read.

Candidates should never use script or any of the stylized typefaces.

John G. Self

John G. Self

John G. Self

Frankly, this typeface screams, *"Do not take me seriously!"*

Use of Key Words

Some larger companies and recruiting agencies use computer screening tools for staff and entry level management jobs. That is why some resume experts recommend the use of keywords. However, resumes for executive positions typically are personally reviewed by a researcher or recruiter. Loading your resume with "keywords" in an attempt to grab attention of a software screening program diminishes the brand of a seasoned executive. Make the case for the value you can deliver with your dot-point summary of accomplishments not with paragraphs loaded with ***performance-driven,*** or a ***dynamic*** executive with a ***superior*** record of performance.

Use of Career Objective Statement

I advise against including an "Objective" description at the top of the resume. Recruiter Larry Tyler once said that objectives are either too general to serve any useful purpose or too specific and will lead to elimination from further consideration.

Career Summary

I am not opposed to the use of the career summary. However, there is reasonable debate on both sides of this issue. I come down in favor of the summary *if* the summary provides an accurate and relevant description of a candidate's experience and career progression. In other words, the summary is beneficial if it helps the recruiter quickly gain a sense of the candidate's experience and accomplishments. *Less is more* so candidates who use the summary paragraph should carefully construct a summary that is no longer than four or five short sentences.

Contact Information

Candidate identification information – name with professional credentials, address, telephone number and email address – also known as *the stack,* should be constructed in a simple format. Candidates who attempt to be creative in hopes of attracting attention should remember that formatting which might elicit a negative impression is not worth the effort. *Less is more.*

John G. Self
JohnMarch Partners, Inc.
325 North St. Paul, Suite 3910
Dallas, Texas 75201
(214) 220-1234 (o)
(214) 577-5540 (c)
JGSelf@johnmarch.com

This format of the "stack" is clean and easy to read. Always include an email address and telephone number. Candidates should use caution when deciding which information to include. If your job search is confidential, using an office email address and telephone number can produce unintended consequences. Case law has established that employees have no expectation of privacy when using a company computer. Many larger companies monitor web site access and emails are routinely scanned for certain key words. I recommend using Gmail or any other email service that allows web access.

> SPECIAL NOTE: If you use a home telephone number with an answering machine, candidates should periodically check for messages as well as personal email. Delays in responding to potential employers or recruiters can hurt your chances for continued consideration, especially in a "noisy" market – where there are significantly more people competing for each available position. Cutesy greetings on the home answering machine should be replaced with a more suitable, professional greeting that establishes that the potential employer or recruiter has, in fact, connected with the right person.
>
> In creating an email address, the candidate should use a professional address. An email address like *hotstuff@yahoo.com* or *charmedIamsure@msn.com* diminishes a candidate's brand as a professional executive.

Education and Credentials

Unless you are a new graduate, education credentials should be listed at the end of the resume. A master's degree is NOT a professional credential and should not be used after the name. Only doctoral degrees should be used after the candidate's name.

Fellowship in a professional organization like the American College of Healthcare Executives or Healthcare Finance Management Association (FHFMA), or certification as a public accountant, or clinical qualification such as RN, for example, should be placed after the name.

> SPECIAL NOTE: Most professional organizations have their own standards or rules concerning use of an advanced credential. Candidates should contact the professional organization to ensure they are being consistent with the rules of that group. For example, the American College of Healthcare Executives no longer uses the CHE certification – Certified Healthcare Executive – and should not be used on a resume. If you are a healthcare executive and previously passed the ACHE Governor's exam but you are no longer a member, you are not permitted to use the credential under any circumstance. Including this information on your resume is permitted but then begs the question: *If you are a healthcare leadership professional and achieved certification status, why would you*

allow this to lapse? Many mainstream health systems will view this as a possible reason to eliminate a candidate from continued consideration. Some health systems will not entertain candidates who are not Fellows.

Candidates, who have allowed their ACHE membership to lapse after passing the Governor's exam, may be able to qualify for Fellowship by rejoining and completing the educational requirements. Contact the College to determine eligibility.

Employment

Again, *make it easy* for the recruiter and/or employer. I prefer a listing format that includes the organization, title and a brief italicized description of the business and scope of responsibility. It is important to include key metrics.

Clarity is very important. If you held more than one title with a company, you should list the tenure with that company and then separately list each job with the dates you held that position. Listing multiple positions in one company – versus individually accounting for each job separately – will help avoid the appearance of a job hopping.

EXAMPLE:

Hermann Hospital *February 1, 1976 to March 15, 1977*
Houston, Texas

Hermann Hospital is a 908-bed teaching hospital, the flagship hospital of the Texas Medical Center. With more than 3,000 employees and net revenues of $xxx, Hermann served as the primary regional referral center in southeast Texas and was the second hospital in the U.S. to implement a hospital-based helicopter transport system

Coordinator, Flight Operations (Life Flight)
June 1, 1976 to March 15, 1977

Responsible for coordinating the implementation and promotion of the Life Flight emergency helicopter transport system. Directed a multi-disciplinary team of physicians, nurses, pilots, business office, and public relations personnel. Directed a staff of nine with an annual budget of $xxcx

- Exceeded plan for number of flights, patient admissions and expense management from month one
- Achieved maximum public relations impact with coverage of the program on at least five news broadcasts per week
- Developed concentric circle marketing strategy that resulted in a favorable change in referral patterns for emergency patients
- Developed budgets and operating plans for the addition of a second helicopter at the start of the second year of operation

Director of Community Relations
February 1976 to September 1976

Responsible for overhauling the hospital's public relations department to enhance responsiveness and to improve media relations. Supervised a staff of three and an annual expense budget of $xxcx

- Achieved media support by creating 24/7 patient condition access program
- Created system to monitor all media outlet coverage in southeast Texas and developed video archive of television coverage
- Established timeline standards for responding to media inquiries on a 24/7 basis; favorable coverage increased by 40 percent in newspapers and on broadcast outlets
- Improved medical staff cooperation for promotion of new programs and services

One of the most common resume mistakes is to mix scope of responsibility with achievements in the dot points.

Dot Pointing Accomplishments

While candidates should list their jobs chronologically – from most recent to the first employment – a candidate's accomplishments for each position should follow an old journalistic rule -- inverted pyramid. A candidate should always list their most significant accomplishment for each position first, not chronologically. Using this rule will showcase important accomplishments of each job and will preclude something of importance from being overlooked. The use of metrics to highlight the significance of the accomplishment should be used whenever possible. Candidates who routinely journal and have access to that information tend to produce the strongest resumes. A paragraph narrative describing the scope of responsibility and generalized accomplishments, without supporting results, is an excellent way to be eliminated in an early round.

Ideally, executives should maintain an up-to-date resume at all times. However, the truth is that few actually do and rely on memory to recreate the employment history. This can lead to unintentional mistakes that could call into question a candidate's attention to detail or, worse, in the event of misrepresentation or an embellishment, the candidate's ethical practices.

Rules on Listing Jobs

Some recruiters/employers want the resume to show a complete history of a candidate's career. Some so-called resume doctors advocate only including relevant experience. Some advise candidates to eliminate any short- term employment to avoid creating confusion, but there is peril in that strategy.

Our Firm uses the *Topgrading*© chronological interview process. Our preference is that candidates include all of their jobs on their resume. After fifteen years, the candidate can simply list the company, title, and dates of employment. Since our recruiters will ask about these positions, including them on the resume eliminates the potential for error.

With a noticeable increase in the number of resume misrepresentations and outright fraud, recruiters and employers, with increasing regularity, are checking comprehensive databases, including social security records, to verify employment history. Eliminating short-term employment, which the candidate views as an embarrassment or "confusing" for example, may raise questions about the candidate's ethical standards.

Professional Associations, Credentials

This information should be inserted in the resume following the earliest employment listing.

Professional memberships connote expertise and up-to-date industry knowledge. It is critical that this information be current <u>and</u> accurate. Candidates who think that potential employers or recruiters will not vet this information are mistaken.

I advise candidates to maintain these memberships for a number of very important reasons. They include:

- Access to latest education and career development information
- Local and national meetings/forums that offer an excelled opportunity for relationship development and networking (adding to your contacts)
- Access to the organization's membership list which, when faced with the need to find a new position in a hurry, will be worth the price of membership

I am always distressed when I hear recently fired executives say they are dropping their professional memberships to reduce personal expenses when, in reality, that association may be the single most important lifeline for a new position.

Civic Involvement

Civic involvement – memberships, offices, honors – should be summarized and added following the section on *Professional Associations, Credentials.* Candidates should not list every Rotary or service club of which they were a member unless there is a specific reason: office held, an honor or award received. More emphasis should be given to activities within the last five to seven years.

Naming Your Word Document File

Your resume, in all likelihood, will be the only one on your computer. But it is NOT the only resume on my recruiter or client's computer. I look at hundreds of resumes each year, from early careerists to senior executives. The file name you create for your resume is not an insignificant issue.

Everyone has an opinion but from my perspective, I prefer a file naming system that allows me to easily ascertain what the document is:

JohnSelf.Resume.01.01.09

As the candidate updates his or her resume, I recommend they change the file name to reflect the date it was amended. This will preclude any confusion about which version the recruiter or employer has in their possession and could help avoid any misunderstandings regarding current employment, for example.

References, Credential Verification, Background Investigations

These are important issues for candidates entering the job market. Managing this part of your job search is critical to your success. Before discussing the guidelines for these issues, it is important to establish some context concerning the job search process.

First, most jobs are *not* filled by outside recruiters. That is why establishing *and maintaining* a robust network of contacts is so important.

Second, when a recruiter contacts you, it is critical to understand the type of recruiter you are dealing with – Retained or Contingency. Retained firms are client centered. This means that they are engaged by the client to fill a specific position or number of positions. The vast majority of the time, retained recruiters hold the exclusive rights for the position(s). They are paid for the work they perform, regardless of whether the position is filled. Contingent recruiters are paid only if their candidate accepts the offer. It is more common for clients to use several contingent recruiters for the same position. When this happens, it is possible to be contacted by different recruiting companies for the same position. Contingent recruiters who do not have an exclusive for a specific position are reluctant to share too many details about a job posting until they have your resume. The problem is that if two recruiters have your resume, and submit it for the same job, there is a chance that a disagreement over "ownership" may result if the client does not keep accurate records concerning who submitted the resume first. Clients do not want to find themselves in the middle of a fight between recruiting agencies over candidate ownership. If this does occur, the candidate may find themselves suddenly eliminated from consideration. If a recruiter calls and it sounds similar to a position for which your resume has already been submitted by another recruiter, ask the recruiter if this is for a position in a certain town. You do not want to give the second recruiter too much information because they may attempt to obtain the rights as a competing recruiter to work on the same assignment. Use discretion.

When giving your resume to a contingent recruiter, always specify that your resume cannot be distributed to other clients without your prior verbal or written approval. Include that directive in your email when sending the resume. The vast majority of contingent recruiters are ethical professionals. However, there are numerous examples of situations where recruiters have used resumes, sometimes with all contact information, as a "tease" to capture an assignment.

References

There are no standards on the number of references a candidate should have. At a minimum, it is four or five. JohnMarch Partners requires eight: two superiors, two peers, two subordinates, and two personal references. Recruiters for certain positions may require additional resumes from former bosses.

The timing of the submission of references depends on the process used by the employer or the recruiter. Our Firm requires four references during the vetting process. Confidentiality – and possible negative repercussions from a current employer – is always a concern for candidates who are currently employed. This is understandable. In our case, we wait to check current employer references until an offer has been extended and the candidate has notified their current employer. However, as a rule, these offers are contingent on final background and reference verification.

Candidates should be very clear about these issues and only provide initial references of people who will respect their confidentiality. Recruiters will try to accommodate candidates who express concern that their interest in a new opportunity will compromise their existing employment relationship. However, candidates need to understand that few recruiters will submit a candidate without vetting their prior performance, which is why candidates should always be candid and forthright when asked about prior performance and professional employment relationships.

Secondary References

Ninety plus percent of the time, references provided by the candidates are favorable. Clearly, candidates are not inclined to provide the names of former employers or colleagues unless they know what will be said. That is why recruiters and the best employers will attempt to collect additional names to verify this information. These are commonly referred to as *secondary references*.

When asked to name others you have worked with in the past, candidates should be aware that these individuals might be contacted to verify certain information concerning your scope of responsibility, performance and even reporting relationships. A rule of thumb is only reference names in interviews that you know will be supportive if they are contacted.

Recruiters increasingly require candidates to sign release of information forms before they check references. This typically allows them to talk with anyone; excluding those references that you exempt to protect confidentiality of your interest. If you mention a name that may have a connection with your current employer, specifically tell the recruiter *not* to contact that individual based on those ties.

Credentials

After several highly publicized events where candidates misrepresented credentials, employers and recruiters now routinely verify this information.

Remarkably, recruiters or employers will need your social security number and date of graduation in order to verify degrees. Most colleges and universities now use a national database company to process these inquiries. A valid social security number is essential in order to obtain that information. This raises the fear among some candidates of identity theft. That is why it is important to verify your recruiter, especially if you are dealing with a contingent fee firm about which little is known. There have been examples of people posing as recruiters asking candidates for social security information and even driver's license information in order to conduct a preliminary background check. If this occurs, candidates should take steps to verify the authenticity of the recruiter and the assignment before complying with this type of request.

A common candidate mistake is to list a credential related to a professional association whose membership renewal was forgotten or allowed to lapse. It points to a candidate's lack of attention to detail.

Background Checks

With increasing regularity, recruiters are now conducting background checks of their candidates. Fifteen years ago, recruiters who drilled down to this level were the exception. A recruiter with one of the largest search firms even asked me why I went to the trouble since the clients did not seem to care, and were not requesting that service.

Background investigation firms report continued incidents where candidates fail to disclose material issues: undisclosed arrests, problems with credentials or unreported employment that is relevant to the search.

Contingent recruiters rarely go to this level of detail because of time and financial constraints. They have to move quickly to submit the resume in order to get the credit — and to be paid --if the candidate is hired. More often than not, employers are left with the responsibility for more in-depth candidate screening as well as the all important background checks.

At JohnMarch Partners, we complete a background review prior to the candidate's face-to-face interview with the Engagement Partner. We routinely verify previous employment, academic and professional credentials, civil and criminal court filings, driving record, and credit history. Because we use outside investigators to conduct this work, our Firm falls under the rules of the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 1998. That law specifies the language of the release of information form. It also establishes rules concerning what information can be shown to the client. For example, credit reports may not be duplicated and can be seen only by the company making the request.

At JohnMarch we report to the client only if there are any material findings related to employment, since we are precluded by law from providing the client with a copy of the actual credit history report.

Disclosing a prior mistake is not necessarily fatal to a candidate's chances of landing the job. Failure to disclose usually is a deal killer. We view disclosure as a positive sign of the candidate's integrity. However, there are certain types of issues that will disqualify a candidate, depending on the job. This will vary based on the ownership of the company, the job title, and/or scope of responsibility.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John G. Self, *Chairman and Founder of* JohnMarch Partners, *is the Firm's senior client advisor. A 32-year veteran of the healthcare industry, Mr. Self is a frequent speaker on career management and interviewing skills. A former investigative reporter and crime writer for a major daily newspaper, candidates and clients say he is one of the most thorough executive recruiters working in the healthcare industry.*