

Not Cutting Corners On Your Attorney Resume

By Vanessa Vidal

I've reviewed a lot of attorney resumes during the course of my career, and I'd like to think that I've seen everything . . . well, perhaps almost everything. What is startling is the number of attorney resumes I've received from highly accomplished lawyers that contain what I call "critical editing mistakes," otherwise know as cutting corners. These include typos, missing employment dates, missing locations, no titles, no graduation dates, unreadable fonts, etc. While these mistakes may seem fairly innocuous, and could be overlooked in a good job market, they can be fatal during a competitive market like this one.

Corporate legal departments, human resource professionals, and recruiters generally do not have the time, manpower, or the inclination to contact candidates to discuss their flawed legal resumes. Typically, attorney resumes that do not pass muster in terms of content and form earn a one-way ticket to the "no" pile. Have you ever gotten a call from a prospective employer asking you to explain a mistake or an omission on your legal resume? Probably not. In this market, it is even less likely to happen.

Most people think that the overall substance of an attorney resume is what is more important. While this is generally true, form also affects substance. It is not unusual for employers to be looking at dozens of nearly identical attorney resumes in terms of overall skills, experience, credentials etc. If you can only select a couple of resumes from that long list of equally qualified candidates, whom do you think will be selected? The attorney with the clear, comprehensive, and well-written legal resume, or the one with missing information and typos?

There are a couple of rules of thumb you should keep in mind in terms of formatting and editing your attorney resume. You want your legal resume to be noticed, but you need to keep it professional. This is no time to get too creative by using colorful paper, exciting graphics, or stylish fonts. Your legal resume should be on neutral tone paper, either white or ivory. You should use a traditional black 12-point font, either Times, Arial, or Verdana. In other words, you need to stick to the basics.

Remember to make your headers attractive, yet within the boundaries of industry expectations. Your name should be larger than the rest of the text and the font should be bold. A good idea is to format your legal resume with separate sections between your education, professional experience, bar admission, awards etc. In terms of overall format, a key point to remember is that your resume needs to be *readable*. While you may be trying to cram twenty years of experience into two pages by using miniscule font sizes,

sometimes it's best to make it three pages and keep the font to at least 11-point.

Resumes are not required to adhere to strict standard grammatical sentence structure. However, it is a good idea to formulate complete sentences whenever possible. When you have to communicate your skills, qualifications and accomplishments in one or two pages, space is usually at a premium. Therefore, be sure to eliminate all extraneous wording and focus on precision, successfully communicating each point as succinctly as possible.

While there is no substitute for substance and overall content, proper formatting for an attorney resume is just as important, and in a competitive market it can make the difference between getting an interview and never hearing back from an employer.

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