

Top 5 Attorney Resume Mistakes

By Vanessa Vidal

This article will address the top 5 attorney resume mistakes you should avoid to keep your legal resume away from the “no” pile.

As the economic downturn continues, more attorneys are vying for fewer positions — and everyone is feeling the squeeze. Attorneys are looking for ways to make their legal resumes stand out, and many are resorting to editing decisions that may do them more harm than good.

Here are the top 5 attorney resume mistakes you should avoid:

1. Typos

Of course there are no typos in my legal resume! Are you sure about that?

You may think this is so basic that it is not even worth discussing. However, you’d be surprised how many attorney resumes contain at least one typo. When it comes to an attorney resume, that’s not something you want to take lightly.

Spell-checkers can be your best friend and your worst enemy. They can change words automatically, so quickly that you can easily miss the change, and they are only about 70% effective – in other words, they miss a lot of errors.

So before you send out your attorney resume, be sure to give it a ‘once over’ with a spell-checker, and give it a second and third old-fashioned personal review. Print out a copy of your legal resume, and read it carefully word by word. When it comes to typos, you can never be too careful.

2. Omitting Your Graduation Dates

If I had a dollar for every attorney resume I’ve received that’s missing a graduation date, I’d give Warren Buffet a run for his money. The omission is always intentional, and it almost always comes from attorneys who are more experienced. Why? Because they are worried that if they show that they graduated from law school in 1973, they may be passed over for a candidate who graduated in 1993. Is this a valid concern? Perhaps, but omitting a graduation date may actually do more harm than good.

First, older lawyers considering hiding their age by deleting their year of law school graduation shouldn’t bother since employers can figure it out in an Internet search. This information is readily available, and you cannot hide it. If an employer is not going to hire you on the basis of your age, your resume will do nothing to change that. It is better to be honest on your resume.

Second, the more you try to hide something on your legal resume, the more attention you bring to it. You are not fooling anyone; the omission will not go unnoticed. In fact, it will draw more attention to the fact that you did not include it, that you are uncomfortable with it, and that you may be more seasoned for the position than required.

Third, you are now making an employer guess what that date might be. Worst, it clearly shows that you are hiding something, and if it is something as innocuous as a graduation date, an employer can only guess what else you might not have been upfront about in your legal resume. Doubt creates questions, and questions create doubt. This is the last thing you want your attorney resume to do.

3. Inaccurate or Missing Employment Dates

If you are no longer employed with a corporate legal department or law firm, not making that fact known by keeping an open date (such as '1998-present' or '2004-now'), or not including a date at all is not only misleading but can be very damaging to an attorney resume.

Obviously, you may be worried that if your legal resume reflects that you are no longer actively employed, it will be detrimental to your chances of securing a legal position. While this is a valid concern, it does not take away from the fact that you are not being straightforward with a potential employer.

Again, the omission or inaccuracy on your legal resume will only bring more attention to the fact that you are currently unemployed, or that you have made lots of transitions in a short time period. If this is something you do not want to highlight any more than necessary, just be honest and include the correct dates. If a potential employer has an issue with this, it is better that you know now rather than waste their time or yours.

Finally, these types of omissions and inaccuracies will bring into question your good faith, honesty, and integrity. These are not things you want a potential employer to challenge. Honesty and full disclosure are the best policy when it comes to the information on an attorney resume – you need to present yourself as you are, with the good, the bad, and the ugly.

4. Not Including Titles

While a title is not always indicative of the type of work and/or level of responsibility of a particular position, it is nevertheless an important marker for employers to be able to examine on your attorney resume. It may show an upward trend, highlight a lateral transition, or give one a better sense of where you are operating within a larger matrix. The lack of titles on your attorney resume will not only force an employer to guess your level, but also make them wonder about your progression or lack thereof.

5. Not Including Your Geographical Location

This is probably the most difficult omission to understand. I have seen attorney resumes that not only omit a candidate's current address, but also fail to provide the location of their various positions altogether. Inevitably the question becomes: where is this attorney located, and where are they practicing?

If the concern that prompted the omission is relocation, this approach to your legal resume will inevitably fail. Whether a company is willing to relocate a candidate or not, or is focusing on a particular region or not, is made well before a search begins. This is not a factor that will change based on one great candidate or attorney resume alone.

Again, you need to be upfront with your location. Location can tell a lot about a candidate such as geographical ties, willingness to move etc. This is information that is important for an employer to be able to evaluate on an attorney resume; when it is missing it casts doubt, and when time is limited and candidates are plentiful, it may earn the attorney resume a one-way ticket to the "no" pile.

Conclusion.

Next time you send out your legal resume, make sure you proofread it multiple times, and remember the following: honesty and full disclosure are the best policy.