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Help wanted

Experts offer their tips for winning that new job

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As a career coach and résumé writer, Debbie Shalom has seen the good, the bad and the ugly when it comes to job applications.

While she strives to bring out the good -- sales records, special skills, major accomplishments -- the bad and ugly -- from unfocused, difficult-to-read résumés to inappropriate wardrobes and even too-strong perfume -- are all too common, she said.

Shalom said a few tips -- and a lot of time -- can improve any résumé, and her company, Amazing Résumés, and many others in the region can do it for a fee. Key lessons résumé writers and career coaches emphasize include that job applicants should have highly focused résumés emphasizing accomplishments they can put a value on, clearly telling a potential employer what's in it for them if they make the hire.

Many job applicants assume a résumé is just a laundry list of their career history, experts said.

"But that begs the question of the reader, so what?" said Darlene Cook, president of Résumés & Beyond. What's more important is what a person was able to do within those responsibilities, she said, and those accomplishments should be quantified.

Shalom said that's possible regardless of a person's industry. In sales the numbers are obvious, but teachers don't always think to include test scores or pass rates and administrative assistants may not include important numbers beyond words typed per minute, such as the number of calls taken a day.

Job seekers should consider what types of skills an employer is looking for and tailor their résumés to it, Cook said.

"I always identify the three most critical needs of an employer, because employers don't have jobs, they have needs," she said.

Professionally written résumés typically cost at least \$300 and can get up to \$1,000 for an executive-level résumé with added services, such as coaching, which can run around \$90 per hour.

When Ernestine Scott was looking to move on from a long career as a hospital nurse, she wasn't sure what her options were and only had a basic, outdated résumé. She found Amazing Résumés in the phone book and said she was surprised at that advantage she gained from building a strong résumé.

"It was amazing the things she could pull from me that I saw as ordinary and she added as pluses in my résumé," Scott said. She went on to get hired as a nurse case manager at the **Social Security Administration**, turning down two other offers.

Part of the résumé that is often overlooked or not executed well is what Shalom calls a qualifications summary, sometimes known as an objective statement.

"Interviewing is about selling yourself, but also telling your value, because everything is about the bottom line," Shalom said. "It's about how you transfer your previous accomplishments into the new company."

Job applicants should use the statement to explain that, she said. That also requires researching prospective employers in depth, something many people fail to do, she said.

"Just looking at the Web site is not enough," Shalom said. Learning about a company's mission and values is key in determining if it's the right place to apply, and it also tells applicants how they can market themselves effectively.

Beth Colley, an Anne Arundel County-based career coach and résumé writer, said it can also help to tailor a résumé for a specific industry, or an area within an industry.

And as everyone remembers from their high school guidance counselor or English teacher, spelling and grammar count -- mistakes "make people doubt you," Shalom said. On top of that, it's important to highlight key words, because recruiters for entry- and mid-level jobs get so many résumés, they only scan each for 15 to 20 seconds, Colley said.

And for those who don't plan on jumping in the job market anytime soon, strong résumé preparation is even valuable in the common situations where companies are looking to promote from within, Shalom said.

Mona Williams was a senior financial analyst at **Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine** but wanted to move on to become a research financial manager. She prepared her résumé with Shalom and also passed it by her supervisor to look over.

A week later, her boss came back and said Williams could create such a position within her current department. "I didn't even really have to apply for another job," she said.