

In Brief

- How hard is it to write a resume?
- Your resume has 15-30 seconds to capture someone's attention.
- Learn how your resume can capture that attention in a short time frame.

GETTING THE RESUME

I wouldn't blame you for completely dismissing this topic as the least exciting part of the job search—after all, how hard can it be to type up a chronological list of where you've worked and what you have done? All I can say, is after 11 years of reviewing thousands of resumes and having recruited for leading US, UK, and Canadian corporations, financial institutions, law firms, and regulatory bodies, that I know getting the resume

right is unquestionably one of the most important aspects of your career search. When I advise candidates on this, however, I sometimes think it's a bit like teaching your grandmother to suck eggs,¹ so please forgive me if some of the following seems a touch obvious.

Your resume is often the first point of introduction to the decision maker—whether it's the CEO, general counsel, head of HR, or even a humble recruiter such as I. How you present yourself on

paper is important, and first impressions made during the initial resume review can last throughout the whole recruitment process.² First impressions can be critical in the final shortlisting stages and even on the selection of the final candidate—"I like that candidate, but isn't this the one who had a resume that was all over the place and had those really long unreadable paragraphs—how's that presentation style going to go down with our directors and shareholders?"



RIGHT

By Jonathan Marsden

This article is intended to help lawyers of all levels put a resume together. However, to give it some balance, I am going to use a fictitious example of the CEO of a major telecom company looking to recruit a new general counsel.

The Ground Rules

A two-stage process

A typical reviewer of the resume goes through a two-stage process. The initial stage is the preliminary review. On a quick glance, does this candidate have what I am looking for? The second stage is what I call the “comfort” stage. Having identified this candidate's potential, can I gain enough comfort, or evidence, from the resume that this candidate should be interviewed?

The 30-second rule

Most readers will have been involved in the recruitment process at some point. How long did you honestly spend reading the resume to make the decision as to whether you put the resume in your “A” pile (definite interview—will read the resume in detail before the interview—probably on the way to the interview—in the elevator!); “B” pile (possible interview if all “A” listers are duds or pull out for whatever reason); and “C” pile (definite rejects)?

I have asked this question of clients and candidates many times throughout my career, and the answer is typically 15–30 seconds! Furthermore, resumes are often reviewed in down time, sitting on the train on the way home, in front of the TV, or at a particularly slow baseball game. The reader may not be completely focused and may need some help identifying your key selling points—reasons you have to get it right the first time.

In our example, the CEO could potentially have hundreds of resumes to wade through. More likely, the head of HR or an external recruiter has come up with a shortlist of 10 resumes, in which case the applicant needs a resume that can pass the above 15–30 second test at least twice.

Know the reader

Spend some time identifying what the reader of your resume is looking for. In our example, it wouldn't be surprising if the CEO is looking for a lawyer with: at least 15 years experience with a major law firm or corporation; a proven track record of success; a strong academic record; and expertise in corporate M&A, commercial contracts, regulatory/corporate governance, securities, antitrust, and (ideally) the telecoms regulatory environment.

Identifying what the CEO is looking for (with the help



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of your recruiter, inside knowledge, or plain old common sense), allows you to structure your resume accordingly and make sure the attributes and skill set the CEO requires are evident on the first page of the resume.

Drafting the Resume

So here goes. We have established what the CEO is looking for and how much time is going to be devoted to identifying it. We know that you need to give the CEO comfort that you have the right background and experience. We can now start putting the resume together.

Format and length

I would advise having a one-, maximum two-page resume, with a separate attachment entitled “Synopsis (or Summary) of Legal Experience.” Overall length of the resume may vary depending on where you are applying for a job. In the United States, I would typically advise a one-page resume, with a two- or three-page attachment. In the UK, Mainland Europe, and Australia, it would be quite acceptable to have a two-page resume, again with a two- or three-page attachment.

Irrespective of the length of the actual resume, the first page is undoubtedly the one that has to clearly state your key selling points. Tailor this to what the reader wants. Here are my top pointers.

Title, name, and layout

Don't waste space using a heading in 16-point typeface saying “Resume” or “Curriculum Vitae.” The reader knows what the document is. Just have your name at the top in 14-point typeface, centered. Use a one-inch margin around the page and have the rest of the resume in 10- or 12-point Times New Roman or Arial font. If you have a preference for other fonts, by all means use them, but make sure it looks clean and professional. Don't use fancy graphics or colours. They appeal to few and offend many. Use the full width of page for your paragraphs, and don't use narrow columns.

Contact details

Put your address, home and cell phone numbers, and personal email address as a footer on each page of the resume. This all needs to go on the resume, but you don't need to waste five or six lines of prime marketing space putting it at the top of page one. Don't use work email—a willingness to use company property in your personal job search does not go down well with some. It's easy to set up a Yahoo®, Hotmail®, or Gmail™ account. Don't be

too creative in setting up your personal account—*mickey mouse@yahoo.com* does not set the right impression.

Dates

I prefer dates to be listed down the right-hand side of the page. This looks neater, and from a marketing perspective, the reader of your resume will read from left to right. Where you attended law school or the names of your current and previous employers is more relevant than the dates you were there.

Be precise with dates: Use months and years. Stating that you were with an employer from 2001 to 2003 could mean that you were there anywhere from 14 to 36 months. Lack of clarity on this can be annoying to the reader. In a similar vein, don't omit dates. Senior candidates quite often do this with regard to their year of graduation in an attempt to hide their age, but their intent is obvious and it sets a bad impression. If the potential employer is seriously age prejudiced, then you have to ask yourself the question: Is this somebody I really want to work with?

Dealing with employment gaps can be tricky, and my advice on this varies according to the circumstances. If the gap can be easily explained (for example, a three-year gap to have and raise a family, or a year gap to go travelling in South America) this information can go under a "Miscellaneous" heading. If it's a gap of a few months, I would not draw attention to it.

Personal profiles

I don't like the personal profile sections that career counsellors so often advise candidates to have at the top of their resume. They are subjective fluff and a waste

of space. You may think that you are a "hard-working, task-driven, high performer who rises to any challenge," but the statement makes little impact on the reader. What readers want are objective statements of fact that will allow them to reach that conclusion for themselves. If your latest performance appraisal states all these things, by all means include the quote in your resume, in the appropriate place (see later)—at least it's what others are saying about you and can be proven.

The only times I refer to a personal profile is when the individual's career or personal circumstances need some particular explanation. In most cases, one is not needed.

Qualifications and education

Use this section to include your bar admission information and university credentials.

Typically on a 30-second glance at the resume, the reader wants to be satisfied that the candidate is smart, has an impressive employment history, and has developed the skill set required to do the job in question. I therefore like to see this Qualifications and Education section up front. If a candidate is a university dean's list student, I want to know as soon as I start reviewing the resume; it sets a positive impression from the start. The academic record in itself may not be enough to guarantee an interview, but it certainly affects how you read the rest of the resume.

Of course, there may be occasion to let the education section slip to the bottom of the page or onto page two—for example, if the employment history and work experience are more impressive than the academic record.

I regularly hear from candidates, in senior roles in particular, that university grades are irrelevant (given that it was so long ago), and in any event, the candidate has proven themselves as a lawyer since. I completely agree, but the fact remains that if even 5 percent of the potential readers of your resume prefer candidates with top marks, then it goes on the resume. I have never known a client to object to a candidate's highlighting a strong academic record.

A quick story: When I was a junior recruiter, I was one of a team working on a general counsel search for one of the UK's most prominent financial institutions. The final shortlisted candidate was the managing partner of a top UK firm and was known as an exceptional lawyer and manager of people. Our client (the outgoing general counsel) refused to confirm the offer until the candidate's academic record had been confirmed. His view was that the job required high academic intellect and he needed as much proof of that as possible—even if the candidate had graduated 30 years previously! It wasn't the easiest candidate call I have made.

Resume Do's and Don'ts

Do:

1. Put yourself in the shoes of the reader.
2. Identify your key attributes before you start.
3. Remember you only have 15–30 seconds to get these attributes across.
4. Use headings and bullet points.
5. Show off—objectively!

Don't:

1. Waste space on Page 1.
2. Use fancy graphics, colors, or fonts.
3. Use long turgid paragraphs.
4. Have a fluffed up personal profile section.
5. Try to mislead the reader in any way.

Employment experience

This should be your next section. After the heading, refer to the Synopsis of Legal Experience section on the following page for a more detailed description of your legal experience.

Start with your most recent employment. On the left, have the name of your most recent employer, and on the right, dates of employment. Underneath the employer name, list the roles and titles you have held with that employer and the respective dates.

Next, have a paragraph describing your employer (no more than three lines of page-width text). Never assume that the reader will know about your company—what will happen if a recruitment firm has been instructed, and the job of shortlisting the first 30 candidates goes to a novice recruiter straight out of college, who has no real knowledge of corporate America?

The next paragraph briefly describes your role and responsibilities with that employer. You need to hit on the key areas of your expertise—even bulleting key areas and mentioning specific highlights in each one. An example:

As general counsel, I have been responsible for a team of five lawyers and seven support staff, reporting directly to the CEO. During a very busy period over the last five years, I have been primarily responsible for the following: M&A—I have been lead counsel on over a dozen acquisitions, most recent being the \$200 million acquisition of X company, one of our major competitors in the Y market. . . .

Avoid long, turgid sentences and paragraphs.

If you have had a recent performance appraisal that contains a concise, complimentary quote about how great you are, you may consider having a final paragraph including this information. If you have multiple

For Additional Information

CLE

ACC, in conjunction with the WestLegalEdcenter, offers the following online CLE courses:

- *Building Relationships: Working with and Managing Staff*, 2005. Delivering exceptional legal services is not enough. From staff attorney to CLO, career success often depends on fitting in and playing well with others. Hear from our HR professionals who will guide you along the path to building strong relationships to carry you through every step of your career. www.acca.com/resource/v5840.
- *Taking Charge of Your Career: Best Practices for Women Lawyers*, 2005. As you've navigated the course of your professional career, there have undoubtedly been times when you would have liked to have the advice of a woman lawyer who has been there, done that, and was willing to share. We've assembled an outstanding panel of women general counsel who are committed to offering that sounding board you've wanted and identifying ways to approach some of the unique challenges faced by women in-house counsel. www.acca.com/resource/v6719.
- *Attorney Management Workshop*, 2005. This 2004 winner is back with updated information to take you to the next level of your management career. Using hypothetical problems in an interactive setting you will learn best practice solutions to law department management

problems. The updated checklist you take home from this class will be an invaluable resource to use in your everyday management role. www.acca.com/resource/v6730.

- *Career Planning for the Legal Department*, 2004. Your legal department is only as good as the people who serve in it. Choosing and developing the right team is essential to success. But how do you ensure you are building an "A+" lineup? Your law department management peers will share with you their strategies and tips for recruiting, retention, motivating, goal-setting, evaluating, succession planning, and more for professional staff. www.acca.com/resource/v5146.

Legal Recruiters

- Marsden International, www.marsdeninternational.com. This site offers resources that include a resume template.
- Robert Half Legal, www.affiliatesroberthalflegal.com. Robert Half Legal is the ACC Alliance staffing partner. For more information and ACC member discounts, see www.acca.com/certificate.html. (Charles A. Volkert III, executive director of Robert Half Legal, is coauthor of "New Horizons: Managing a Career Transition," also in this issue.)
- For a general listing of legal recruiters, visit www.hierosgamos.org/hg/db_recruiters.asp?action=search&abc=a.

quotes or summaries of performance appraisals, you may want to include “Performance Appraisal” as a separate heading in your Synopsis of Legal Experience—but don’t go overboard!

Other headings

The above format will convey most of what you need in that preliminary 30-second review of the resume. Being an experienced and well-rounded individual, you want to convey additional information. This additional information may not itself get you on to the “A” list, but once on, it may be influential in the final decision-making process. Thus you might also include resume headings such as:

- Publications or Seminars,
- Languages,
- Citizenship,
- Community Involvement,
- Corporate Involvement—i.e., being a health and safety officer, captain of the company’s softball team, or anything that shows that you are an active participant in corporate life,
- Previous Nonlegal Experience,
- Interests, and
- References.

For the “References” heading, it is acceptable to put “available upon request.” Listing references on a resume (in particular, current employer references) creates the impression that the current employer knows of your job search and raises the question: Have you been asked to leave your current role (and, if so, why)?

Attaching a Synopsis of Legal Experience

The attachment, which you may want to call your “Synopsis of Legal Experience” or “Summary of Legal Experience,” is where you expand upon what you have briefly described on the first page of your resume. It’s where you provide comfort to the CEO that you really have the expertise you profess to have. Think of your career as a whole, and break this down under headings of discipline expertise. The headings I would recommend would be:

- M&A,
- Commercial Contracts,
- Regulatory/Corporate Governance,
- Securities, and
- Antitrust.

If relevant, you may also add other headings such as:

- Litigation Management,
- Labor/Employment,
- Intellectual Property, and
- Information Technology.


I would also encourage you, if appropriate, to have separate headings for areas such as:

- Management Experience,
- Training and Development, and
- Specific Awards and Recognition

Under each of these headings, list the key deals you have been involved in and the experience you have gained in each, and your role. Don’t forget we are at the comfort-seeking stage of the resume review. You have caught the readers’ attention in the preliminary review, and they are now on your side—they will read the rest of the resume to gain comfort that you really do the type of work that the CEO expects of a general counsel. The length of the attachment varies, but is typically two to three pages.

Getting—and Keeping—The Resume Right

Following the above rules will help you to draft a resume that will be an informative and malleable marketing tool to assist in applying for your next job. Keep multiple resumes—each position you apply for may require you to tweak the resume to highlight certain skills.

Even if you are not looking for a job, it’s a good idea to keep your resume up to date. Add to the Synopsis of Legal Experience every time you complete a significant project. As the synopsis gets too long, you can condense it down occasionally. 

Have a comment on this article? Email editorinchief@acca.com.

NOTES

1. Being originally from England, I feel it’s my duty to educate the world on some choice English sayings. It means don’t give needless assistance or presume to offer advice to an expert. As one author, Anon., once wrote:
*Teach not thy parent’s mother to extract
The embryo juices of the bird by suction.
The good old lady can that feat enact,
Quite irrespective of your kind instruction.*
2. On the importance of first impressions, I highly recommend Malcolm Gladwell’s books, *The Tipping Point* (Back Bay Books 2002) and *Blink* (Little, Brown 2005).

Jonathan Marsden, “Getting the Resume Right!” *ACC Docket* 24, no. 7 (July/August 2006): 66–72. Copyright © 2006, the Association of Corporate Counsel. All rights reserved.

Don't Network, Make Contact

By Barbara Moses

Two emails I received this past week: "I'm a career coach living in Malaysia. I saw your book *What Next?* It looks great but I'm too busy to read it. I'm coming to Toronto next week. Can we have a mutually advantageous meeting? I would love to discuss the ideas in your book."

Even better: "I'm a member of the same professional association as you (along with 5,000 of my other closest friends around the world) and have just developed a great workshop on networking. I understand you have great connections. Who are your clients? Can you send me a list of their names?"

Although networking is a central part of everyone's career vocabulary today, it still provokes consternation in many people. Some wonder about the basic mechanics. "What am I supposed to do? Go up to everyone I meet and say: 'Hi. My name is . . . and I'm a customer-service-driven, team-building financial professional.'" Others are uncomfortable because they feel like they are "using people."

Only a small percentage of the professional managerial population feels completely at ease with networking, and even fewer could be described as skilled. Instead, they are awkward at best, and obnoxious at worst.

What does networking mean to you? For many of us, networking conjures up an image of slightly wooden-looking professionals in business attire aggressively passing out business cards and madly trying to impress those in a position of influence—as if most people ever look at those cards again. While trying to get your name in front of decision makers is certainly one aspect of networking, it actually accounts for relatively little of the activity good networkers engage in. Indeed, good networkers are often status blind.

Another popular image is meeting as many people as possible and asking them for assistance in some way, whether it be information about their professional field, or the names of people who might be interested in their services. Notice how only one person's interests are being served in these scenarios. Yet, when I look at the great networkers I know, most of them spend far more time helping others than intentionally seeking personal benefit.

I asked people who receive a constant stream of requests for networking meetings what puts them off most. I heard a chorus of complaints. Liz, for example, a vice-president of learning, was at a garden party where a

management consultant glued himself to her "telling me about the most banal programs he'd developed as if they were rocket science. On Monday, he called my office and insisted on getting through, telling my assistant he was a friend. I finally agreed to see him to get rid of him, but I was so pissed off at his pushiness that no matter what he said, I wouldn't have been interested."

Others had similar stories of people who agreed to meet a networker out of duty or as a favor to a friend, but were resentful about it and of no help to the networker.

Other common complaints included people who: act like robots spouting their sound bites; have no idea of who you are and then lecture you on stuff on which you are an expert; think networking with a senior person is better; and use the name of someone you know and assume it's an automatic door-opener. (One person recently called me up, mentioned a friend's name, and asked for some private information about my company. When I said it was confidential she replied: "Well, I will have to tell Jeff about this.")

And then there is the sheer ingratitude of many networkers: You meet someone and are generous with your time and helpful in terms of passing on ideas and sharing contacts. Not only do you not get a thank-you note, but several months later, you learn through the grapevine that one of your contacts led to the person finding a job.

But to my mind, the infomercial is the worst sin of all. Someone asks you for help and then goes into excruciating detail about every job they have had in their 30-year career and how amazing they are. When you're about to provide some advice, they repeat how great they are "You know, I'm really good at . . .," just in case you didn't get it the first time.

Good networking is a two-way street. Skilled networkers don't think of themselves as networking but rather as exchanging information. Whenever someone tells me about a great networking experience they had, I ask them two questions. "What did you learn from them?" and "What information did you pass on?"

In good networking there always is a mutual connection. Done well, networking is like the most graceful dancing. Both parties are stimulated by the interaction. No one feels used. At its best, there is a deeply satisfying emotional and intellectual connection. Done poorly, nothing is more off-putting.

Good networkers are “wired,” with broad connections that range beyond their own professional boundaries and into all walks of life. They cultivate relationships with people who know how to get things done. Like good mentors, they are genuinely curious about people and what they are thinking, and like to make things happen for others. They like to bring together interesting people and ideas—and they are as proud of making things happen for others as they are of the number of names in their personal organizer.

But networking is as much a cognitive skill as an interpersonal one. Adept networkers are huge information synthesizers who can see connections between

people, things, and ideas that are not obvious; identify a higher-level idea, which goes beyond the presenting issue; and often make creative referrals that the other person wouldn't otherwise have identified. So, next time you are at a networking event, “ask not what your network can do for you, but what you can do for it.”

Barbara Moses, PhD, is an organizational career management expert, speaker, and best-selling author. Her new book, Women Confidential: Midlife Women Explode the Myth of Having It All will be published this fall by Marlowe & Company. She can be reached via www.bmoses.com.

Getting Over Networking Angst

Do you feel awkward or think you are being pushy when networking? You're part of a large group of managers and professionals. Here are some tips on how to reappraise what you're doing.

Do:

- Think of yourself as building knowledge networks of people with great ideas.
- Network broadly with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Be creative and bring together information and people from a variety of sources.
- Make it easy for someone to say yes to a meeting; ask if they prefer phone or face-to-face.
- Get to the point quickly. Summarize what the other person needs to know.
- Maintain the connection by following up on your contacts. Send a thank-you note.
- Develop a strategy that plays to your strengths. If you are introverted, for example, become known by presenting at conferences or stay in touch by sending out articles or email. Force yourself to participate in conferences and networking events. Talk to people at conferences and networking events.
- Learn what the other person values. Can you provide them with helpful ideas, information or content?
- Show your personality—make a personal connection. Be charming. Display great manners.
- Share an idea with everyone you meet. Pass on the information you have acquired in earlier networking meetings. Become an oral storyteller.

Don't:

- Equate the number of business cards handed out or endless lunches with effective networking.
- Assume a more senior person will be more helpful to you than someone more junior.
- Confine yourself to people just like you.
- Evaluate your activities in terms of whether they will pay off right away, such as a job lead. You are cultivating long-term relationships.
- Try to strike a connection with the promise “I was wondering if we can get together to discuss something mutually beneficial” unless the other person really will benefit.

ACC Resources on . . . Legal Careers

Jobline:

- ACC's In-house JoblineSM is a comprehensive database, specifically designed for the in-house counsel community, that offers over 900 job listings, 7,000 resumes, and a wide selection of employment-related resources. Visit Jobline at jobline.acca.com.

InfoPAK:

- *Career Options for In-House Counsel*, 2005. This InfoPAK will present techniques for pursuing new positions as well as strategies for the successful management of your career. www.acca.com/resource/v5833.

Webcast:

- *Managing to Motivate and Maximize Productivity* (June 21, 2006). A panel of in-house counsel and career management advisors will share their strategies for creating and sustaining a highly productive environment in the corporate legal workplace. www.acca.com/resource/v7161.

Leading Practice Profile:

- *Job Titles for In-house Lawyers: What Companies Are Doing*, 2005. Although most job titles can't convey the complexity of services or an individual's level of experience, they are a reality that department executives need to deal with. Lawyers care deeply about how they are titled and perceived; for some it is one of the few measures of their career development within an organization where there is not much room for department expansion or promotion. Featured in this Profile are approaches taken by six companies in setting job titles for in-house lawyers. www.acca.com/resource/v5986.

Docket Articles:

- Keith E. Gottfried, "Is It Time to Move On? 14 Questions to Ask Yourself about Your Career," *ACC Docket* 23, no. 4 (April 2005): 78–91. When it comes to proactively managing careers, in-house counsel, like everyone else, tend to avoid addressing change unless absolutely forced to. You may not be sure what to expect from your position or how your position differs from other in-house counsel positions. These criteria will help you determine whether it is time to move on to a new in-house counsel position. www.acca.com/resource/v5719.

- Teresa T. Kennedy, Eva M. Kripalani, and Elinora S. Mantovani, "Achieving Balance: A Recipe for High-quality Work Life for In-house Counsel," *ACC Docket* 22, no. 2 (February 2004): 38–54. Many of us want time, energy, an ethical lifestyle that has a place for both our work responsibilities and our duties to our communities and families, flexibility, and—last but certainly not least—the ability to enjoy our lives. How can we as attorneys find this idyllic combination? Read this article to find out. www.acca.com/protected/pubs/docket/feb04/balance.pdf.
- Veta T. Richardson, "From Lawyer to Business Partner: Career Advancement in Corporate Law Departments," *ACC Docket* 22, no. 2 (February 2004): 70–75. Read this article for insights and tips on how to achieve your fullest potential. www.acca.com/resource/v467.

Annual Meeting Material:

- Thomas Fay, Teresa Kennedy, Brett Shur, *Career Planning for the Legal Department*, 2004. Includes a power-point presentation. www.acca.com/resource/v5589.
- Sara Armstrong, Kathy Barlow, Barbara Eisenberg, and Karen Litsinger, *Moving Up the Ladder: How to Advance within the In-house Profession*, 2004. Would you like to move up, either within your current company or at another company? Maybe become a senior lawyer at a large organization or a general counsel of an any-size corporation? You work hard and charting your advancement is always on your to-do list, but somehow it always stays at the bottom. This panel of career specialists discusses meaningful ways for you to approach advancement in the in-house profession and shows you ways to build your skill set so that when the next big position comes along, you will get in the door. www.acca.com/resource/v6012.

Alliance Partner:

Robert Half Legal is ACC's exclusive staffing partner. For ACC discount opportunities and details. www.acca.com/certificate.html.