

ATTORNEY RESUME SECRETS REVEALED



THE WORLD'S LARGEST ATTORNEY RESUME SERVICE
by **ATTORNEY RESUME**
A Juriscape company

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Attorney Resume Secrets Revealed

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INTRODUCTION

From a *summa cum laude* graduate of Stanford Law School to a student at the bottom of his class at a non-accredited law school to an attorney entering the legal field after 20 years as a figure-skating coach, my clients have included attorneys and law students at every level, in every geographic location (even overseas), and with every story imaginable. Like snowflakes, no two legal job seekers are exactly alike. Sure, they share certain things in common—each of my clients has either has or is in pursuit of a law degree, and each client has desired a new (or first) legal job—but the similarities end there.

What I learned from working with such a diverse group of legal professionals is this: Your credentials are only as strong as the manner in which they're presented.

I'll be the first to admit that I was skeptical about how much weight a resume really carried. Some people, it seemed, just didn't stand a chance. In the midst of a sour economy, how was someone who hadn't practiced law for 10 years going to get a job when those with nearly impeccable qualifications were struggling? But then I saw the people with long employment gaps get jobs, I saw people make drastic career changes, and I saw people secure positions on the other side of the country (or world). And, most important, I saw what a difference a resume can make. If you need further proof, one client submitted the resume we'd revised together to a firm that had rejected her just weeks earlier—and got an interview!

As success story after success story came in, I looked back at the successful clients' resumes, making notes of what had worked and why. I wish I could say that my analysis resulted in a no-fail formula that I could share with you by simply pasting a sample resume and cover letter here and saying "Voila! Just use this, and you're guaranteed success!" Unfortunately, it's not that simple. As I looked at the resumes and cover letters that had gotten people interviews, I soon discovered that—like the job seekers themselves—no two were alike. Successful cover letters were short, long, aggressive, humorous, and/or formal. Successful resumes were descriptive, concise, one page, two page—the list goes on.

What these documents all shared in common, however, was that they were products of significant strategizing and brainstorming by both the client and me. They gave a good sense of the person they were written about; they conveyed this person's best attributes in a clear, concise manner; and they turned some nicely formatted words and symbols into someone worth getting to know.

While I can't offer a quick "here's what works" template, what I can offer is the knowledge I've gleaned from assisting more than 2,000 attorneys and law students to date with their legal resumes and cover letters. Every day, I am met with new challenges, and along with these challenges has come tremendous insight into what it takes to get a legal job, regardless of your situation. I've written this book to share that insight with you. While self-marketing takes various forms, this book will focus solely on marketing through the written word.

My goal is to help you 1) see yourself as the marketable legal professional that you are and 2) convey that marketability to others. Whether you feel you're extremely marketable or you are in the depths of despair because you're not where you want to be professionally, the following pages will provide you with advice that will put you one important step ahead of your competitors.

CHAPTER 1: THE MARKETING MINDSET

Before you ever put pen to paper to write your cover letter or resume (or any document for that matter), you need to ensure that you know your audience. This doesn't mean that you need to personally know each legal employer to whom you write, but you do need to have a sense of what an employer is thinking and looking for when he/she receives your cover letter and resume. This chapter will put you inside the head of the employer and help you to apply the things you already know about effective marketing (whether you think you know them or not) to your own self-marketing campaign. Once you are confident that you're taking the right approach, the actual writing of the documents will be much easier.

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Leveling the Playing Field

Have you ever seen a couple and thought, “How did he get her?” or vice versa? Obviously, the person deemed less physically attractive knew how to sell his/her other great qualities to compensate for what he/she lacked in the looks department. You’ve also probably known someone who seems to have it all—good looks, charm, intelligence, etc.—yet sits at home dateless on Saturday nights. Clearly, that person is lacking when it comes to self-promotion.

If there were strict rules about dating, the “tall, dark, and handsome” guy would always get the girl; and the “nice” guy would always be left out in the cold. Likewise, if there were strict rules about how your credentials must be presented, then the same people (those with great credentials) would always get the good jobs, and the others (those with less than great credentials) would be forever stuck in bad jobs.

This is where self-marketing comes in. Your resume and cover letter give you an opportunity to level the playing field. The worst thing you can do is to take someone else’s resume and simply fill in the blanks with your information. Your friend might have a 3.9 GPA and therefore doesn’t need to flesh out his/her work experience quite so much. A colleague might have been made partner and therefore doesn’t need to do as much selling of his/her experience. You need to view your resume and cover letter as an opportunity to show what you do have that your competitors do not.

Demystifying the “Employer”

To an active job-seeker, the term “employer” doesn’t simply refer to a human being who needs to hire another human being. Instead, it refers to a mysterious god-like entity who selects the “good” from the “bad.” Many legal job seekers believe that the key to a successful resume or cover letter lies in a magic phrase, word, format, or font that will immediately land them on the “good” pile. They believe that the hiring partner or recruiter is a proverbial Rumpelstiltskin, waiting for some insightful job seeker to say their name.

Clients frequently ask questions such as these:

- Do legal employers prefer justified or left-aligned cover letters?
- Do legal employers like white or off-white paper?
- Do legal employers prefer that a two-page resume be stapled or paper-clipped?
- Do legal employers like bullet points or paragraphs?
- Do legal employers prefer that my heading be centered?
- Do legal employers like letters to be signed in blue or black ink?

When it comes to predicting exactly what legal employers prefer, there is no crystal ball that will tell you. When someone becomes a hiring coordinator, he/she does not enter a giant brainwashing machine that tells him/her to hate long cover letters or to love bullet points. Employers are individuals with their own unique likes and dislikes. While there are definitely some general rules with regard to what legal employers prefer, be aware that there is no secret formula that automatically guarantees success.

You also need to know that the person who puts out a job posting is not an evil monster, rubbing his/her hands together with glee while waiting to crush the hopes and dreams of every person applying for the job.

Here are some prevalent myths that I’ve heard:

- Legal employers will throw your resume out without looking at it if it’s two pages long.
- Legal employers will toss your submission if there’s even one tiny typo.
- Legal employers will contact your employer before speaking to you to find out if you were a good employee.
- Legal employers will disqualify you if you don’t include your GPA.

Employers want to like you. This might be hard to believe if you've had a frustrating job-hunting experience, but it's true. Legal employers genuinely want to find people who will do a good job, and they are hoping that good candidates will come across their desks. Hiring qualified and competent attorneys is in the employer's best interest. Therefore, if you can impress upon the employer that you can fulfill his/her needs and add value to his/her company or law firm, you will be considered, typo and all.

If there is anything that can approximate a magic resume and cover letter formula, it is this: Legal employers want to know what you can do for them. Adopting this as a mantra will start you on your way to a successful job search. Your goal in finding a job may be to make more money and advance your career, but if you convey this in your marketing materials, you will surely find yourself in the rejection pile.

Learn How to Think Like a Legal Employer

The simplest and best way to get a good idea of what makes an effective cover letter and resume is to be on the other side of the hiring process. When you are in the position of hiring someone, you will see firsthand what employers like and dislike in an applicant, because you are the employer. Recently, I had to go through the process of hiring writers to assist me in drafting resumes and cover letters for clients. This process alone taught me more about what should/shouldn't be in a resume and cover letter than any books I've read, philosophizing I've done, or interviews I have gone on.

Here are some of the things I learned:

1) Many people who apply for jobs do not put one second of thought into what they send and to whom they send it. I received resumes that contained an objective stating thus: "To obtain a teaching position." I received letters that carried on for two pages about the candidate's IT background. I received only a resume when a cover letter was explicitly requested.

2) Many people who apply for jobs are crazy. Seriously. I was sent pictures of cats, links to soundbites of candidates singing horrible folksongs, and a "virtual handshake." I'm pointing this out because many people who are level-headed, non-crazy job applicants fall under the assumption that everyone else applying for the job that he/she is applying for is a super-qualified, attractive, poised, top 10% graduate of Yale Law School. This is not the case.

If you are beginning a job search, try to either put yourself in a real hiring situation (volunteer to participate in interviewing/screening candidates at your current job) or, if that's not possible, a virtual one.

By virtual, I mean that you should try to imagine a scenario in which you would need to hire someone. Perhaps think of your ideal intern, summer associate, or colleague. Jot down a brief job description. Then think of what you would want to see in that person's resume and cover letter.

What you will find is that there are often a few key things that you are looking for in your virtual employee. Say those things are 1) a law degree from a certain school or a certain caliber of school, 2) strong grades, 3) experience in labor and employment law, and 4) evidence of strong writing skills, i.e., publication or awards in legal-writing courses.

Does your resume catch the employer's eye in 20 seconds? Well, that's all the time a prospective employer spends on a resume.

A well-written resume is the single most important factor that opens doors to that perfect position. It is in fact a marketing brochure that highlights the scope and depth of your experience and communicates a compelling reason for the prospective employer to need and want your services.

The purpose of your resume is not to land you a job, but to get you an interview. A huge number of job seekers make the mistake of putting far too much detail into the resume. The interview will land you the job itself, so you must effectively use the resume to get that elusive interview.

In the current scenario of self marketing where it is essential to show off your work, it is equally important that it should be done without a hint of bravado. There are various dignified and appropriate ways to let prospective employers know how good you are without sounding haughty.

The **Attorney Resume Secrets Revealed** gives you expert guidance on writing the most important document of your career. Learn to market yourself effectively and aggressively through this book.