

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

One of the most important concepts you will ever encounter in the job-search process is that of **TRANSFERABILITY OF SKILLS**. In fact, I tell my clients that **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS** is one of the most important ideas I mention. The deft use of transferable skills should pervade your job search and play a major role in your résumé, cover letter, and interview strategies. What are transferable skills? Simply put, they are skills you have acquired during any activity in your life — jobs, coursework, projects, parenting, hobbies, sports, virtually anything — that are transferable and applicable to what you want to do in your next career phase.

In résumés, cover letters, and during interviews, you should always portray your skills as applicable to the job you seek. If you have good experience and you're seeking a job in the same field you've pursued in the past, portraying your skills as transferable is relatively easy. But if you are changing careers and seeking to do something entirely different from what you've done in the past, or you are a recent graduate or other entry-level jobseeker without much experience, you have a greater challenge ahead of you.

Let's look at the career-changer's dilemma first. I was recently asked to re-strategize and rewrite a résumé for a woman who wanted to become an account representative (*sales*, in other words). I won't tell you what field she sought to change from; see if you can guess it from this entry on her old résumé about her current job:

- Utilize personal computer for word processing, spreadsheets, and graphic design including internal/external correspondence, reports, procedure manuals and presentations.
- Create and distribute a variety of queries and reports using Access.
- Process confidential employee records such as salary changes, vacation/absenteeism reports and performance appraisals, etc.
- Complete and submit invoices to process for payments.
- Schedule meetings/appointments and make travel arrangements.
- Accountable for reconciliation of expense reports.
- Develop and maintain product application guides using flowcharts.

Did you guess *secretary*? You're right! Her résumé screams "*secretary*," not account representative. I told her that if she really wanted an account rep position, she was definitely emphasizing the **wrong** skills.

She should **not** have been emphasizing clerical and secretarial skills — or even computer skills. None of those skills is even mentioned in the ads she sent me spotlighting the kind of job she wanted.

I told her she should be emphasizing sales, customer service, interpersonal, and communications skills. Almost nothing in her current job — *the way she portrayed it on her old résumé* — supported her desire to be an account rep. Yet, I'm sure her job requires great interpersonal skills, and she interacts with lots of different people and solves the problems of her boss and others. Those are the kinds of skills needed in the account rep jobs.

For example, I told her that instead of saying "Schedule meetings/appointments and make travel arrangements," it would be much more effective to say "Interact effectively with diverse personalities to effectively schedule meetings and make travel arrangements."

That's what you need to do if you're seeking a new job. Think of everything you've done in terms of how it is transferable to what you want to be doing, and portray it that way. Remember the old saying "Birds of a feather flock together." **If you describe your current or prior activities in the terminology of the job environment you plan on entering, you will be perceived as much more relevant to the employer's needs.** For every item on your current résumé, think: How can I portray this skill so that it supports the idea of doing what I want to do in my next job? ***If you can't make it support your career objective, leave it out.*** It's probably typecasting you into your old job anyway!

The classic examples that I begin showing my clients, about how a college student can portray transferable skills, come from my colleague Donald Asher's book, *From College to Career*, one of the best résumé books available for college students. Look at how Don takes a typical lowly job held by a college student, that of receptionist, and portrays it as applicable to her desire to work in finance:

- Proven ability to deal with a wide range of individuals, including high-net-worth investors and institutional money manager, in a stressful and time-sensitive environment.
- Gained knowledge of financial markets and instruments, especially stocks, bonds, futures and options.

Now see how he makes a waitress seem like just the person you'd want to hire in an entry-level marketing job by showcasing the transferability of her skills:

- Act as a "sales representative" for the restaurant, selling add-ons and extras to achieve one of the highest per-ticket and per-night sales averages.
- Prioritize and juggle dozens of simultaneous responsibilities.
- Have built loyal clientele of regulars in addition to tourist trade.
- Use computer daily.

To effectively identify which skills you need to emphasize, you will certainly have to do some research on the company at which you seek employment and / or the particular job you're applying for. If you're responding to an ad, it's easy to find valuable *intel* right in the ad that will call your attention to the most important qualifications for being hired. Want Ads will also clue you into the key words, sometimes called '*buzz words*' that will cause your résumé to be screened-in; bringing you much closer to an interview invitation; instead of being tossed into the 'circular file.' You can also scarcely go wrong by emphasizing the skills that virtually all employers are looking for, such as employability, teamwork, communications, interpersonal, and leadership skills.

Make sure that YOUR résumé is KWS meaning **KEY WORD SEARCHABLE**

Often times we can make effective use of the experience gained through part-time jobs and summer employment. If an employer kept you on for two and a half years, during High School, well you wouldn't have lasted if you didn't do a good job, were undependable, or frequently late to work. Additionally, the fact that the same summer camp not only retained you for three summers, but also promoted you, conclusively demonstrates your employability factors.

For recent graduates or current students aiming for a specialized internship, take stock of school projects and assignments, as you can derive a substantial amount of relevant experience necessary in achieving your next career goal. Your objective is to **demonstrate that you have the POTENTIAL to do the job.** Don't forget about your efforts in volunteer activities or for a civic organization or even a special school activity. Here are some of the steps taken for this college senior seeking a paid internship in the Investment Banking field:

Firstly we highlighted the relevant business, banking, finance, investment coursework.

We then titled a résumé section: **Special Projects / Relevant Experience.**

{Underlined words below indicate referenced (and previously listed) course titles. }

Special Projects / Relevant Experience

- ☑ As part of the coursework in Multi-National Corporations, researched data and performed spreadsheet analyses comparing levels of foreign direct investment in both Australia and Germany. Effectively demonstrated how resulting data is useful in increasing confidence level of foreign investors.
- ☑ For International Business, researched the synergy created by the MCI-WorldCom merger.
- ☑ In Spanish, analyzed potential effects on Panama's society due to transfer-of-control of the Canal from the United States' to Panamanian.
- ☑ Researched, selected, and tracked stocks throughout the semester in the Business Financial Management course.

“O.K., so those are good examples for students to translate school experience into relevant work-related skills. How about translating from one job environment to something totally different?”, you might ask.

Here is an example of the strategy used for someone aiming to switch to a corporate job from something extremely different. We'll clue you in on what her (at the time) professional experience had been. Bet you won't be able to guess it on your own.

In a specially created section titled: **AREAS OF EFFECTIVENESS** we took credit for two skill / ability areas:

- ✧ Organizational Ability – Successfully revamped inventory / supply and purchasing systems which eliminated over-ordering by 30%. Received credit for returned supplies. Comparison shopped for best prices when purchasing, thereby slashing monthly expenditures by 28%. Increased efficiency enabled a greater number of clients to be serviced.
- ✧ Finance – Attention to detail, communication with clients, and contact with insurance companies generated an additional \$3,000 per month in revenue while decreasing over-due payments by 8%.

She had been a dental assistant. We focused on her business-related activities talking about inventory / supplies and not cotton wadding and dental floss; clients and not patients; accounts payable and receivable and not dental insurance claim forms. **Essentially we told her story in terms of the business environment she planned to transition into. But most importantly she SOLD her VALUE.**

THERE IS A HUGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TELLING AND SELLING.

The job seeking candidate must think of her / him-self as a ‘product to be sold’ with the employer as the *potential buyer* and focus on key selling points rather than telling your employment auto-biography.

The entire job market is driven by the exchange of value. The hiring manager's implicit question is: “*What can you do for me in exchange for your compensation package?*”

It is critical that your résumé answer these five questions:

- 1) Who are you *professionally* and what value would you bring to our company?
- 2) What (*quantified* or *qualified*) results can you deliver, that would be of benefit to this organization?
- 3) What are your main areas of expertise that produce tangible results?
- 4) Where have you delivered these results in the past?
- 5) Why would I be better off having YOU on the team rather than someone else? / Prove that can YOU do something important for me that another candidate, with a similar skills/experience mix, *couldn't* do?

Mark D. Berkowitz, NCCC, CPRW, JCTC, CEIP, a highly regarded *career strategist* is president of CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES. Changing lives and revolutionizing careers since 1985, Mark provides one-on-one career consulting services including career counseling and assessment, job search and interview coaching as well as résumé building assistance and guidance to help each client achieve not only job advancement, but lasting and meaningful success in their career path as well.

A distinguished figure in his field, Berkowitz is one of the top career builders in the country and has been quoted in dozens of books and publications on the topic of career advancement including: GALLERY OF BEST RÉSUMÉS; GALLERY OF BEST RÉSUMÉS FOR TWO YEAR DEGREE GRADUATES; COVER LETTER MAGIC; PROFESSIONAL RÉSUMÉS FOR TAX AND ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONALS; PROFESSIONAL RÉSUMÉS FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS; RÉSUMÉ WINNERS FROM THE PROS; RÉSUMÉS THAT KNOCK ‘EM DEAD; COVER LETTERS THAT KNOCK ‘EM DEAD; THE EDGE RÉSUMÉ AND JOB SEARCH STRATEGY. and WINNING INTERVIEWS FOR \$100,000+ JOBS

Has been credited with being “... *one of the leading résumé writers in the United States*” by Dr. David Noble in his Jist Works book PROFESSIONAL RÉSUMÉS FOR EXECUTIVES, MANAGERS, AND OTHER ADMINISTRATORS. Wendy Enelow, Founding President of the Career Management Alliance has acknowledged Mark as “... *one of the most talented career counselors I have ever met.*”

Passionate about empowering others to realize their dreams, Mark served as an executive board member of the Professional Assn of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches. He has been helping clients successfully advance in and/or change their careers for over 35 years. With a Masters Degree in Career Development and four specialized certifications (NATIONAL CERTIFIED CAREER COUNSELOR, CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL RÉSUMÉ WRITER, INT’L CERTIFIED JOB & CAREER TRANSITION COACH, AND CERTIFIED EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW PROFESSIONAL), he is uniquely qualified to help you improve your career situation. A recognized expert in the field, Mark served as chairman of the Certification Board for the Professional Assn of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches and was a founding member of the Career Management Alliance. Additionally, he shared his expertise in effectively utilizing career assessment tools with graduate counseling students from nearby Fordham University, helping to prepare students for their future counseling careers.

For sixteen years, Mark directed the Career Assessment & Counseling Center at the Southern Westchester Board of Cooperative Educational Services, which enjoyed the reputation of being the most comprehensive career planning service in the region. He has taught graduate counseling and job search courses at the College of New Rochelle and mentored graduate counseling interns from Fordham University.

Among his career highlights are:

- ◆ Executive Board Member: Professional Association of Résumé Writers; Chairman (1998 – 2000) Certification Board.
- ◆ Serving on the National Certification Board from 1995 through 2002 and having coordinated the testing program for those seeking the designation Certified Professional Résumé Writer (CPRW).
- ◆ Was quoted in the National Business Employment Weekly in an article on writing résumés.
- ◆ Serving as programming consultant to numerous school districts for their “School-to-Career Transition” programs.
- ◆ Was extensively quoted on interviewing strategies in “Winning Interviews For \$100,000 Jobs”.
- ◆ Had been instrumental in planning and producing the very successful “*Career Expo*” in the Hudson Valley Region for five years.

Mark connects with clients locally as well as international clients via the internet. He also provides outreach to high school and college students, presenting career planning and job search strategy workshops. He has been helping professionals, of all levels, *maximize their career potential* since 1985 and was spotlighted on WCBS television in “*ACING THE INTERVIEW.*”

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