

If you are considering a career change, your resume can feel like a barrier to getting an interview. But that doesn't need to be true! Much (if not all) of your experience is transferrable and useful, if presented in the right way. Here are some steps for strategically revamping your resume:

## **STEP 1: What do they want?**

While there are obstacles for any career changer, you can tackle them by re-packaging your experiences and skills on your resume to address the audience's needs. This requires some audience analysis.

Make a list of what the company is looking for using these three "audience analysis" techniques:

- Review the job description: This is true for any job seeker, but even more so for a career changer. Write down the obvious things that the company is looking for (qualifications section) but also read between the lines in the job duties and write down things you think they would desire from the person in that role.
- Review the company website: Look at the company's mission statement, values, recent press releases and other job descriptions. What are some common threads you notice? This will help you target your resume and cover letter.
- Speak to people within the organization: Not only will this give you an inside scoop as to what the organization looks for and how to approach your resume, but it will build your professional network!

## **STEP 2: How do you meet those needs?**

A person making a lateral move or seeking a promotion within the same field has an easier time communicating how they meet the recruiter's needs, but that doesn't mean they are a better fit than you! Using the following techniques will help you communicate why you bring a unique skill set and still meet the criteria for the job.

Use the list you made above to implement the following strategies on your resume:

### 1. Transferable skills:

- Transferable skills are skills you have acquired during any activity in your life—jobs, classes, projects, hobbies, volunteering, virtually anything—that are transferable and applicable to what you want to do in your next job. Transferable skills are important for the career changer because many of your qualifications may not be from your work experience but from other facets of your life (volunteer experience, personal accomplishments, education, etc.). Using the job description, pull out various skills that you believe you have and then generate examples of times you have demonstrated these abilities in your life.

### 2. Keywords

- Keywords are important because many organizations are now using Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to filter through resumes. An ATS will throw out resumes that do not have enough keywords in common with what they are looking for. This can be the biggest hurdle for career changers because your resume may not naturally contain the right keywords. But you can work with the system and not against it by seeking out these keywords and including them in your resume.
- An effective way to come up with keywords is to look at the job description and highlight words – specifically those words that are more technical in nature (specific software, industry-specific knowledge, etc.). Then include them in your resume if you can do so while remaining honest about your experiences and skills.

### 3. Strategic organization

- Seasoned professionals often order the sections of their resume with work experience on top followed by education and certifications and then volunteer or leadership experience. This order can cause some of the most relevant experiences to end up on the second page and hidden from the recruiter. For example, if you are transitioning from higher education administration to counseling and you earned a license in Marriage and Family Therapy, don't force yourself to stick to the "typical" organization of a resume. Put your license on the top! Utilize an order that demonstrates you are the best person for the job.

### 4. Marketing using resume format

- While a resume should always contain honest information, formatting can drastically change the way this information is communicated and perceived. Any of the following formats can work for career changers as long as it is used strategically:
  - Chronological – Experiences are listed in the order in which they happened; most recent to oldest. This format is generally used by applicants with extensive related experience, or for those applying within their organization for a lateral move or promotion. If done well, it can be an effective format for career changers, but it is generally not recommended because it highlights experiences not transferable skills.
  - Functional – A functional resume highlights transferable skills and simply lists work experiences without additional detail. This format is often recommended for people with little to no work experience.
  - Combination – A combination resume is just what it sounds like; a combination of the chronological and functional formats. Combination resumes highlight transferable skills while still featuring work experience.

### **STEP 3: Cover Letter**

- For a career changer, a solid cover letter is vital. Many of the principles introduced here apply to the cover letter, as well. Please see our handout "Career Changers: Writing an Effective Cover Letter" for assistance!