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EXECUTIVE SEARCH

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Six Things To Consider When Updating Your Resume

We often joke about how small the group insurance industry is. Forget six degrees of separation, most people in this industry are at most two degrees of separation away from each other. That's why in the past you may have been able to get a job or two without having to show anyone your resume. I believe that's changed, and along with drug tests, background checks and employment testing, at some point a prospective employer is going to request your resume.

You may have a relationship with a hiring manager at your prospective new company, but that person is just one of a handful of people probably involved in the hiring process. Your resume may be the first or only exposure a Regional VP, Head of Sales, HR person or anyone else involved in the hiring process has of you. It is critical that you leave them with a good first impression.

1. **DO Use *Reverse* Chronological Order**
   Reverse chronological order is the norm. That is, start with you current job and work backwards to your college degree. Yes, your college degree should come at the end. The only time it should come at the beginning is if you are very recently out of college and that's frankly your best most recent achievement. Put the company name first and job title underneath.

2. **DO Date Properly.**
   When showing the dates, include months with the years.

Sun Life Financial *Sales Representative*	January 2002-December 2005

VS.

Sun Life Financial *Sales Representative*	2002-2005

The example directly above could have been Jan 2002 to Dec 2005 which is almost two years longer than Dec 2002 to Jan 2005. If you are *not* trying to hide a gap in employment, don't make it look like you are! If you are hiding a gap, don't, it's going to come out later anyway. You might as well just put it out there and cover the situation pro-actively.

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If you have had a few jobs at the same company, just write the company name down once. If you write the company name multiple times, it looks like you've job hopped. If someone looks carefully, they can see that you haven't, but **don't make people work too hard!**

Not so good…

Financial Consultant, Merrill Lynch, Phoenix, AZ / 1999 – 2001

- Designed financial plans for high net-worth individuals and business owners including estate, insurance, retirement, income, business succession, and educational planning
- Responsible for the sales and marketing of Merrill Lynch products (cash management accounts, employee benefit plans, packaged investment products.

Service Manager, Merrill Lynch, Phoenix, AZ / 1998 – 1999

- Responsible for the oversight of 35 Administrative Assistants and Support Staff
- Coordinated and supervised cash management, wire/order flow and system support

Portfolio Services Supervisor, Merrill Lynch, Englewood, CO /1997 –1998

- Responsible for training and managing a 15-member marketing, technology, and service team that provided Financial Consultants and Retail Investors product and operational support for all Merrill Lynch wrap products
- Assisted in creating new fee-based products and services

Broker Transfer Associate, Merrill Lynch, Englewood, CO / 1995 –1996

- Responsible for reviewing documents and maintaining follow up for accounts transferring in and out of Merrill Lynch

VS.

Better…

Merrill Lynch **1995– 2001**

Financial Consultant, Phoenix, AZ *May 1999-Jun 2001*

- Designed financial plans for high net-worth individuals and business owners including estate, insurance, retirement, income, business succession, and educational planning
- Responsible for the sales and marketing of Merrill Lynch products (cash management accounts, employee benefit plans, packaged investment products and individual securities)

Service Manager, Phoenix AZ *Feb 1998 – Apr 1999*

- Responsible for the oversight of 35 Administrative Assistants and Support Staff
- Coordinated and supervised cash management, wire/order flow and system support

Portfolio Services Supervisor, Englewood, CO *Jan 1997 –Jan 1998*

- Responsible for training and managing a 15-member marketing, technology, and service team that provided Financial Consultants and Retail Investors product and operational support for all Merrill Lynch wrap products
- Assisted in creating new fee-based products and services

Broker Transfer Associate, Englewood, CO *May 1995 –Dec 1996*

- Responsible for reviewing documents and maintaining follow up for accounts transferring in and out of Merrill Lynch

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3. DO State What is Unique to You

- **What makes you better than the 1000 other group reps who do the same thing?** Specify what you've actually achieved in that role. Include numbers, percentages, rankings, and details which communicate how well you've done. If you are relatively new and don't have dramatic results to use, include specifics about the things you do have control over, like the number of appointments you go on each week and what kind of quote activity you have. If those numbers don't look good, fix them before looking for another job.

- **Resumes are not job descriptions**. You can mention products sold and size of groups targeted but don't spend too much time talking about how you build relationships with brokers to increase market share, because every rep at every company does that, and it doesn't need to be stated.

- **Get to goals exceeded, perhaps premium and case count written**, President's Club Awards won, trips won, etc. as soon as possible. This is the core of what is going to get most employers interested to talk to you.

- If you are not in sales, perhaps you've still done things that have helped the company **increase revenue, save money or time**. How are you evaluated at your review? Perhaps you renew a certain amount of business, cross sell, or achieve certain customer service objectives.

4. DO Use Proper Spelling, Grammar and Syntax.

These may seem obvious, but many resumes lack these essentials.

- Resumes indicate the quality and caliber of the work you'll produce. An imperfect document isn't acceptable. Check for spelling errors, incorrect grammar and changes in tense throughout the document. Mistakes make you look lazy in the best case, and not the sharpest tool in the shed in the worst case.

- People often feel the resume should only be one page. I don't believe that's the case, especially if you've been working for a long time. Just make sure what you include is useful, relevant content. If that takes you over one page, so be it.

- Use 10pt or 12pt type. Use Arial or something similar. Times New Roman is a little dated.

- Use Bold and Italics, but use them judiciously. For clarity's sake, I prefer the company name and dates bolded, and the job title italicized.

- Write your document in past tense except for your current role and use the first person, never the third person. Proofread several times then have a few other people read it.

- Use bullet points, not a paragraph format. It's easier to skim and gives the interviewer easy to read talking points to ask you about in an interview. No one wants to wade through lots of material to try to pick out the highlights.

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- Learn how to use the ruler and tabs at the top of the Word document. This is critical if you are in a non sales role and you indicate on your resume that you know how to use Word.

- Formatting marks are turned on and off by clicking the Show/Hide button ¶ on the Standard toolbar. When it's turned on you can see when the space bar has been used instead of tabs, or the indent bits on the ruler. It's inefficient to not use this tool, as it makes it much easier to format documents. If I'm hiring someone who supposedly knows Word to help with letters, presentations and other documents in a fast paced office environment, I would instantly disqualify someone for the position who isn't formatting their resume cleanly.

- A great resource for a tune up on Microsoft Word knowledge is http://www.office.microsoft.com/training

5. DON'T Group By Function
This may be popular in other industries but I think it is very confusing. Most employers want to see your career progression, and how you got to where you are. It is helpful to know what someone achieved in each role they have had. Grouping by function muddles this up (see example below).

Management

-Direct Supervision And Management Of 20-25 Personnel
-Financial Management For Budget Analysis, Forecasting, And Reconciliation's

Client Relations

-Account Management, Strategic Development, Consulting, Presentation, Contracting, And Compliance
-Maintained Professional Relationships With Various Brokers And Consultants
-Generating New, Repeat, And Referral Business By Maintaining Customer Satisfaction

Marketing

-Direct And Consultative Business Development, And Account Management
-Achieved And Maintained 1.3 Million In Revenue Within A 13 State Region
-Penetrated New And Existing Market Share By 130%

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6. **DON'T: The Executive Summary or Profile, and Objective (not so much a don't as don't bother)**

Do any of these sound familiar?

"Excellent communication skills with the ability to motivate, lead and interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds".

"A self-motivated manner allows me to work well independently or as part of a team."

"Goal driven individual adept at meeting challenges and surpassing goals"

"Highly motivated, solution-focused, sales professional with five years of success in sales"

Sometimes these also include areas of specialty like; "***Negotiation, Broker Development, Client Relations, Presentation Skills, Persuasive Communicator"*** etc.

Who wouldn't say these things? Can you imagine saying the opposite? These are gross generalizations and don't prove anything, especially when everyone says the same thing. If you have good sales results or have been promoted at your company, or have some other specific, measurable achievement, they should be listed in bullet points under the job where you accomplished them. After seeing these objective accomplishments, an employer will logically conclude that you have a modicum of communication skills, presentation skills, that you are highly motivated etc. When they have come to that conclusion themselves, it means a lot more than when it's stated on the resume.

The Objective isn't necessary if you've gone through a recruiter or your own connections, and you and the prospective employer both know what you are interviewing for.

Objective: To secure a position with a leading non-medical insurance carrier

There's nothing wrong with writing one, but since you're only going to write one that reflects the job you are interviewing for, it doesn't really add value and you might as well save the line or two on the document.

I recognize there are many points of view on resumes. The rules may be slightly different if you are looking for a job online through Monster, Career Builder, Hot Jobs etc. and you need filters to pick up certain buzz words in your resume.

The six points listed here represent my 'expert' opinion and apply when you are looking for a job through your own contacts or a recruiter. That opinion is derived from having to actually get interviews for candidates in the employee benefits field. A well formatted resume with good content makes that job much easier.

What follows below is a good sample resume based on the 6 points above.

John Bonham

10 Downing Street, Denver CO 80126
jbonham@gmail.com Cell: 303-555-1212

EXPERIENCE

CNA, Denver, CO **Apr 2004 to Present**
Regional Sales Manager

- Currently managing 10 employees including Sales Consultants, Administrative Staff and Service Representative.
- Territory includes Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and New Mexico
- Started with a $1.6 million block and currently at $38 million in premium.
- 2nd place for office of the year in 2007 ($13.2M of premium sold)
- 4th place for office of the year in 2006 ($10M of premium sold)
- 4th place for office of the year in 2005 ($9.2M of premium sold)
- Currently in 2nd place for office of the year with $12.6M of premium sold as of 8-1-2008
- Succeeded in getting all three sales reps to conference

Sun Life Financial, Chicago, IL **Aug 2001 to Apr 2004**
Senior Sales Executive

- Achieved 209% of $3.0M quota for 2004, sold 103 lines of coverage
- Achieved 112% of $2.7M quota for 2003, sold 95 lines of coverage
- Achieved 125% of $2.4M quota for 2002, sold 115 lines of coverage
- Trained 2004 Rookie of the Year.
- Sold employee benefit plans, and self funded medical products to medium, large, and national account sized business.
- Managed customer service, and account management staff on a $50M+ block of Life, Disability and Stop Loss business.

Unum Life Insurance Company, San Francisco, CA **Jun 1996 to Jul 2001**
Sales Representative

- Consistently achieved goals by line.
- Managed inforce block of $11 million of non-medical premium.
- Attained Leader's Forum in 1999, 2000 (top 15% of Sales Force)
- Leader's Club in 1997, 1998
- Territory included some East Bay brokers and Sacramento

EDUCATION

1996 – Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
Bachelor of Science Degree in Business,
Concentration: Finance - Major GPA: 3.68