

## SUCCESSFUL CVS

### What is the purpose of a CV?

The immediate purpose of your CV is to get you the interview, just as the aim of the interview is to gain you an offer, but what sort of CV will influence an employer to see you? The following points emerge from research into employers' preference when reading a CV:

#### Neatness

Aim for the best standard which you can reach in layout and content. You will be judged in part by the look of your CV.

#### Brevity

Most people can set out everything necessary, at least for a short career summary, on two sides of an A4 sheet. Others will need more, but remember that the ability to express oneself concisely is a managerial strength. In any case, effective self-marketing on paper suggests that you should include key personal details on the first page, together with information about your education and your current or latest appointment. The reader interested thus far will no doubt read on, whereas the CV which omits significant information from page one will be unlikely to be pursued to page two.

#### Fact

Let the reader infer the kind of person you are from what you have done and the way you express it. A good principle is to include in a CV only information that can be factually verified. Expressions such as a 'candidate with drive', 'a good mixer', etc are best omitted; their truth can be conveyed much more effectively face to face in an interview.

#### Positive

Aim to bring out what you have done: your achievements, strengths, contributions, transferable skills and experience and so on. Responsibilities are also important but the CV should be more than a catalogue of these. If you do not set out what you are selling, how can your employer know what is for sale? Asking 'how was the company better off by my presence - compared with having nobody in that position?' can help focus on achievements.

#### Plain

Try to keep your CV simple. Avoid the use of colours, tables and photographs.

**Content** - Research indicates that most employers prefer the following:

- Personal details (address, etc) first and not last
- Nationality to be stated
- A personal statement of 80-100 words detailing what you can offer employers
- Positions held in reverse chronological order
- Responsibilities and achievements listed against appointment rather than a table of appointments first, followed by a list of achievements
- Last or current salary, with an indication as to whether a car is provided, and any other significant benefits
- A brief summary of academic, professional, managerial or other principal achievements - ensure it is strictly factual
- Leisure interests, perhaps under the heading 'Other Activities', giving an opportunity to mention activities outside work - past and present
- No 'Personal Characteristics' section

#### Salary disclosures

- It is useful to disclose your current/most recent salary, since salary is such an important aspect of the negotiation for any position.

## Stages in preparing a CV

There are two main stages in compiling a CV - *assembling the facts and drafting/editing*. The aim is to produce a document which a prospective employer, when reading rapidly through many applications, will put in the 'YES' (for interview) pile. The ideal document will be the one which includes all the information which is needed with an element of originality but excludes the negative, the superfluous or causes the reader to stop and wonder. Assemble the Facts List from your personal data base, all of your past experiences and achievements, identifying clearly your strengths.

Put everything down. You may assemble more than you can ultimately use in your CV, but this may still come in useful, perhaps during an interview. Drafting Next, draft, re-draft and edit your CV until you have the best possible phrases to describe your experiences and achievements. Rather than 'worked on the company merger 1994/1995', explain precisely your part in the project; write 'I have four years' experience of ...'(rather than 'I have had wide experience of...') and 'increased the turnover from £35m to £80m in two years' (instead of 'improved the turnover'). Be bold: recruiters are often influenced by evidence of previous managerial and leadership successes. Spell them out and quantify them.

If you introduced something new into the company, say so, especially where it was successful and continued to be used. Test your draft with a colleague or friend. The objectivity of two minds is better than one.

Consider using action verbs in describing what you have done and achieved. However, bear in mind that strong verbs should be used selectively for maximum impact.

Other useful words and phrases include: successful/fully; new; since; adopted by; well accepted. On the other hand, be careful of words like: liaised; coordinated; administered. The reader cannot really be sure what you did or what involvement you really had.

| Action Verbs |             |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Accomplished | Extended    | Redesigned   | Supervised  |
| Accelerated  | Finished    | Reduced      | Terminated  |
| Achieved     | Generated   | Reorganised  | Traced      |
| Approved     | Implemented | Revised      | Traded      |
| Conceived    | Improved    | Scheduled    | Trained     |
| Conducted    | Increased   | Serviced     | Transferred |
| Completed    | Introduced  | Simplified   | Translated  |
| Consolidated | Launched    | Set-up       | Tripled     |
| Created      | Maintained  | Sold         | Trimmed     |
| Decided      | Negotiated  | Solved       | Turned      |
| Delivered    | Ordered     | Started      | Uncovered   |
| Developed    | Performed   | Structured   | Unified     |
| Demonstrated | Pioneered   | Streamlined  | Utilised    |
| Designed     | Planned     | Strengthened | Vacated     |
| Directed     | Processed   | Stressed     | Waged       |
| Doubled      | Programmed  | Stretched    | Widened     |
| Eliminated   | Proposed    | Succeeded    | Wanted      |
| Ended        | Promoted    | Summarised   | Worked      |
| Established  | Purchased   | Superseded   | Wrote       |

Conventions in writing a CV are less rigid than they once were particularly with regard to order and style. Personal details which do not flatter your case, for example, may be deferred to the last page, even if they concern something traditionally presented on the first page. If you are the Finance Director of a large multi-national company, but left school at 16, you could justifiably leave 'education and schooling' until the end.

## Conclusion

Your CV is of the utmost importance; it is the key to your campaign. Essentially, it is a sales document - it must sound business like and convincing and present the information in an attractive way. Give it the time and effort it deserves. Not only will you produce a better CV, but the process will enable you to understand yourself in relation to your experience and achievements.