Write a winning CV

2 November 2020

Given the current situation there are a lot of people looking for jobs right now. With business closures and retrenchments at an all time high (how I wish it wasn't), plenty of people are putting together their CV's and applying for jobs. So firstly, this means it's very competitive out there. Even if you do have good skills and lots of experience it will still not be easy. Also, you need to bear in mind that if you have not looked for a job for a number of years, today a good CV looks very different from what it looked like many years ago.

1. Keep your CV to a maximum of two pages. Some professional bodies only want one page, so check if you belong to a professional organisation. As a general rule, do not go over two pages.
2. Recruiters and hiring managers do not read CV's. The days of your CV comprising a summary of your career history are gone. CV's are scanned – by computers and people. When a recruiter or hiring manager looks at your CV you have about seven seconds to get their attention while they scan it. In that short time period you need to stand out as someone who would add value to the organisation. Your front page is really, really important. And so is the layout. Your CV needs to be aesthetically pleasing. You need colour. You need clear headings to direct the recruiter's eye to important information. Tables, graphs, bullet points, and short paragraphs are what you want.
3. Only include your name, email address, and phone contact number as personal details. If you have a LinkedIn profile you can add a link to your profile. Anything else makes you look out of date. Other details are not required or will be checked if they are interested in your CV.
4. You need certain information on the first page. You need a paragraph which is a professional summary. You need your qualifications, and you need a list of skills or competencies. These need to match the requirements in the job description for the job you are applying for, provided you meet these requirements (don't lie and pretend you have skills you don't have). Try and use the same words as in the job description – which means you need to customise your CV for each job you apply for. The chances are that the first screening of your CV will not be done by a human being. It will be done by a machine – an Applicant Tracking System. With so many CV's being received, the job requirements listed in the job description are designated as keywords,

and your CV is searched according to those keywords. If you don't meet the threshold of keywords in your CV, it will be discarded. Possibly without a person even seeing it. Your professional summary, qualifications, and skills sections must cover all the job requirements you have to ensure you move on to further selection stages.

5. Few CV's contain a section on achievements, which list selected accomplishments that demonstrate real value add in the job. You need this. With so many people applying for each job vacancy, provided you meet the job requirements, you will go further in the selection process if you can show you have been a top performer in your previous jobs. Use numbers where you can when you talk about your achievements. For example, time saved through improving processes, money recovered from shortfalls, sales targets exceeded, new ideas and products developed, customers retained, and so on.

6. If you can try and put in a one or two liner that is a commendation or testimonial from a significant manager or client. Testimonials or commendations speak volumes. People have been hired just on references. If a respected individual says they would recommend you for any job because you always do more than required, you are going to stand out in a good way when applying for a job.

7. Then on the second page you can do a brief summary of your most recent, and relevant career history. Relevant means relevant for the role you are applying for.

8. If you have volunteered or done any charity or community work, mention that, because it also goes down well.

When you have finished your CV give it to a few people. They each have seven seconds to scan your CV and decide if they would hire you. If they are not sure, or they would not hire you, then you need to go back and do some more work on your CV. Keep polishing your CV. It is the first contact a recruiter or hiring company is likely to have with you. It needs to be really, really good. You need to stand out in a good way from everyone else if you want to be hired.