



# Rebrand and Land:

**Top 10 tips to brand your career change resume!**

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# Introduction

Today, mid-level career changers—the lawyer who wants to transition into finance, the independent entrepreneur who wants to reenter structured corporate life, the non-profit executive who wants to start a consulting company—make up more than 60% of my coaching/consulting practice. Resume writing is very hard, particularly when the goal is rebranding for a new career, and almost all of these clients understandably struggle to write an attention-grabbing resume.

To complicate things, a great career change resume alone is not enough to help career changers reinvent in today's job market. Recruiters and hiring managers go to LinkedIn and other social media first to learn about candidates. If you don't have a strong online brand that highlights your value proposition and that creates excitement about you as a person, you may never even get asked for a resume!

A lot of clients ask why they should even bother to write one. What I tell them is that the work they do to write their branded resume lays the foundation for their online brand and LinkedIn profile. If they get that right, they will be asked for a resume down the road.



## What is career change, exactly?

A career change can mean:

- Change in industry (e.g., a high-tech software sales person moves to medical device sales)
- Change in job function or occupation (e.g., a medical device finance person switches to a medical device marketing role)
- Change in both industry and function, which is the hardest type of career change to accomplish (e.g., a lawyer with a specialization in tax law becomes a fundraiser)
- Reentry (e.g., a solopreneur reenters the workforce or a parent comes back to work after taking time off to raise children)

Now that you know why you need a great resume to change careers, you need to know how to write it!

These 10 tips will guide you through the process.



## **TIP 1: Think About Your Approach Before You Start Writing**

### Lateral Moves Vs. Career Reinvention

Career reinvention requires a very different resume-writing approach than making a lateral move. Let's briefly review the differences between these two career goals to help you understand why.

An example of a lateral move would be a corporate lawyer seeking a similar role at a different firm. In this example, the candidate wants to keep their current job function and remain in the same field—the only change would be their employer. Thus, this candidate would highlight their experience in corporate law on their resume, focusing on their proficiency in the following areas, many of which are industry specific:

- Contract negotiation
- Legal research
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Collaboration with senior executives and board members
- Problem-solving
- Clear and persuasive writing

An example of career reinvention would be that same corporate lawyer looking to leave legal practice for a sales role in legal publishing. To be successful, this candidate must reweight and reposition the information on their resume to make it more relevant to their new objective (sales) and industry (publishing).

# What Makes Writing a Career Change Resume Different?

If you want to make a career change, you must map what you have done in your past roles to the requirements of your desired target role and industry. You have to make it easy for a potential hiring manager to see how your skills and experience can be used in their open position.

Going back to our example of the corporate lawyer desiring to switch to sales in legal publishing (we'll talk about this client's situation throughout, using it to highlight the information in each tip), their reinvention resume would focus on the competencies that are relevant for sales roles rather than industry-specific legal items. Here are a few sample competencies:

- Communication, that is, listening skills and the ability to convey ideas succinctly
- Managing relationships with clients, vendors, and consultants
- Speaking in front of groups
- Ability to think on their feet
- Experience selling and/or persuading

As you can see, writing a career change resume requires more analytical thinking than writing a resume for a lateral move. But if you want to reinvent your career, it's likely that you're an innovator and you're up for the challenge!





## TIP 2: Strengthen Your Personal Brand

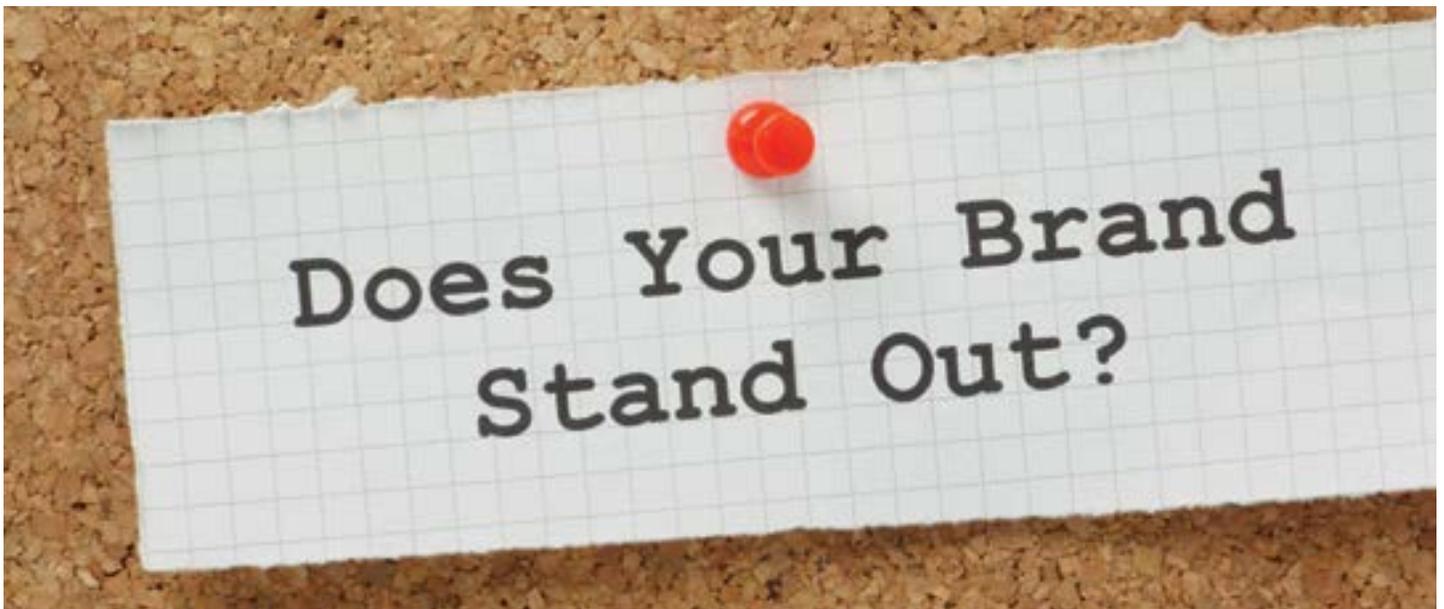
When you are trying to move your career in a different direction, you may not yet have industry-specific knowledge or skills. Don't worry—you will acquire this knowledge and expertise as you take classes, intern, get mentored, and learn the ropes of your desired new profession. What you do have as you move into a new industry is your personal brand. If your personal brand is strong, it will be enough to get someone excited about engaging with you!

# Why Personal Branding Isn't Optional

Your brand comes down to how you are perceived by the external world—in other words, your professional reputation. It is shaped by your passions, signature strengths, key personal attributes, and guiding principles. Your brand also encompasses the way you do your job/work, and this is key to differentiating yourself from the competition. When well articulated, your personal brand can create an emotional connection with the employers you are so desperately trying to convince to give you a chance to try something new. Believe it or not, many companies prioritize personal chemistry and a good fit over industry experience. Branding generates the chemistry hiring managers are looking for and can make you come alive on paper and online.

## Tools for Branding

You can see why it's critical to take the time before you start resume writing to get a read on your personal brand. Reach Communications, the company I am certified with as a Master Brand Strategist, offers a [free 15-day trial](#) of their personal branding 360 assessment tool. Or you can pay a bit more, and get access to the complete version of the tool, which will produce a 25-page customized report.\*



\*If you are interested in the complete version of the tool complete with custom report, [please email me.](#)

If you aren't interested in using online branding assessments, you can still get brand feedback from your personal network on how you are perceived and what your signature strengths are through what I refer to as a "personal 360." Write 5-7 questions (for example, "How would you describe me if you were introducing me at a conference?"), send them to a few trusted friends and colleagues, and ask them to participate in an informal review. You'll be surprised at how much you can learn about yourself through other peoples' insight.



## **TIP 3: Research Your New Industry**

Let's pick up our earlier example of the corporate lawyer. In the first scenario, where this individual is making a lateral move, they already know the industry, so their research would be mostly confined to the new firms they want to join. But in the second scenario, where that same lawyer is seeking to reinvent their career with a transition into the legal publishing field, they might need to take substantial time just to research a list of companies in the industry! Then, they need to figure out which of these companies have an active sales force. And that's just the beginning.

### **What It Means to Do "Due Diligence"**

As a career changer, you need to do a lot of homework before you begin writing your resume. It will take a lot of research—both online and offline—to become familiar with your target industry and the companies within it. You have to figure out what potential hiring managers are looking for in terms of skills, qualifications, achievements, and competencies. On top of all that, you need to get familiar with the "lingo" used in your new field.

# How to Do Due Diligence

Here are some practical ways you can start attacking your career change homework before you start writing:

- **Mine your connections.** Do a mental inventory of your friends, family, and acquaintances. Focus on anyone with ties to your target industry and/or role. Perhaps your best friend's husband works at a company you're interested in. Or maybe a member of your gym is a recruiter in the industry—even if it's not a direct connection they may be able to refer you to someone else.
- **Now set up informational meetings with these industry insiders.** Ask them what they consider to be the key skills and competencies for the industry and/or role you're targeting.
- **Find several job descriptions for roles in your new industry.** Review these descriptions and make a list of what the companies and/or hiring managers are looking for. Focus on "buzzwords" and common lingo used across similar descriptions. Take note of any specific educational or technological requirements to determine if you need to take a course.
- **Read publications and/or blogs.** This will help you get a better feel for the industry, understand its jargon, and become familiar with some of its challenges.

Once you have zeroed in on your desired type of change, done some work on your personal brand, and researched your target industry, you're ready to start building your resume.



## TIP 4: Use a Non-Traditional Resume Format

A traditional chronological resume is not always adequate for career reinvention. This fairly rigid format may not be flexible enough to accommodate the reweighting of information that is necessary to support your career change goal.

### What's Different About This Format?

When working with career changers, I use a non-traditional resume format that supports rebranding and rewriting. I reweight my client's skills and qualifications, focusing on what matters most to their target audience. To show how I do this, I'll again use the example of the corporate lawyer who wishes to move into legal publishing sales and discuss a few strategies I could implement for this client.

**Write an engaging brand summary statement.** I would include a branded summary or qualifications statement at the top of the resume, focusing on the skills and competencies the client has that are relevant to a sales role. To make the client stand out even

more, I might include some of the more powerful feedback from the client's branding assessment (or personal 360 review), in the form of a quote. Here are examples from the corporate lawyer:

**Summary:** Seasoned legal professional with highly developed presentation, negotiation, and client-management skills. Proven ability to deliver high-impact presentations that communicate the value and benefit of services to key decision-makers. Known for sense of humor and for diffusing tension when dealing with difficult client situations. Unwaveringly loyal, highly approachable and personable, with the highest levels of integrity, ethics, and business acumen.

**Quote:** *"In working with Tom, I have always been impressed by his ability to develop strong client relationships and to develop creative solutions to customer and market challenges. He has unquestioned integrity, loyalty and dedication to win-win solutions."*

—Name and Job Title

**Consolidate and highlight relevant experience.** Under this summary statement, I might consolidate all of my client's sales experience into a single section. Even though the corporate lawyer hasn't had a sales job, per se, they do have snippets of sales achievements from varied sources, including volunteer work, earlier career history, and even from their current role (lawyers are rainmakers who bring in business, after all!). This collection of snippets could be called "Sales Accomplishments" or "Highlights of Sales Accomplishments," attracting the attention of hiring managers and creating an immediate connection for them between the lawyer and their open sales position:

#### **Highlights of Sales Accomplishments:**

- Cultivated long-term customer relationships that resulted in 80% referral and repeat business over five consecutive years in IP legal community.
- Awarded as one of the top two fundraisers in generating \$100,000K for Boston University Law School's capital campaign.
- Contributed to successful fundraising activities for the Speakeasy Stage Company that benefitted underprivileged children in Boston public schools.
- Selected by Managing Partner of law firm to teach rainmaking and client relationship skills to newly promoted partners.

**Organize professional experience into areas of expertise.** On the non-traditional resume, current professional experience is listed next (after the summary statement and the sales achievements box). When writing this section, I break down the client's current role using a series of subheadings that represent skill or competency areas. For the corporate lawyer, a few examples might include Commercial Contracts, Regulatory, and Compliance. Under each subheading, I would then include 2-3 bulleted examples, reweighting the information as closely as possible to the lawyer target reinvention goal.

**Showcase relevant training.** I could include the sales training classes this lawyer took as part of their ongoing professional development.

When strategically organized and rewritten to map to the target reinvention goal, these so-called "extras" are likely to wind up being more important than the client's actual day-to-day responsibilities in their current role.



## **TIP 5: Identify Relevant Keywords**

Keywords are shorthand for desired skills and competencies, rather than industry-specific tasks. They are words (or phrases) that job seekers use to search for jobs and employers use to find candidates. They are the foundation of the hiring manager's search for qualified candidates in resume databases and on LinkedIn, and as such they are critical to resume writing. The more keywords you use, the more closely the job will match what you're really looking for.

To reinvent your career, your resume must use keywords that are relevant both to how you want to be perceived in the job market ([see Tip 2](#) on personal branding) and your new career target ([see Tip 3](#) on researching your new industry). Good keywords wed your signature strengths to the requirements of your new industry. Used first in resume writing, note they can be saved for use down the line in your LinkedIn profile, cover letter, and other self-marketing materials.

## How to Put Keywords to Use

Once identified, include your keywords in your summary statement. You also can include them in a bulleted format in a separate section entitled “Core Competencies,” “Core Strengths and Capabilities,” or “Professional Qualifications.”

Here are some possible keywords that our corporate lawyer moving to legal publishing sales might use:

- Client relationship management
- Public speaking and executive presentations
- Listening and negotiation skills
- Rapport and relationship building
- Solutions-focused account service
- Cross-functional team collaboration
- Rapid learning of new products and services
- Contract negotiations

Go back and review [Tip 4](#), which includes the corporate lawyer’s branded summary statement, to see how these keywords are used.





## **TIP 6: Showcase Your Achievements**

The key to successful resume writing is to populate your resume with success stories about your achievements. These stories should be short statements describing real-life situations that demonstrate the skills and competencies you have to offer to a prospective employer. Writing success stories is often easier when a client is interested in a lateral move. Career change clients have twice as much work to do, but the payoff is worth it!

### **How to Write a Success Story**

Each success story on your resume should be no longer than 1 to 2 sentences but needs to pack a lot of punch. It can be helpful to brainstorm achievements and map out the details using the PAR approach, where you identify a Problem, Action, and Result, and then condense the information into a shorter accomplishment statement later.

- **Problem:** What was the problem or challenge that you faced?
- **Action:** What were the actions you took to solve the problem?
- **Result:** What was the result of your efforts?

As you put all the details on paper, you can work on translating your successes into language that a hiring manager in a new field can understand and relate to. You should also quantify your achievements with numbers and metrics. If you can't use numbers to back up your contribution, use "before and after" examples that demonstrate improvement.

The corporate lawyer moving into sales, for example, would want to demonstrate mastery of the competencies of client relationship management skills, new client acquisition and retention, and contract negotiations through a success story.

After summarizing the facts using the PAR approach, the lawyer could write up the achievement that demonstrates these competencies more succinctly for their resume like this:

1. Delivered proposal presentations to clients that outlined the full scope of XYZ firm's capabilities and cost-justified proposals to clients. Increased sales by 25% over 12 months.

OR, they could choose to front-load the accomplishment with the result first to add in more impact, like this:

2. Increased sales by 25% over 12 months. Delivered proposal presentations to clients that outlined the full scope of XYZ firm's capabilities and cost-justified proposals to clients.

Whittling the details down to these short statements is difficult at first, but don't be discouraged! Using the PAR approach will make the process less intimidating. As you become more practiced, you may be able to skip your review of the details and go directly to crafting the bullet for your resume. Either way, before you know it, you'll have a whole arsenal of unique success stories to fill up your resume. You will eventually be able to use these on LinkedIn and in your cover letters as well.



## **TIP 7: Include All Relevant Career and Life Experience**

When writing a resume for a career reinvention, it is important to take inventory of everything in your life—not just your professional experience. Include all experience that demonstrates the skills that you want to showcase to a prospective employer. Do not discount previous/early career experience, community service, training, or volunteer roles.

For example, let's say our corporate lawyer is on the board of a non-profit organization and in this role, they are doing a lot of fundraising and development work. This information should definitely be included on their resume. At its essence, fundraising is a sales function and thus relevant. In addition, these activities demonstrate that the lawyer has good relationship and negotiation skills, desired competencies in their new target industry/role.

## How to Present the Information on Your Resume

Here's an example of how the lawyer could write this up on their resume:

- Demonstrated outstanding sales, negotiations, and client relationship management skills while orchestrating annual fundraising and corporate giving campaigns. Increased volume each year for 5 consecutive years.

Building on this experience, let's assume this lawyer recently participated in a sales training to support their career reinvention and supplement their legal experience. That information should be highlighted in the summary statement at the beginning of the resume and then showcased again in the education section. In fact, in this case, the client could change the heading of the latter from "Education" to "Education and Professional Development."

This is how the information could be incorporated into the resume:

### **Summary Statement**

More than 10 years of experience in the field of law, combined with innately strong presentation, negotiation, and client management skills...

### **Educational and Professional Development**

#### ***Education***

Bachelor of Science, 1997  
Bentley University, Waltham, MA  
Major: Business Administration

#### ***Highlights of Continuing Professional Development:***

Sandler Sales Leadership Training, Winning Incorporated, 2009

As a career changer, you need to use all the tools in your arsenal, and you may be pleasantly surprised at how many you have, once you consider ALL your experience.



## **TIP 8: Place Information Strategically (Location, Location, Location!)**

Remember that many of the hiring managers and individuals you are trying to influence will be reading your resume on their smart phones or tablets, perhaps even while multitasking (during a meeting or on the way to their car). They may only allocate 15 seconds for your resume, and they may never get more than a third of the way through it! Short snippets of information placed strategically have the best shot of grabbing a potential new employer's attention.

Knowing this, you have to make the top third to half of the first page of your resume stand out. You also need to keep the full resume to two pages maximum. You can always use LinkedIn to expand on what's summarized in your resume and showcase additional information that won't fit the two-page format.

## The Top Third

Here are some examples of the types of information to place in the top third of the resume to make maximum use of the space. Some clients may benefit from using two of these, some three, some four, etc.

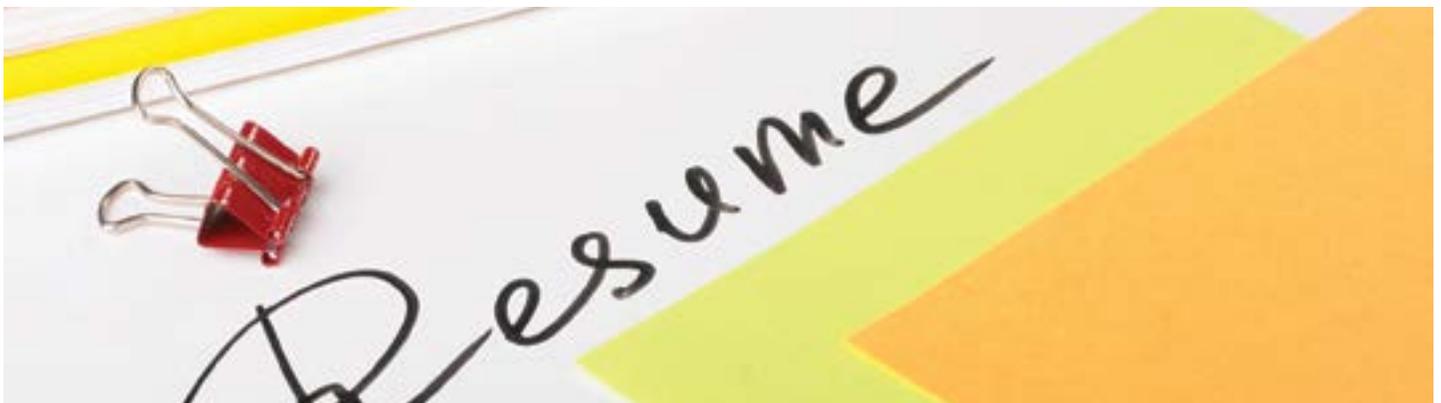
- Your personal brand statement or leadership brand along with a powerful quote from a recent performance review, your personal branding assessment, or someone you work with ([see Tip 2](#))
- Relevant keywords in columns or in a box ([see Tip 5](#))
- A “Highlights of Accomplishments” section with several value-driven bulleted statements with associated metrics ([see Tip 4](#))
- A “Career Focus” or “Career Target” section. Here is an example from the corporate lawyer’s resume:

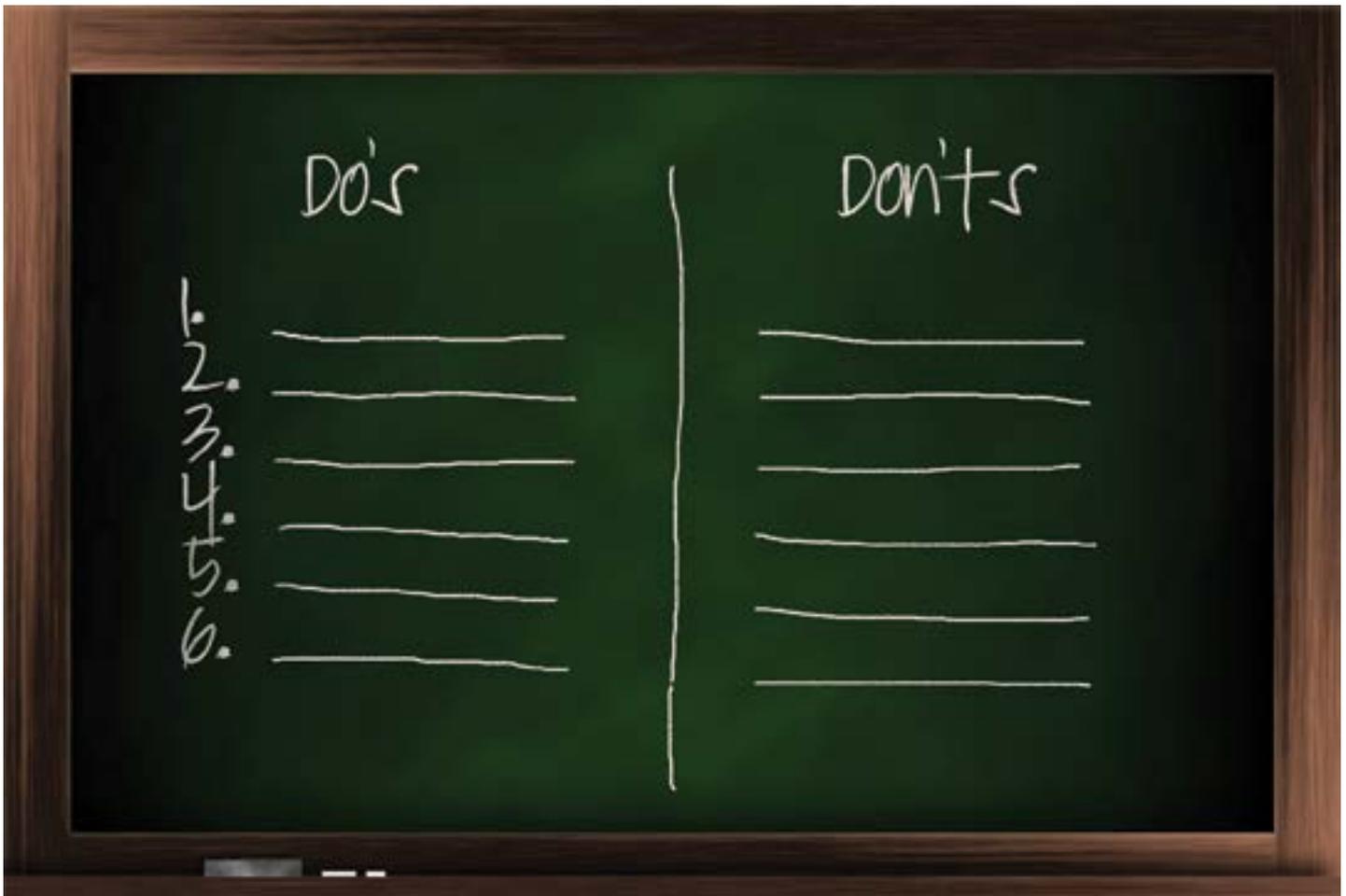
Contributing to a legal publishing firm’s sales success and market dominance through application of key competencies: Sales, Relationship Building, Persuasive Negotiation, Consultative Communication Style

## Formatting

Make sure your resume is clean looking and attractive:

- Use only one or two different fonts
- Make sure the font is a readable size (9 point is not!)
- Keep underlining and bold to a minimum
- Include lots of white space





## TIP 9: Things to Avoid

You may have noticed that the earlier tips are all essentially pieces of advice—they are the “Do’s.” Now it’s time to go over some of the “Don’ts,” which are just as important.

### Early Career Experience

Conveying your skills is important when writing your reinvention resume, but your resume shouldn’t become a dumping ground for every accomplishment in your career. To write an effective resume, you need to identify information that is not relevant to your new career goal and leave it out or move it to a less prominent section of the resume.

Our corporate lawyer, for example, worked as an accountant for two years before enrolling in law school. This professional experience may be significant to this client from a personal perspective, but the accounting job and its related skills and competencies don’t map to the required skills and competencies in legal publishing sales. Therefore, this experience should be moved below the “Professional Experience” section to the bottom of the client’s resume, under the heading “Early Career Experience.”

It's likely that you also have experience that you are proud of but that is not directly relevant to your desired new role. It will be tempting to share everything that you have accomplished with potential new employers, and I have many clients who argue in favor of providing a "full picture" of their employment experience. I understand why they are reluctant to minimize some of their experience, but they usually come around when I explain that too much extraneous information can distract hiring managers and take the career change client out of the running for their new dream job. (Note that LinkedIn does not have the same length restrictions, and once you finish your resume and move on to online branding, you can amplify information and include more information.)

## "Transferable" Skills

Demonstrating that you have transferable skills is essential to a career change, but I don't believe that it is helpful to actually use the word "transferable" (or "transitional" and other similar words). These descriptors signify that you are an outsider to the field, which is exactly the opposite of the perception you want to achieve. All of the work that you have done—specifically strengthening your personal brand ([see Tip 2](#)), researching your new industry ([see Tip 3](#)), and identifying industry-specific keywords ([see Tip 5](#))—is to position you as an insider in this new area. Instead of telling the hiring manager that your skillset is transferable, show them, by showcasing your achievements ([see Tip 6](#)) and moving your relevant job experience to the top of your resume ([see Tip 7](#)).

## Generic Descriptors

Finally, I also advise my clients to avoid commonplace resume words, ones that you are likely to find on many resumes. These generic descriptors do nothing to show what differentiates you and why you are unique. Here are some of the worst offenders in this set of killer words and phrases:

- Team player
- Results-oriented
- Excellent communication skills



## TIP 10: A Work in Progress

A career change resume is not a one-shot deal. Unlike a regular resume for lateral career moves, which you can write once and then update only when you are ready to change jobs, a career change resume is a living document.

You will continue to tweak it and reweight your experience as your career change journey unfolds. This could mean that you update it as often as every few months. You may have to move sections around and reframe your growing portfolio of experience, skills, and education in your target field or industry.

### Bolstering Your Experience

Let's go back one final time to our corporate lawyer with a desire to move into legal publishing sales. Let's say they have realized after applying to a few jobs in sales and failing to get any interviews that they need more real world sales experience. Because they have been with their employer for many years, they are able to negotiate a reduced schedule, going from 5 days a week in the office to 4 days.\* This allows them more time (and gives them more energy!) to dedicate to their career change. Once the modified schedule is in place, the lawyer starts actively networking with friends and colleagues. At a legal conference they run into a friend from law school who has just started a software company. The company sells information products and services to the legal community.

\*Note: Don't be discouraged if you don't have this kind of flexibility. Many opportunities—online courses, for example—can be pursued outside of regular business hours, and as your career coach, I can work with you to balance the demands on your time.

The friend tells the lawyer that he is having a hard time finding sales/call center people who understand legal jargon and who can build trust and confidence with lawyers. The corporate lawyers offers to do a mini-internship at the startup for nominal compensation, giving the lawyer necessarily real world experience and providing their friend with a senior legal resource who can then train and mentor other call center sales reps on how to deal with lawyers.

Once the lawyer has started helping in the call center, we could add a section in between their summary statement and professional experience section titled “Relevant Sales Accomplishments” to highlight this recent sales experience.

Here’s what it would look like:

### ***Relevant Sales Achievements***

Customer Sales & Service Representative 2013 to Present  
XYZ Software, Cambridge, MA  
Interim (or intern) position with a high-volume call center operation.

- Consult with prospective customers/small law firms to provide information and product demonstrations of Publish, the firm’s flagship legal publishing platform. Collaborated with senior sales executive to close three deals valued at \$5,000 each in first three months.
- Designed first-ever Publish sales mentoring program, pairing seasoned and successful outside legal consultants with call center sales reps. Established pilot mentor-mentee pairs, developed program goals/outcomes, and facilitated successful coaching and mentoring of two new employees.

## Concluding Thoughts

Writing a resume for a career change requires a different approach than what you may be used to. It’s hard work! But, if you do your homework and embrace the approach I’ve introduced here, you will succeed!

Visit my website for more in-depth career reinvention resources.

[www.aspireforsuccess.com](http://www.aspireforsuccess.com)



From climbing the corporate ladder to reinventing a career in higher education to founding two companies, Randi Bussin has “been there, done that” several times over. She understands the fears, thrills and obstacles that come with making meaningful career change and stepping into the unknown, outside of one’s comfort zone. A Certified Master Personal Brand Strategist (MPBS) trained by William Arruda (one of fewer than 20 in the world) and a Certified Career Management Coach, Randi brings an exceptional –and rare– combination of expertise and insights to her clients. She’s able to draw out what makes them unique, help define their aspirations and craft strategies to get them noticed by the people they need to influence.

Randi holds an MBA from one of the world’s top international business schools, INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France, with concentrations in Organizational Behavior and Entrepreneurship. As a thought-leader, Randi has appeared on local and national television and radio stations. She also is a sought-after keynote speaker, and a frequent lecturer on career reinvention, personal branding and entrepreneurship.

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