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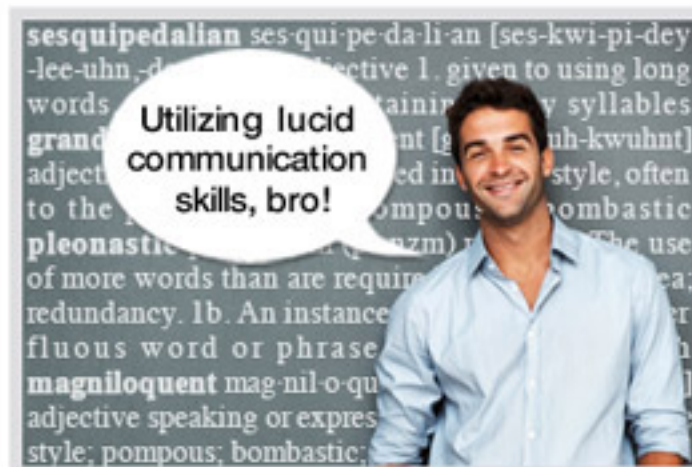
Big Words On Your Resume Won't Make You Sound Smart

Bill Reagan



You're staring at your resume, concerned that 'Retail Cashier' makes it seem like you had a menial job. Maybe you can make it sound more significant – how about 'Textile Transaction Specialist'? 'Monetary Process Liaison'? Both of those sound more professional, right?

Wrong. Those versions sound like exaggerations, not jobs. Most hiring managers and recruiters have seen it all, and can tell when someone is trying to make a job sound like more than it was. Worse, they will likely wonder, if this applicant embellishes on one part of their resume, what else is overstated? In a competitive job market, that might be enough to get you passed over.



Rather than trying to *sound* smart, be smart. When deciding how to describe your experience, consider these tips:

- **Think about who is reading your resume:** Hiring managers are busy, with a stack of resumes to review. Most won't have patience for clever attempts to up-sell your experience.
- **Remember why they're reading your resume:** The recruiter is trying to fill a particular job, so they are looking for specific experience and job titles. If they need someone with shipping experience, they may not recognize 'physical material redistribution' as the skill they need.
- **Don't be afraid of the truth:** Glorifying your past roles is more likely to raise flags than raise interest. No, you weren't the 'Global Network Communications Expert' for your last employer – you were the Social Media Manager. That's an important role, and a recruiter will immediately understand it; the embellished version will be less clear and more easily dismissed.

Instead of dressing up your experience in fancy words, focus on how your experience has value for the job you're applying for. In the case of 'Retail Cashier,' you've worked with customers in an often-hecky atmosphere; you've likely diffused upset customers and resolved customer complaints; you've handled financial transactions and reconciled a till; and you've probably done inventory and merchandising. Emphasize the duties that have the most overlap with the job you want.

We all want to make a good impression, but when it comes to your resume, *don't utilize lucid communication skills* – just be clear, be specific, and be honest. The goal of your resume isn't to show how creatively you can embellish your experience, it's to show that you're the right person for the job.

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World's Simplest Job Interview Advice

Bill Reagan



I was an English major working at an automotive shop -- it was a job, not a calling, but it paid the bills. One day a customer dropped off her car and gave me her business card that read "Advertising and Public Relations." I told her that I had always wanted to write advertising, but didn't know where to start. She said, "If you want to give it a try, start at my office."

I went to her office, got my first assignment, and spent a week trying to be clever and creative. I wanted so much to impress, to take this fluke of an opportunity and make something of it. I was nervous, so before submitting my ideas, I asked for feedback from a friend who works in advertising. We met for a drink, where she advised me on how to present my work and assured me that I didn't need to be nervous. The next morning as I prepared, I found a scribbled note in among my draft materials. There in my friend's handwriting was the most concise and powerful job interview advice I have ever received:



Don't swear.

Don't sweat.

Don't sell yourself short.

They were reassuring words to repeat as I drove to the agency to present my work, which they liked and paid for. It was my first paid gig as a writer -- yet what I remember most about the day was that scribbled note.

Now that I work in the recruiting industry, I have read (or written) scores of blogs offering crucial interview advice -- insights into word choice, tone, body language, how to handle specific scenarios -- yet I have never found anything that so simply boils down the appropriate mindset for an in interview:

- **Don't swear:** "Be yourself" is good advice for an interview -- but "be professional" is more important. Mind your words.
- **Don't sweat:** It's hard not to be nervous, but it undermines our ability to communicate. Prepare as much as possible, then relax and do the best you can.
- **Don't sell yourself short:** If you don't believe in yourself, why would anyone else? Make the best case for why you are their best investment for the open position.

It's solid advice for your next job interview. And frankly, for any endeavor.

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SHOULD I EAT THIS AT MY DESK?

Culinary Advice for Maintaining Workplace Harmony



GOOD RECIPES FOR MAKING ENEMIES

Looking for a passive-aggressive way to settle a score? Look no further than vinegar as a condiment, fresh red onions, sauerkraut, hard-boiled eggs, or any food that can make people ask, "Did someone just take off their shoes?"

Warning: Results may vary.

WHOA, WHOA, THIS IS A "NO"

Avoid Gorgonzola, Limburger or any other cheese described as "an acquired taste," as well as steamed broccoli, seafood (no, that "exception" isn't an exception), boiled cabbage, brussel sprouts, and garlic (most folks agree, there's no such thing as "a little garlic.")

THINK BEFORE YOU STINK

Microwave popcorn is a treat, but burning it ruins everyone's day; fast food is easy, but french fry odor outlasts the actual fries by several days; curried take-out is delicious, but might make your cubicle smell like a food cart. Rule of thumb: When in doubt, just eat out.

FOOD LIKE THIS WILL NEVER MISS

Pale, nearly flavorless foods like white rice, white bread, sauceless pasta, baked potatoes (no bacon, which elicits jealousy), celery sticks, oatmeal, American cheese, and pudding are unlikely to offend even the most sensitive office olfactory units.

The bottom line? Eat what you want, just be considerate of your colleagues. Hopefully they'll do the same.



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Prove It

Bill Reagan



I was at a crowded party once, stuck talking with a guy who was quite full of himself. He was bragging about how well he played guitar, and bass, and piano, and added, "and I'm getting pretty good at the harp," putting his hands near his mouth to show that he meant harmonica, not the stringed instrument. After he made the hand gesture, my friend Jeff, a musician himself, silently reached into the front pocket of his jean jacket for a small harmonica, offered it to the big talker and said coldly, "Prove it."

The big talker tried and failed to joke his way out of it. No proof was provided.

I think about Jeff sometimes when I am talking about resumes. There is so much pressure on our resumes to open doors for us, to emphasize our skills in the most positive light. That pressure can lead to seemingly harmless overstatements – not overt lies, like claiming to have a degree that you don't actually have, but little things like:

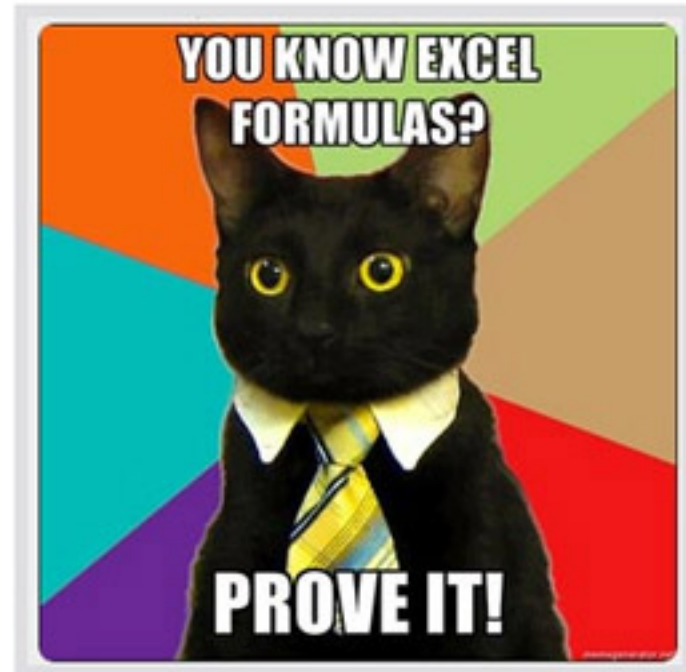
- Claiming to have "expertise in Excel" when really you're a typical user who rarely ventures off of the "Home" tab
- Claiming to have "excellent written communication skills" because you got A's in Freshman English, not because you've been actively communicating in a business role
- Claiming to have "implemented a new process" when in fact, it was someone else's idea and you simply did the grunt work to get it operational

These are very minor exaggerations, right? Who's going to fact-check an applicant's Excel capabilities?

But I like to imagine my friend Jeff went on to become a hiring manager, and he's ready to interrupt your self-promotional pitch with a simple, "Prove it." You may be expecting to explain, probably with a sheepish grin, that your Excel expertise isn't as comprehensive as you had thought, or you haven't actually had much experience in written communication. You see this as correcting a minor overstatement – but if you can't prove it, the hiring manager sees that as a lie. And if you lied about that, what else will you lie about?

The old adage "honesty is the best policy" is solid advice for resumes. If you think stellar Excel skills will give you an edge, sign up for a class at your local community college; if you had a minor role in the implementation of a new product, emphasize the achievements of the team and accurately describe your role.

It's tempting to embellish the facts, but for best results, plan that the person sitting across the desk is going to ask you to prove it.



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Resume buzzwords that have lost their buzz

Bill Reagan



A good resume is a continual work-in-progress -- not only because you are always gaining work experience, but because yesterday's hottest buzzwords are often today's clichés. While no one wants to hear criticism of their carefully crafted career overview, it's time for some tough love on a few common terms that no longer resonate with recruiters and hiring managers:



Extensive experience

On most resumes, "extensive" is a big word to describe a small amount. It's a code that everyone knows, and it means "not enough experience to state specifically." Drop this phrase and state the facts about your skills. If it's not deep enough to define in concrete numbers, it's really not extensive experience.

Team-player

Are you trying to convey that you don't need to get your way, that you can toe-step the line when the team decides on a direction that isn't yours? That's not being a team-player -- that's called "doing your job." Being a team player is expected, so rather than say that you are, give examples of effective collaborations.

Innovative

An innovator is a game changer, a visionary -- think Henry Ford, Steve Jobs. Modifying a spread sheet to compute simple arithmetic is an *improvement*, not an innovation. Employers appreciate innovation, but they also want to hire people who can work within existing processes, so reserve this word for true game-changing achievements.

Self-starter

This phrase is apparently intended to differentiate a job seeker from a lethargic couch potato, which doesn't raise the bar very high. Resist the opportunity to brag that you sometimes work without being told to do so.

Results-oriented

As opposed to what? Laboring pointlessly without destination until you've clocked enough hours to go home? Remove this vague claim and name the specific results you've achieved.

Of course, it's still good advice to customize each resume to match the job description, so if the post says they're looking for a "results-oriented self-starter with extensive experience," it's wise to include that language in your resume.

Otherwise, remember: the goal is to get the hiring manager excited about your abilities, and you do that by showing *how* you've made a difference, not simply claiming that you have. Drop the empty buzzwords and focus on specific achievements that make you the best person for the job.

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