



You Are More
Accomplished
Than You Think:

HOW TO BRAINSTORM YOUR
ACHIEVEMENTS FOR CAREER
AND LIFE SUCCESS

By Katharine Hansen, PhD



**YOU ARE MORE ACCOMPLISHED THAN YOU THINK: HOW TO BRAINSTORM
YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS FOR CAREER AND LIFE SUCCESS**

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**DEDICATION
TO LIZ, WITH LOVE**

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INTRODUCTION

You are more accomplished than you think

Do you recognize yourself in any of these situations?

- Jeff just learned his company is downsizing, and he will be losing his job in a few weeks. He knows he needs to update his resume and prepare for interviews. The last time he was in this position was a nightmare; Jeff found it extremely hard to remember everything he'd achieved in the job he was in at the time. His resume was substandard as a result, and his job search took much longer than he felt it should have.
- Danielle has decided after considerable agonizing that it's time to ask her boss for a raise. She is determined to arm herself with a solid set of bullet points outlining her contributions to the company. She's just not quite sure how to identify the accomplishments that will motivate her boss to raise her salary.
- Trudy set a number of goals for herself – things she wanted to accomplish over a year's time. The year is almost up, and she wants to see how well she has done with meeting her goals. Unfortunately, her system for tracking her accomplishments was weak and ineffective, so she found it difficult to compare achievements to goals.

- Meredith is trying to start a small business and must present a proposal to venture capitalists to get the funding she needs. These firms want to know what Meredith has already accomplished that qualifies her to launch her dream business. She needs to know how to uncover the achievements that will help her sell her qualifications to her would-be backers.
- Larry was just asked in a job interview, "What accomplishments are you most proud of?" – and he completely froze up.



This book is for people like those listed above who are pretty certain they've had accomplishments, but can't think of them. It's for anyone who feels left behind by the accomplishments train and wants a more positive outlook. It's also for people who aren't sure the things they've done are truly worthy of being called accomplishments. Much of the book focuses on deploying accomplishments in job search and career, for job-seekers who need to identify accomplishments for resumes, cover letters, and interview responses. It's also for people on the job who need to track their accomplishments to keep their bosses informed and to be prepared for performance reviews, as well as opportunities for advancement and salary increases. It's for entrepreneurs who need to attract investors and win

clients by showing them the results they've attained. It's for students seeking to apply to college or graduate-school programs who need to showcase accomplishments on their applications. And it's for people who simply want to feel accomplished and learn how to leverage accomplishments to set life and career goals.

If you're not sure of who the audience for your accomplishments should be, consider an awesome question



suggested by author Peggy Klaus in *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It!*: "Who can help me meet my goals?" Anyone you can list in response to that question should know about your successes.

The inability to come up with accomplishments happens to lots of folks. I got interested in the dilemma of identifying and communicating accomplishments when I ran a resume-writing business for five years. I would ask my resume and cover-letter clients to list accomplishments as part of the process of preparing their job-search documents. Although I stressed that accomplishments are far more important than duties and responsibilities, a surprising number of clients were unable or unwilling to articulate beyond the day-to-day tasks they performed in their jobs.

What is an accomplishment?

The dictionary definition of "accomplishment" is surprisingly simple; it's something you've completed or achieved, says the *Merriam-Webster*

Dictionary. It can be a quality or ability that equips you to function in society. An accomplishment may be a special skill or ability you've acquired through training or practice. By the way, since the shades of meaning of "accomplishment" and "achievement" are extremely close, I've used the two words interchangeably in this book so you (and I) don't get sick of "accomplishment." You'll also see "result," "outcome," and "success" as synonyms for "accomplishment" in this book.

By those definitions, it's clear that ...

... ***Everyone has accomplishments.***

I've had many people – students and clients, job-seekers and not – tell me they have had no accomplishments. I don't believe that. I am convinced that everyone has had accomplishments. If we look at the broad dictionary definition of "accomplishment," we can scarcely imagine anyone who hasn't completed something, achieved something, gained the ability to function in society, or developed a special skill or ability.

But are those the kinds of accomplishments that will attract employers, clients, admissions officers, and the like? More importantly, are they the types of accomplishments that will inspire pride in the individual – to enable that person to feel good about himself or herself?

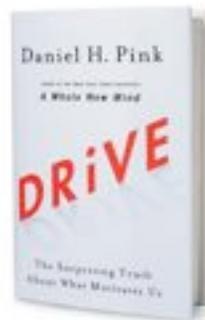
That's a big part of what this book is about. I am confident that through comprehensive brainstorming and careful framing and articulation of accomplishments, anyone can unearth a set of accomplishments that provides a powerful tool for life and career.

The power of accomplishments.

Feelings of accomplishment lead to feelings of satisfaction. We almost always feel good when we've completed a project, especially when we've completed it well and seen positive results from it. But tracking our accomplishments and progress can do much more; it can make us happy in our work. When Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer compared research-study participants' best days "when they were most happy, had the most positive perceptions of the workplace, and were most intrinsically motivated" with their worst days, they found that "the single most important differentiator was a sense of being able to make progress in their work. Achieving a goal, accomplishing a task, or solving a problem often evoked great pleasure and sometimes elation. Even making good progress toward such goals could elicit the same reactions."

Uncovering and tracking your accomplishments will show you the progress you're making. (See an engaging video of Amabile talking about keeping a work diary at <http://tinyurl.com/9kzsgzc>.) Similarly, in his book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, author Daniel Pink cites mastery, our desire to get better at what we do, as one of three primary motivators.

When we share progress and accomplishments with others, we



reinforce them in our own minds and feel them boost our confidence.

Get ready to discover your accomplishments.

This book will help you understand why it's important to have a solid grasp of your accomplishments. It will explain the importance of accomplishments self-knowledge for getting a job, as well as advancing in both salary and levels of responsibility. This self-knowledge will help you set goals and improve your self-esteem.

The book will help you gain a better understanding of why people – people perhaps like you – often have a hard time identifying their accomplishments. With that knowledge, you can overcome the barriers that keep folks from realizing what they've achieved.

The book offers techniques for brainstorming, identifying, quantifying, framing, and articulating accomplishments. One of the most valuable tools in the book is [Chapter 4](#), which offers more than 200 prompts to help you mine for accomplishments.

Since job search and career advancement are big motivators for getting a handle on your accomplishments, [Chapter 7](#) details how you can communicate your accomplishments in resumes, cover letters, interviews, portfolios, performance reviews, and other career-related venues. [Chapter 8](#) discusses how to conduct ongoing reviews of your achievements. By the book's end with [Chapter 9](#), you can assess your progress in uncovering your accomplishments and

plan your next steps as an accomplished person.

Take the accomplishments pre-test.

Let's begin by looking at how you're feeling about your accomplishments.

Answer **true** or **false** to these statements:

1. I consider myself an accomplished person.
2. If asked today to state my proudest accomplishment, I can readily provide a detailed response.
3. If I lost my job today and had to update my resume, I could fill it with rich, results-driven accomplishments.
4. I know how to quantify many of my accomplishments.
5. I understand the best ways to frame my accomplishments so I can communicate them to best advantage.
6. I am comfortable talking about my accomplishments – in networking, interviews, and other oral situations.
7. I know what tools to use to brainstorm my accomplishments.
8. I regularly share my accomplishments with my boss.
9. I have a plan in place to regularly monitor, track, and self-report my accomplishments.

10. As I review my accomplishments, I set goals for the future.

If you had more “false” answers than “true” answers, you can expect to tip the balance the other way after reading this book.

A note about sources ...

In the [Appendix](#), I've listed all the terrific experts whom I've quoted, cited, and consulted for this book. I'd like to single out one author and book because you'll see her name and her book's name pop up frequently here. Peggy Klaus is the author of *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It!* Her book is a superb companion to this one. While this one focuses a bit more specifically on identifying and tracking



accomplishments, hers is slanted more toward becoming comfortable in communicating them. I'd also like to spotlight my partner, Dr. Randall S. Hansen (pictured at left), for all his assistance with the book, including writing several of the accomplishments stories herein.

CHAPTER 1

Why we need to brainstorm, track, and leverage our accomplishments

The vital role of accomplishments in the job search and beyond is the subject of this chapter.

Prospective employers respond to accomplishments and results, not duties and responsibilities.

Accomplishments are the points that really help sell you to an employer – much more so than everyday job duties, and you can leverage your accomplishments for job-search success at all stages of the process: resume, cover letter, interview, and more. Hiring decision-makers want to see the results you attained for past employers, what you accomplished, the value you added, and how you made a difference in your past jobs. They want to gain a sense of the complexity and significance of what you’ve done. Telling employers the duties and responsibilities you handled in your past jobs is not enough; in fact, to a great extent, you should avoid focusing on duties and responsibilities when you attempt to sell yourself to future employers.

In the employment world the word “results” is virtually synonymous with “accomplishments.” Hiring decision-makers’ focus on the “results” concept may be the most important nuance to



consider as we seek to characterize the types of accomplishments to uncover and communicate. Results are what employers most look for, notes a study by ResumeBucket. If you read a list of duties and responsibilities in a job description or job posting, it’s difficult to picture results springing from most of those activities.

You’ll see much more about accomplishments vs. duties/responsibilities in [Chapter 7](#), but a brief overview of the reasons to favor accomplishments is in order.

“Though you may share the same job title with many other people, your accomplishments and how you carry out your responsibilities are what distinguishes you from other qualified candidates,” writes Linda Matias of CareerStrides.com in her article, “The Interviewable Resume,” which appears in many places on the Internet.

In her article, “Is Your Resume Lost in the Great Internet Void?”, resume writer Deb Walker of Alpha Advantage draws an analogy to show accomplishments can differentiate a job-seeker: “Dozens of fast-food restaurants sell hamburgers and fries. How do you choose which one you want? Chances are, one of those restaurants has a differentiating edge, something that you like better than all the others. The job market is the same way; it’s flooded with choices, so you have to make your resume stand out from all the competition. The best way to differentiate your resume from others is with accomplishments.”

To sell our services – whether to employers or clients – we need a track record.

Strategically articulating our accomplishments helps our audiences – employers, clients, and more – to picture what we can do in the future. If you achieved a given result in your past, you can probably attain a result at least that good in the future. “Employers don’t want to know what you did,” notes career trainer Bob McIntosh, “they want to know what you can do.”

We’ll see in [Chapter 6](#) more about how to craft accomplishments statements that enable our audiences to envision our future performance.

To boost job security in an insecure world, we need our bosses to know what we’re accomplishing.

No one is indispensable anymore; anyone can be downsized. While ensuring that your boss knows what results you’re accomplishing is not a guarantee of retaining your job, keeping him or her abreast of how you’re helping the organization’s bottom line can certainly give you an advantage over your colleagues who aren’t doing so.

To advance in our jobs and get raises, we need to tout accomplishments.

Advancement means getting promoted within your current organization, attaining increases in salary, and sometimes moving on to bigger and better opportunities with a job or career change. In each case, you need to make a case to a manager as to why you should move up or move on. Accomplishments

tied to how you’ve benefited the organization are a big part of how to do that.

Walker notes that for career-changers, “accomplishment statements give credibility to transferable skills and prove your ability to cross industry or occupational lines. Well-crafted accomplishments make a big difference in whether you win the interview or are passed over.”

Accomplishments and successes may compensate for other deficiencies in our backgrounds (such as lack of a college degree, history of job-hopping, gaps in employment, age discrimination).

Many of us have aspects of our job histories that serve, unfortunately, as red flags to employers, such as current unemployment, a history of not staying in jobs very long, periods of unemployment between jobs, inexperience, lack of qualifications, or the “overqualified” label, which is often applied to mature job-seekers.

While the prejudices of a few employers are too strong to overcome deficiencies in some cases, job-seekers can greatly bolster their cases by front-loading any communication with employers with accomplishments. Any prospective employee who consistently gets results and boasts successes can potentially win over an employer who might otherwise be on the fence about a deficiency. Never try to cover up your background, but do de-emphasize the negative while accentuating the positive.

College students, who already face the challenge of less experience to draw from

than other job-seekers, tend to fail on their resumes and cover letters to provide evidence of achievement – proof that their actions had positive, recognized results. In fact, that failure is the most common mistake this group makes, says Phil Hey, professor of English and writing at Briar Cliff College. “Employers don’t want a dead history of education and job descriptions;” he says, “they want some outcomes that show that the applicant really can produce on the job.”

Mature job-seekers can also use accomplishments to their advantage, advises Rachelle Canter, PhD, president of San Francisco-based executive development firm RJC Associates, in ExecuNet’s *Overcoming Today’s Toughest Resume Challenges*: “I recommend that executives focus on quantifying accomplishments, including showcasing big things they’ve been able to do fast (generally a way to show how experience can save time and money) so prospective employers can see that they can potentially get more from a seasoned employee.” (See more about quantifying accomplishments in [Chapter 5](#).)

To identify gaps in our experience, set and meet goals, we need to monitor accomplishments.

How many times have you ended a project or job by saying, “I didn’t accomplish everything I wanted to”? Reviewing and reflecting on accomplishments provides an opportunity to see the gaps between what we intended to do and what we actually did.

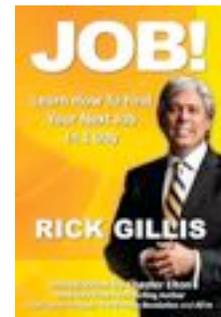
Monitoring and tracking accomplishments also gives us a way to

set goals. We can look at what we’ve achieved and then ask ourselves: What do I want to accomplish today/this week/this month/this year?

To feel good about ourselves, we need to appreciate what we’ve achieved.

It’s a pretty good bet that anyone who feels he or she has not accrued any accomplishments also lacks self-esteem. Because our society recognizes and rewards accomplishments, those who feel they lack them feel left behind. Even setting aside extrinsic recognition for achievements, most people feel intrinsically rewarded when they check items off their lists, do what they set out to do, and even exceed expectations. Learning to identify our accomplishments and communicate them to others can only help us to appreciate ourselves, and that confidence gives a boost in the job search and other endeavors.

Brainstorming accomplishments is “a great motivational exercise to build personal confidence,” Rick Gillis writes in his book, *Job!* “You will be amazed as you find yourself remembering other achievements while jotting down the particulars of another. When you are done, you won’t believe how cool you feel.”



CHAPTER 2

Why people have a weak grasp on their accomplishments

This chapter explores the reasons – social and psychological – that most people are at a loss when it comes to identifying their accomplishments.

It hasn't occurred to us to record accomplishments beginning early in our careers.

Most people don't think about accomplishments until something changes the status quo of their lives. Few people take their first job out of school and start jotting down their accomplishments. Who has time? Recording accomplishments just isn't a priority for most people.



For many people, the accomplishments issue comes up when they suddenly find themselves in a new job situation. They've been unexpectedly fired or downsized. Perhaps they've worked for the same employer for many years. They've had no compelling reason to keep track of their accomplishments because they haven't had to update their resumes or look for a new job. As a resume writer, I was often approached by clients who said they had not needed a resume for many years – either because they had not changed jobs or because they had always attained new jobs through networking or being recruited.

Even when a job situation is stable, we're not thinking about accomplishments until something occurs in the job that warrants such reflection. "Often people don't pay attention to their accomplishments until performance-review time," says Carol Johnson, owner of Plan B Consulting in Derby, CT.

We can't remember what we've accomplished.

Because most of us haven't tracked accomplishments from the beginning or thought much about them along the way, we have no easy way of remembering achievements when we truly need to. If you were asked for your top accomplishments from three jobs ago, could you come up with them? Can you even list more than a handful of accomplishments from your current job? If not, you're not alone.

Sometimes it's hard even to remember the accomplishments of the past day, as Glen Stansberry notes: "We often forget the things that we got done during the day for lots of reasons. We're taught at an early age that what we do isn't as important as what we didn't do. After all, what we don't get done often impacts us more in work and other social settings. This [mindset] causes us to automatically shove the stuff we did accomplish into the back of our minds, and fret about the undone," he writes in his article, "5 Reasons to Keep a Work Diary."

We're not sure we've done anything worthy of being called an accomplishment.

"Most people are not self-aware of what they bring to the table each day or who they really are," notes Cheryl Roshak,

CPC, transition and career coach and president of Cheryl Roshak Associates. “People don’t recognize their own accomplishments for what they are,” agrees Indianapolis-based corporate recruiter Todd Rogers, “or they confuse accomplishments with their job responsibilities.” On a resume, job candidates will list bullet points detailing their job description, observes Gregg Podolski, accounting and finance recruiter for Emerson Group, instead of listing accomplishments. “Yet when I ask a few probing questions, they are almost always able to tell me something they did that earned them praise or was above and beyond the call of duty; yet it was part of their routine so they didn’t recognize it for what it was,” Podolski says.

We sometimes think what we’ve done is not good enough, nothing special, too small to count, or not anything that would impress anyone. “Are you convincing yourself something isn’t good enough when, in fact, any more objective onlooker would convince you otherwise?” asks author and career expert Miriam Salpeter of Keppie Careers.

Why do people not believe they’ve done anything accomplishments-worthy? Sometimes an accomplishment just isn’t up to our own expectations, so we discount it. Another reason is the way achievements are treated in the workplace – the message that no one is indispensable, explains educator and consultant Leri M. Thomas, PhD. “Workers aren’t typically praised every time they do something exceptional,” Thomas says. “If they were, from an employer’s perspective, they’d want more compensation. I remember being told that I could be replaced by anyone on the

street. So, in the industrial work place, which is still the prevailing culture, managers devalue achievement as a means to hold the bottom line down.”

Workers aren’t just starved for praise; they are deprived of feedback of any kind from colleagues and superiors in the workplace, says Kiana Wilson, PHR, GCDF, of Tampa, FL (see her [sidebar](#) at the end of Chapter 3 on how to get more feedback from employers). “Many people go through their day-to-day responsibilities without any regard to what they are truly



accomplishing. It is only through continuous feedback that these individuals come to realize the magnitude of their contributions and subsequently their accomplishments along the way. Without this feedback, many are left scrambling through their work duties to determine what impact, if any, they have made,” Wilson notes.

Many people believe that success is expected of them. Many, like me, grew up without earning much praise from parents for accomplishments because they were simply doing what their parents expected them to do. Excellence was nothing out of the ordinary. “For many overachievers, success, work ethic, and striving to be better than everyone else are second nature,” observes Patrick K. Hollister, a sales manager with Panasonic.

(On the flip side, of course, are those who are accustomed to lavish praise for

everything and consequently feel a need to broadcast every accomplishment. “Gen Y and Z tend to live each day to tell everyone how awesome they are,” asserts Jennifer Cash, an operations professional and LinkedIn contributor, “and can easily blog about what they did as if everything they did that day is an accomplishment.”)

Some people believe any activity they can’t measure or quantify is not an accomplishment. “Most resume-writing and job-search advice states that accomplishments are best when they are backed up by facts and figures,” says career-development practitioner Karen Schofield, “Some people work in fields where it isn’t always easy to quantify what they have accomplished in their jobs, such as teaching and writing. That situation makes it difficult for the job-seeker to clearly explain what he or she has done and how it benefited the company or client, Schofield says.

When we think of benefit to an employer or client, we generally think in terms of results, and most people miss accomplishments because they aren’t thinking in terms of results, observes Darlene Zambruski, managing editor for ResumeEdge.com. “They’re thinking in terms of tasks. For example, ‘I do this, I do that.’ Stopping to think of the consequences if they *didn’t* do ‘this’ or ‘that,’ that would give them the accomplishment.”

We have difficulty seeing ourselves as others see us.

Because we often have no idea how others view us, we’re not sure if they perceive what we do as accomplishments-worthy. We’re often surprised to discover that the people we work with and observe our

work find us far more highly accomplished than we find ourselves. (However, having made that discovery, we sometimes fall into the trap of thinking others will talk about our success for us – so we don’t have to.) Women are especially likely to underestimate how coworkers perceive them, as University of New Mexico researcher Scott Taylor discovered when he studied 251 managers. He found that women were three times less likely than men to accurately predict their coworkers’ perception of their work performance. The women tended to undercut themselves when asked to rate their performance through their coworkers’ and managers’ eyes across many key workplace attributes.

We’re worried about being perceived as boasting.



“The need to ‘toot your own horn’ is just not something that everyone possesses,” notes Cash, “and I think that has a lot to do with what generation you grew up in. I think that humility is generation-based. Prior to and including Gen X, one did not talk themselves up or they were looked upon as bragging or brown-nosing.

The change in the way society interprets accomplishments has changed at a basic level. What a seasoned job-seeker may interpret as just doing their job and doing it darn well, a younger generation may look at each detail as an accomplishment.”

Many of us have been taught that our good work should speak for itself; we shouldn’t need to talk about it. Some of

us actually think we'll get more attention by being humble than by touting our accomplishments.

Women have particular difficulty with the idea of boasting, notes Peggy Klaus. "It's a well-researched fact that women are terrible self-promoters," she writes.

Man or woman, though, you're not boasting; you're marketing a product. Here's a tip however – research shows that people who compare themselves to others when touting their accomplishments ("I'm better than others.") *do* tend to come off as boastful.

Clearing the obstacles

Now that we better understand the barriers that frequently stand in the way of identifying and tracking our accomplishments, we can begin to break through those barriers. We can't time-travel to the beginning of our careers and begin to record accomplishments in real time. But we can deploy various tools to help us pick our brains, remember, and record achievements. That's what Chapter 3 is all about.

CHAPTER 3

Tools and techniques for brainstorming and tracking accomplishments

“When you don’t keep a log of your accomplishments,” writes Peggy Klaus, “you’re more apt to forget the specifics that speak volumes about your value.” If you’re ready to begin mining for your accomplishments, you’ll find here an array of methods and means for doing so. Many of these tools straddle two purposes; some are merely repositories for you to record the accomplishments you’ve brainstormed through your own devices. Others are tools that assist with the brainstorming. Some provide both functions. You’ll want to use what you’re most comfortable with, and you may find that using multiple tools in combination works best for you.

Don’t decide which tool to use until you’ve reviewed [Chapter 4](#), a collection of more than 200 prompts to help you identify accomplishments. That chapter is conceived as a tool in itself to prompt you to recall your successes; you may want to combine its prompting technique with one or more of the recording tools in this chapter.

The idea is to begin generating raw data that you will later massage into powerful descriptions of your accomplishments. For now, this information will begin to open your eyes to how accomplished you are. “Many people discount what they do,” says consultant Liz Sumner, “but it’s harder to do so with all that data staring you in the face.”

Many people begin to achieve success in this process by taking a half a day to a full

day of quiet time to brainstorm and reflect on accomplishments. Then they can begin to add to those baseline accomplishments by tracking new achievements regularly, whether daily, weekly, or at a frequency that works for the individual.

Journaling techniques.

Calendar or Daytimer: I still have pages from desk-pad (“blotter” style) calendars with notes of all my work project deadlines and meetings,

which serve as memory prompts for accomplishments. I liked this style of calendar when I had office jobs because it was right in front of me where I could see it at all times. I didn’t have to open up a notebook-style calendar to jot down notes. To better remember and translate deadlines and meetings into achievements, I could have gone even further by jotting down actual accomplishments on these calendars, as Denise P. Kalm of DPK Coaching notes: “The trick is to note [accomplishments] down every day that you have one in whatever method makes sense,” Kalm says. “But after you have a few noted, go back and amend them. Note the business value of what you have done. A month or year later, you may not remember that, and the raw accomplishment may not mean much then.” Whatever style of calendar works for you – desk pad, wall calendar, page-a-day, or a



notebook style such as a Daytimer, you can use it to record accomplishments.

Work/job diary. A diary of your work life, which can be kept in any sort of journal, blank book, composition book, or notebook, is an effective venue for recording and reflecting on accomplishments. Researchers Teresa Amabile and Steve Kramer had their study participants spend just 5-10 minutes a day keeping a work diary. Not only did participants track their progress, but many gained “a new perspective on themselves as professionals and what they needed to improve.” For the study participants, reflection on progress seemed to be a highly positive aspect of keeping the diaries. Amabile

referenced a former student who enjoyed using Levenger’s 5-Year Diary (<http://tinyurl.com/ck4khzq>). Each page in the diary represents a day of the year, with space to write a short entry over five years. An added advantage is the ability to look at what you accomplished on the same day up to five years ago.



Journaling daily accomplishments has other benefits. “Focusing on what we have done – the wins – in our day rejuvenates,” Glen Stansberry writes. “Going to bed looking at what was accomplished can be a massive motivator to help start the next day,

and can keep us from closing the day on a sour note.”

“One thing that I recommend to all of my clients,” writes Liz Handlin in a blog post, “is to keep a diary or journal about what is going on at work. Did your boss tell you what a great job you are doing? Write it down. Were you just named Employee of the Month? Write it down. Date each entry in your journal and keep your records at home rather than at work.”

You can set aside a few minutes a day for this journaling, perhaps during your lunch hour, on your commute home from work, right after you get home, or before you go to bed.

If “work diary” or “job diary” sound dull to you, call it whatever you want – such as Results Journal, Victory Journal, Success Diary, or Journal of Awesomeness, as “George P.H.” of The Man-Up Blog calls it. “You’ll be amazed at how much better focusing on your positive achievements makes you feel! And once you start reinforcing good choices by writing them down, your subconscious will encourage you to make them more often.”

Write case studies about your projects. Essentially, a case study is a story with added details and analysis. You describe in detail the problem your organization faced that motivated the project, the action you took to resolve the problem, and your results. If you were writing a case study about an external situation in which you were not involved (say, for a class assignment), you would

interview the people involved about how the problem developed, how they feel about it, and so forth. Since you were in the thick of it, you don't need to interview others, although you could. After telling the problem → action → result story of the project in detail, your analysis could include what you learned from it, what you would do differently if faced with the same situation again, why you felt the project succeeded.

Techniques using Web apps, software, and cloud apps

Use LinkedIn Skills (<http://www.linkedin.com/skills/>) to remind you of the skills you possess with which you may be able to connect accomplishments. "I typed in 'writing' and clicked on Search," explains Maura Over of Aurega Communication. "This gave me a list of writing skills. I realized that I have done technical writing, manual writing, and creative writing. This process enabled me to write more about my accomplishments."

Consider a spreadsheet. "I use an Excel spreadsheet," says Darlene Zambruski. With a spreadsheet, she notes, "you can sort info more quickly, especially when you need it for a performance review or if you're refreshing your resume for a new job search." See a sample spreadsheet at: <http://tinyurl.com/c2b5e4d>. An accomplishments spreadsheet can be set up in many ways. The sample assumes that its creator has determined the functional-skills areas she wants to especially track, created columns for those areas, and inserted accomplishments by date as she

achieved them. She could also have entered accomplishments according to date and then later broken them into categories.

Try iDoneThis.com. iDoneThis is an online app (<https://idonethis.com>) that, according its Website, "makes it easy to track and celebrate the progress that you make at work every day." The service emails you at day's end to ask, "What'd you get done today?" After you reply, you can go to your page on the site and see a calendar. You can click on any date and see that day's accomplishments. The next day's email also contains the previous day's accomplishments. You can export an accomplishments file that you can open in Google Spreadsheets, Microsoft Excel, and as a plain text file. The service is free for individuals. (For teams, the service costs \$5 monthly.)

The logo for iDoneThis, featuring the text "iDoneThis" in a bold, sans-serif font, with the "i" in lowercase and "DoneThis" in uppercase.

Experiment with online or mobile-device journaling apps. You can find tons of journaling and diary apps, both Web-based and for mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets. Most are free or have a free version. Search terms to try include: "journaling app," "journaling app iphone," "journaling app Android." Just a few examples:

- 28Daily: <http://28odaily.com>: Summarize your day in 280 characters.
- Day One: <http://dayoneapp.com>: Helps users remember, record and track their lives in a simple way. For Mac, iPhone, and iPad.

- Penzu: <http://penzu.com>: An online diary and personal journal that is focused on privacy.

Articles that offer lists of journaling apps: <http://tinyurl.com/7b3ok3c> and <http://tinyurl.com/8xufbmo>

Integrate JibberJobber’s Job Journal feature. JibberJobber (<http://www.jibberjobber.com/>) is an online personal relationship manager that helps users keep track of job searches, networking contacts, and other career-management information. The Job Journal feature enables users to record accomplishments. Users can list up to 25 accomplishments using the free level of JibberJobber, more in the paid version (see pricing levels at <http://www.jibberjobber.com/pricing.php>).

Use a cloud-based app, such as Evernote. Evernote (<http://evernote.com>) touts the ability for users to “have instant access to their memories.”

Users can type notes, to-dos, and clip entire Web pages and save all the links and contents. They can also snap photos of anything from business cards to whiteboards to wine labels, write handwritten notes in digital ink, record audio clips. The variety of media and content that can be integrated into an Evernote



“notebook” adds to the richness of tracking accomplishments. The app also has versions for mobile devices. You can find apps similar to Evernote at <http://tinyurl.com/8hajf97> and <http://tinyurl.com/93dq6q2>.

Voice-record your accomplishments. Most mobile devices enable you to record voice memos. This technique provides a quick and easy way to capture your achievements as they happen. Just remember that transcribing them into written form is very time consuming. But wait ... you can get free voice-recognition apps, such as Dragon for the iPad, that do the transcribing for you. Conduct a search for “voice recognition” on your mobile device.

Try an accomplishment site. Web sites that enable users to construct accomplishments have sprung up in abundance in recent years. Example: OurAccomplishment at <http://www.ouraccomplishment.com/>. While you may not need anything as elaborate as this kind of platform, you might at times appreciate the ability to add photos and video to your accomplishments stories.

Set up a Google search alert on your name: This technique should supplement, not substitute, for other brainstorming and tracking techniques. If you have any kind of significant online presence – in articles, videos, podcasts, blog posts, comments, for example – your name will come up in a Google search. If you set up an alert (<http://www.google.com/alerts>), you may be reminded of forgotten content you’ve

produced, as well as see what people are saying about you in reviews and comments.

Low-tech techniques.

List *everything* you've done in each job. Paula Sanders of Hunt4Staff.com suggests thinking about the tasks or instances where something has gone well, what skills you utilized, what the outcomes were, and whether those outcomes were over and above what was expected of you within the role. Also list what you've done through personal interests and hobbies. "An individual who runs a kids club, Brownies or Scouts group, for example," Sanders says. "generally will [forget to list] the skills and accomplishments in this part of their life, but these are just as important [as those listed for jobs]!"

Keep physical evidence and artifacts of your accomplishments in a container.

Whether a file folder, a box, or portfolio, you can store photos, memos, letters, certificates, and any other physical objects that will help you remember your achievements. Some of these artifacts can then be transferred to a portfolio or "Brag Book" that you can use to present your accomplishments to others. "I encourage my clients to create an "Accomplishment" file in their desk drawer," notes Career Coach Mary Jeanne Vincent, "and drop something



in it every week. When it is time to update their resume or prepare for their annual performance evaluation, they can pull out the file and remember all of the achievements they have forgotten. Not everything will be a pearl of wisdom, but there will be plenty of achievements to highlight."

In your container full of artifacts tied to your accomplishments, you can keep letters and notes about your performance from supervisors, colleagues, customers, and vendors; performance reviews; sales ranking reports; your college transcript; letters of recommendation; certificates from training courses; photos of yourself working on various projects or showing deliverables; samples of your work; award certificates, and more. See [this section of the list of prompts in Chapter 4](#) for more ideas on artifacts that can be tangible evidence of accomplishments.

Create a Brag Book or Portfolio.

This technique takes those containers full of evidence of your achievements a step further. Brag Books and portfolios are physical manifestations of your accomplishments. "Brag Books" are commonly used in the sales field, especially pharmaceutical sales. They are binders that aspiring sales reps take to job interviews, and they are filled with tangible evidence of achievements. A portfolio is virtually the same thing as a Brag Book; it, too, is used in job interviews by job-seekers in any field to illustrate accomplishments. Although these binders are typically used to communicate about accomplishments, they can also be used as tools to help

brainstorm and track accomplishments. Research I conducted with my partner revealed that individuals gain confidence from simply preparing the portfolio or Brag Book.

By organizing your artifacts in your binder, you will refresh your memory about your accomplishments and gain confidence as you review all the evidence of your success.

Another option is a virtual, multimedia portfolio or Brag Book, using a site such as Visual CV (<http://www.visualcv.com>) or Bragbook Multimedia (<http://www.bragbookmm.com/>).

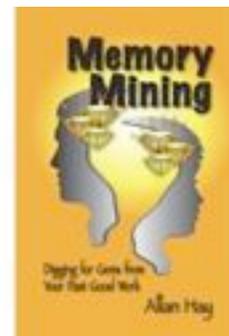
Keep a “Best Experiences” notebook. This technique, suggested by the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (<http://www.dependablestrengths.org/>), begins with writing down your best experiences every week – things you enjoyed doing, felt you did well, and were proud of. After a month of recording these experiences, choose those you felt were the Best Experiences. Describe them in greater detail, with outcomes. Then, every quarter, choose two or more top experiences of the quarter. At the end of a year, review your top quarterly experiences. Reflect on how they could have been changed or improved. Set goals for the next year based on what you’ve learned.

Use a “Categories of Achievements” Worksheet. This downloadable Word document, (<http://www.execglobalnet.com/careercenter/12stepsresources/Worksheet2.1-W-CategoriesofAchievements.doc>) from ExecGlobalNet, offers very simple prompts for helping identify accomplishments in eight categories.

Employ Ford Myers’ Accomplishment Stories. Go to <http://www.careerpotential.com/bookbonus/>, enter your name and email address, and later receive a link to a Job Search Survival Toolkit from career coach and author Ford Myers. Click on “Accomplishment Stories” to get a downloadable Word document, a worksheet emphasizing skills.

Utilize Allan Hay’s Memory Mining technique.

In his book, *Memory Mining*, Allan Hay recommends using job descriptions as jumping-off places for

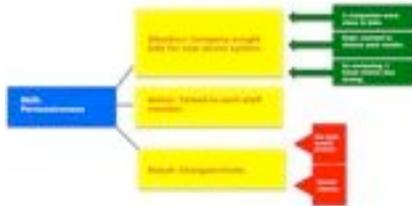


accomplishments discovery. To deploy this technique, find a job posting that contains a detailed job description for a position that typifies what you seek. Read the description over carefully, perhaps several times. Identify the job functions listed in the posting. Break each function into smaller elements, essentially by picking out all nouns and noun phrases. Now, brainstorm

your accomplishments that exemplify how well you can perform each function. Hay provides a detailed list of questions to ask yourself about each function, but for our purposes here, focus on accomplishments.

Try mind-mapping. Describing mind-mapping

as a great tool for dealing with a vast



amount of interrelated information, my partner, Dr. Randall S. Hansen, defines mind-mapping this way in our book *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Study Skills*: “Mind maps allow you to see ... the way in which the concepts relate to one another. Mind maps are created around a central word, idea, or theme. From this central word, you create branches to other major concepts related to the central word. From there, you continue to create branches from every word or concept you add to the map – and keep doing so until you have all the material on your map. By focusing on key concepts that you discover and define, and then looking for branches and connections among all the concepts, you are mapping knowledge in a way that will help you better understand and remember the information. This approach is sometimes referred to as concept mapping.”

You can use mind-mapping in a number of ways in brainstorming/tracking accomplishments. You could begin with values, [such as these listed in Chapter 4](#), and flesh out

accomplishment stories about them. You could do the same with the [skills in Chapter 4](#). Let's take “persuasiveness” for example, and the accomplishment story below about that skill:

Recently my company asked for bids on a phone system for our new college campus. Two companies came in very close with their bids, and most of my department wanted to go with a vendor that we have used in the past. After I looked over the proposals, it was clear that this was the wrong decision. So, I talked individually with each member of our staff and changed their minds and got the best product that would save money and provide the highest quality.

See a mind-map for this story (which is shown in miniature at left) at <http://tinyurl.com/azca27z>.

Other targets for mind-mapping accomplishments include the prompts in [Chapter 4](#) and your own resume.

While mind-mapping can be quite informal and hand-drawn, you can also find mind-mapping software, much of it at no cost. Find a huge listing of mind-mapping software, tools, and information at “99 Mind Mapping Resources, Tools, and Tips” (<http://tinyurl.com/yvleul>). See also Andrew Makar's article, Mind Map Your Business Interview (<http://tinyurl.com/bj7dk34>) and “What is Mind Mapping? (and How to Get Started Immediately)” (<http://tinyurl.com/5agu90>).

Construct status reports. Many organizations require workers to keep regular status reports, usually weekly or monthly. But you can track your accomplishments on your own in a status-report format even if your organization doesn't require them. One option is to conduct a search of "status report template" online. Because most forms, however, are task-oriented rather than results-oriented, you may want to develop your own form, perhaps using one of the storied formats described in [this section](#) of Chapter 6. See also [this section](#) of Chapter 7 for more about status reports.

Techniques that integrate feedback from others.

Query your colleagues. "Ask colleagues and especially past supervisors what they see as your top accomplishments," advises Mary E. Hayward, principal at Career Options. "It is often difficult for us to remember and claim our accomplishments and strengths, but it is much easier for others to do so." Consider also talking to people with whom you've served as a volunteer or any capacity in which you've made meaningful contributions.

Questions that Vickie Elmer, a freelance writer who writes about career and consumer issues and blogs at WorkingKind.com, suggests can be posed to current and former colleagues include: "What did I accomplish when we worked together?" "What did I lead/create/develop that had a big impact on you and on our employer?" Resume

writer Laura Smith-Proulx suggests asking former supervisors, "What were the key reasons for [my] past promotions?"

"I also suggest that [clients] keep track of others who may have helped with each activity," says Todd Rhoad, director of BT Consulting, an Atlanta career-consulting firm. "We also like to track activities that impact teams, divisions, and companies."

New grads and other young people may especially benefit from asking others about what successes they observed, notes author Rick Gillis. Ask professors, coaches, advisers, and others about what impact you had in the capacity in which they knew you and how you made a difference.

Show colleagues and former bosses your resume (preferably after reading [Chapter 7](#) and revising it).



Do they feel it accurately reflects your contributions?

Also consider asking family members, including your spouse. In most cases they don't work with you, but chances are they are the people you are most likely to boast to about your successes. If you're having difficulty dredging accomplishments out of your memory, family members may recall wins you've told them about.

You may also find yourself remembering other accomplishments

when those around you start giving you input.

Enlist a partner to help you “drill down.” To truly get at the meat of your accomplishments – the results that distinguish you, recruit a spouse, friend, colleague, or family member to ask you questions. Your current resume or the list of prompts in [Chapter 4](#) are good starting places. Your partner will not only ask you about what you did in each job, but also what it meant, what resulted, why it mattered, and how it distinguished you. In other words, he or she will ask “so what?” about each item (see [this section](#) in Chapter 4). Your partner could also use [this list](#) from Chapter 4 to drill down.

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### **Get more feedback from employers, a sidebar by Kiana L. Wilson, PHR, GCDF, Tampa, FL:**

Workers must take the initiative to own and cultivate this process. They can start by doing the leg work to make this technique simple for those who may be involved. They should put together a list that outlines the specific criteria for the feedback they seek (i.e., what did I do especially well during this task? What lessons learned should I be aware of and take away from this task? What areas, if any, would you suggest that I further strengthen?). This preparation takes the guesswork out of the process, and people are more likely to participate.

Next, workers should be direct with their co-workers, manager, clients, and others by asking for continuous feedback and

explaining why it’s important and how they plan to utilize the information. It is also a good idea at this point for workers to gather initial thoughts and suggestions from these individuals to ensure the process is well received.

Finally, workers should ensure that they provide regular updates on their progress to those that have provided feedback. This check-in will let these individuals know that their time and feedback is valued and workers have taken steps to utilize this information in the manner that was originally communicated.

In the beginning, the brunt of this process will fall on the worker to ensure that he or she is continuously receiving this feedback. However, if cultivated correctly, feedback will start to become a normal workplace practice.

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Mining documents, including e-documents, for accomplishments.

Annual performance reviews.

Because a significant part of many performances reviews includes a discussion of your performance against the goals your employer set for you, the paperwork you get at the end of a performance evaluation can help you identify achievements you may have overlooked. Your review document may also detail your most significant accomplishments and their impact on the organization.

Emails. Recruiter Todd Rogers suggests “going as far back in your “sent” and “deleted” emails as possible and scrolling forward in time, paying attention to the subject lines as you

scroll.” When you see an email that is possibly affiliated with an accomplishment, he says, flag that email for further reading. “After you’ve assembled a year or so of such emails, start to go through them and where applicable, write a one-sentence summary of what you did that was exceptional.” For the future, start an email folder of accomplishments so you don’t have to sift through as many emails.

Recommendation/referral letters from current/previous employers: These letters actually have limited value when presented to an external audience, such as prospective employers; they aren’t considered very credible since no one who would write such a letter about you would say anything negative. But they can be valuable in helping you brainstorm and track your accomplishments, especially as seen through the eyes of others. Consider also letters from customers, clients, vendors, and co-workers.

Your resume. After you’ve read this book, you’ll probably want to beef up your resume with accomplishments, but before you do that, use the document as a tool to prompt reflection and brainstorming on your accomplishments. Review each item on your resume and think about the extent to which it could be better stated as an accomplishment. Also consider additional accomplishments you may have had in each job or educational experience.

CHAPTER 4

200+ prompts for brainstorming accomplishments

This chapter focuses on one of the most effective methods for identifying accomplishments – mining them through a series of questions that can prompt you to rediscover notable moments.

This chapter is about remembering accomplishments and realizing that activities you may not have attached much importance to actually were achievements. It's about developing what I call a *Raw Inventory of Accomplishments* that you refine in later chapters. In [Chapter 5](#), you'll learn some ways to enhance accomplishment statements with numbers and metrics, and in [Chapter 6](#), you'll see how to frame, articulate, and communicate your accomplishments into what I call "AccomplishNuggets," the pieces of pure gold that you can then adapt for various uses. [Chapter 7](#) will guide you in tailoring these AccomplishNuggets to specific communications.

Doubtless, you will find a set of 200+ prompts daunting. When I had my resume-writing business, I would ask clients to respond to 18 accomplishments prompts for each job, and even that number was overwhelming for many clients. I suggest you review the entire list (you can skip the entrepreneurial and entry-level/unpaid prompts if they don't apply to you) to see if anything jumps out at you and triggers an achievement memory.

Next, look at specific categories of prompts and choose those that are most relevant to your current needs.

Updating your resume? The [skills](#) prompts will help you with a Professional Profile or Qualifications Summary atop your resume.

The [experience](#) prompts, obviously, will boost your Professional Experience section.

The "[future-oriented](#)" prompts can help your resume and cover letter but may be even more useful for interviews.

The [awards](#) and [outside recognition](#) sections can boost your resume.

The [values](#) section can assist with targeting specific employers with resumes, cover letters, and interview responses.

The [subject-matter knowledge](#), [field-specific](#), and [uniqueness](#) sections will be especially helpful for interviews (and resumes/cover letters, too).

The section asking about [tangible evidence](#) of accomplishments can be a significant boon to creating a portfolio or Brag Book.

The section offering [creative ways](#) to mine for accomplishments is useful across the board.

The [entrepreneurial](#) prompts will assist those whose careers have been largely or most recently entrepreneurial.

The [entry-level/unpaid](#) section can guide new graduates and those with limited paid experience.

For more global accomplishments that boost your self-esteem and help you set goals, see the [life accomplishments](#) section.

As you work through the prompts in this chapter, keep the following in mind:

- **Try to list specific, concrete accomplishments.** Let's say you were asked one of the prompting questions on this list in an interview: "What is your track record in meeting deadlines and budgets?" Some interview candidates might be tempted to say they have consistently met deadlines and budgets in their jobs. That's not a horrible response, but they would make their point much more credibly and convincingly if they gave specific examples of how they've done so, perhaps describing obstacles they overcame along the way.

Here's another example, from a cover letter. It does a great job of describing accomplishments – but none of them are described in concrete terms. The writer fails to paint a picture of how and where these feats took place. The reader is tempted to say, "Oh yeah? Prove it. Give me specifics."

My accomplishments include assessing current and future staffing needs, overseeing allocation of financial resources, and managing budgetary processes. I can

build and lead successful, goal-oriented teams of professional staff while overseeing budgets and resources for bottom-line results. I have turned unprofitable operations into profit-makers. I have contributed to keeping business centers running like well-oiled machines with a warm, human touch. Upon identifying key issues, I solve problems while embracing change and its positive effect on successful organizations. Fostering commitment, team spirit, pride, trust, and group identity are particular strengths.

- **Consider the "so-what factor" and accomplishment building blocks.** For every accomplishment you list, ask yourself, "so what?" Does the item you've listed truly



characterize your abilities and your potential for contributing to your next employer's success? Does the accomplishment truly distinguish you? For example, when I taught college students, I conducted mock job interviews with them. A frequent interview question was "What accomplishment are you most proud of?" The majority of students cited their pending college graduation as their proudest accomplishment. College

graduation is indeed an accomplishment worthy of pride, but in a job market in which most applicants are college grads, this achievement does little to distinguish the interviewee. See the [section of prompts especially intended to ferret out uniqueness](#). Another way to ensure an accomplishment is “important” enough is to ask yourself what value it contributed to the organization. How did it make a difference? What would have happened if you hadn’t accomplished what you did?

Let’s take this accomplishment for example:

Consolidated and relocated entire technical laboratory of newly purchased specialty division – including technical information, equipment, and knowledge base held by a retired engineer.

Impressive. But let’s ask the job-seeker: So what? Well, it turns out that he completed the project five months ahead of schedule.

Wow! But so what, in terms of value to the organization?

He saved the acquiring company \$500,000 by getting the new lab up and running so quickly. Thus, the post-so-what accomplishments bullet point becomes:

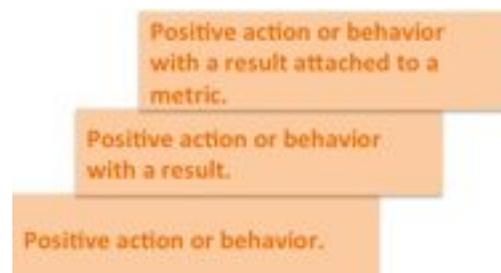
- Saved company \$500k by consolidating and relocating entire technical laboratory of newly purchased specialty division –

including technical information, equipment, and knowledge base held by a retired engineer – five months ahead of schedule.

The “so what?” factor enables us to understand the concept of Accomplishment Building Blocks, or levels of accomplishments:

- Positive action or behavior.
- Positive action or behavior with a result.
- Positive action or behavior with a result attached to a metric.

And, of course, these building blocks should be in the reverse order, building to the holy grail of accomplishments:



- **Make sure each accomplishment is relevant to your goal in brainstorming your accomplishments –** Choosing accomplishments germane to the type of job you seek, the education program you seek to enter, the clients to which you want to sell your products or services will help guide you in which prompts to focus on. It’s wise to build a large arsenal of

accomplishments. But choose subsets judiciously to support specific goals at any given time.

- **Think about the full scope of your experience.** Though your most recent experience is usually the most relevant, think back over every job, every educational experience, and even aspects of your life outside work and school. Sometimes older experiences and those off the beaten path – running a marathon, scaling a tall mountain peak – make the most memorable and illustrative accomplishment stories.
- **Consider metrics.** After you’ve mined these prompts as much as possible for accomplishments, go back through your list and consider how to measure each accomplishment – what metrics can you attach to each achievement? Quantify whenever possible; see [Chapter 5](#) for more about how to do that.
- **Keep your brand in mind.** Consider how each accomplishment fits with your personal brand. Explain in just two sentences in what way each chosen accomplishment will have impact on your targeted job (or other goal) and reflect your brand.
- **Resist the temptation to blow your accomplishments out of proportion.** Accomplishments should be measurable whenever possible and always verifiable. Don’t risk having a prospective employer call a former supervisor

and ask, “Did she really save the company from bankruptcy?” and have your ex-boss say, “Huh?”

Accomplishments that illustrate skills



Identify skills in which you excel – far above the performance level of most people – and give results-based examples of how you’ve demonstrated those skills. Even more important than brainstorming examples of skills in which you excel is to choose skills most relevant to the next job you seek. Identify the skills most often mentioned in the job postings of greatest interest to you and develop accomplishment statements about each of them.

Accomplishments that illustrate skills are important, says Donald Asher, author of *The Overnight Resume*, because your audience, especially the hiring audience “buys” skills and abilities. “Focus on the skills, the abilities, and the track record, not the tenure,” Asher says. They are also important when you are changing careers. Employers have difficulty visualizing how your skills in one field are applicable to another field unless you illustrate those skills through accomplishments.

Technical “hard” skills related to your work are important, but as Peggy Klaus writes in her article, “Are You Up To Snuff When It Comes To Soft Skills?”, soft skills – behaviors and traits such as

self-awareness, adaptability, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, teamwork, communicating, likability, risk taking, and time management – that determine the bottom line and will make or break an employee’s career.

If you haven’t been tracking your accomplishments regularly, you may forget some of the skills you’ve used. As we saw in [Chapter 3](#), Maura Over suggests conducting searches for skills on LinkedIn Skills to remind yourself of skills you’ve used and can tie to accomplishments.

Here are accomplishment prompts related to some top skills employers (and other audiences) seek. In addition, a good overarching prompt is: What new skills have you mastered?:

**Problem-Solving/Reasoning/
Creativity:** Consider specific problems in each job.

1. What were the problems or challenges that you or the organization faced?
2. What did you do to overcome the problems?
3. What were the results of your efforts?
4. Did you turn plummeting sales around? Did you fix weak financials?
5. Did you raise brand awareness?
6. Did you launch a new product?
7. Did you penetrate the market?
8. Did you improve a process?
9. Have you found a better method to do something?
10. What successes have resulted from your creativity?
11. When have you successfully handled a crisis or emergency?

Strategy:

12. Describe accomplishment(s) that had strategic impact.
13. What was the initial problem/ challenge?
14. What was the result?
15. How did you make it happen?

**Communications Skills
(listening, verbal, written).**

16. How have you made a difference through your ability to listen?
17. Can you give examples of how your ability to write has distinguished you?
18. What have you been able to accomplish as a result of your skill with speaking effectively?
19. What special successes have you had with presentations or pitches?



Analytical/Research Skills.

20. How have you demonstrated your ability to assess a situation?
21. What accomplishments have resulted from seeking multiple perspectives, and gathering more information?
22. How have you shown your ability to identify key issues that need to be addressed?

Computer/Technical Literacy.

23. Most workers these days are experienced with computer hardware and software, but how have you gone above and

- beyond in your understanding and ability?
24. What accomplishments have resulted from your expertise in specialized applications such as SAS, SPSS, or SAP software?

**Flexibility/Adaptability/
Managing Multiple Priorities.**

25. What accomplishment(s) illustrate(s) your ability to manage multiple assignments and tasks, set priorities?
26. How have you shown your ability to adapt to changing conditions and work assignments?

Interpersonal Abilities.

27. How have you impacted people in your previous positions?
28. What accomplishments would not have been possible without your ability to relate to your co-workers?
29. When has your ability to inspire others been critical to achieving results?
30. What accomplishments resulted from your ability to mitigate conflict with co-workers?
31. In what ways have you boosted employee or co-worker morale?
32. Describe how your approachability has paid off for you in successful outcomes.

Leadership/Management Skills.

33. How has your management of employees yielded results?
34. What did your subordinates achieve under your leadership that they might not have under someone else?

35. How did your management approach contribute to the organization's bottom line?
36. How have you empowered and motivated subordinates? What resulted?
37. What is your leadership style? Describe how you've applied it to attain a successful outcome.
38. How have you inspired loyalty to the organization?

**Multicultural Sensitivity/
Awareness.**

39. Have you had any successes as a result of demonstrating sensitivity and awareness to other people and cultures?

Planning/Organizing.

40. How have you demonstrated your ability to design, plan, organize, and implement projects and tasks within an allotted timeframe?
41. What accomplishments have resulted from your goal-setting abilities?



Teamwork.

42. How have you excelled through your ability to work with team members in a professional manner while attempting to achieve a common goal? (Be sure to make your role on the team clear and don't give all the credit for achieving the goal to the team; give yourself adequate credit.)

Risk-Taking.

43. What successes have resulted when you have taken risks?
44. In what ways has stepping outside your comfort zone paid off in positive outcomes?

Accomplishments that depict values

Of equal importance to skills are the values, personality traits, and personal characteristics that employers seek. Look for ways to weave accomplishment statements describing how you've exemplified these values into your resume, cover letters, and answers to interview questions. Again, choose those most relevant to the next job you seek.

Following are accomplishment prompts related to some top values employers (and other audiences) seek:

Honesty/Integrity/Morality.

45. What have you accomplished that exemplifies your personal integrity and ethics?
46. In what ways have employers placed their trust in you to positive effect?

Adaptability/Flexibility.

47. What results have you attained by being receptive and open to new ideas and concepts?
48. What successes have resulted from your willingness to both work independently and as part of a team?

49. What achievements have sprung from your ability to carry out multiple tasks or projects?

Dedication/Hard-Working/Work Ethic/Tenacity.

50. What successes have you achieved because you love what you do and work hard at it?
51. What result would not have been attained if you had not been determined to persist at a problem until you solved it and got the job done?

Dependability/Reliability/Responsibility.

52. In what situation has your commitment to taking responsibility for your actions made a difference to an employer?
53. What are some ways you have demonstrated consistency?

Loyalty.

54. What successes can you attribute to loyalty to your employer?
55. Have you ever achieved a positive outcome after your loyalty was tested?

Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion.

56. What achievements do you associate with your drive and passion?
57. What outcomes have resulted from demonstrating enthusiasm through words and actions?
58. What excites you most about your work or makes you the happiest? What do you get the

- greatest charge out of accomplishing?
59. Do you love what you do? Give an example of how that passion for your work has motivated you to go the extra mile.
 60. How have you shown that you continually want to improve in your job?
 61. How have you actually improved your performance?

Professionalism.

62. How have you handled situations in such a way that your professionalism made a difference in the outcome?

Self-Confidence. Look at it this way: if you don't believe in yourself, in your unique mix of skills, education, and abilities, why should a prospective employer? Be confident in yourself and what you can offer employers.

63. What have you accomplished as a result of your maturity and self-confidence?

Self-Motivation/Ability to Work With Little or No Supervision.

While teamwork is always mentioned as an important skill, so is the ability to work independently, with minimal supervision.

64. Describe a situation in which you showed you were a self-starter.
65. Recall a time in which you excelled without supervision – perhaps a situation in which supervision would normally have been expected.

Willingness to Learn.

66. How have you succeeded as a result of your willingness to learn a new skill or technique? (Note that accomplishments demonstrating this willingness can be especially helpful for mature workers.)

Accomplishments that exemplify experience



67. What are you most proud of in each job? Resume writer Julie Walraven has a name for these “most proud of” accomplishments: “Super Stories” that describe how you made a difference.
68. What role did you play in executing the organization’s mission, goals, and objectives?
69. How have you contributed to customer satisfaction? How have you excelled in serving customers? What positive feedback have you earned from customers or clients?
70. What have been your bottom-



- line contributions and the interim contributions that led up to them? Career coach and resume writer Beverly Harvey suggests this approach, in which you describe your contributions’

- impact on the organization in each of these areas:
- strategic
 - financial
 - market impact
 - shareholder/stakeholder value
71. Describe situations in which your ability to execute projects quickly has resulted in positive outcomes?
 72. How have you helped your organization to win bids?
 73. Specifically, how did you attain the successes that have made the greatest contributions to the organizations for which you've worked? What makes you successful?
 74. In what ways have you contributed to a positive corporate image?
 75. What successes have you achieved in helping organizations attain brand recognition?
 76. In what ways have you improved quality – of products, process, people, or other aspects of your organization?
 77. How have you demonstrated innovativeness? What innovations have you introduced?
 78. What have you done to improve sales effectiveness?
 79. What have you done to help an organization manage rapid growth?
 80. What have you increased?
 81. What have you improved?
 82. Identify something negative that was bypassed or avoided because of your efforts.

83. Identify something negative that you helped suppress or prevent.
84. What have you maintained in the face of adversity?
85. What have been your proudest accomplishments as a member of professional organizations/associations?



86. Analyze each project in which you've been involved according to the SMART framework. Used in project management and other fields, these components are also known as Key Performance Indicators:
 - **Specific** task, challenge, project, or problem.
 - **Measurable:** What metrics apply to your performance?
 - **Action:** What specific action did you take? Be clear about your role. (In some versions of this framework, **A** stands for "**Attainable**," as in: What steps did you take to attain your goal?)
 - **Result:** What outcome resulted from your action?
 - **Timeframe:** How long did it take for you to successfully complete the project?

- Recruiting expert Lou Adler suggests an additional element, **Environment**, proposing you ask yourself, “What was the environment like in terms of pace, resources, level of sophistication, the people involved, and your manager?”
87. What projects in which you’ve played a major role have finished on schedule – or even ahead of schedule?
 88. What projects in which you’ve played a major role have finished within budget or even under budget?
 89. What accomplishments can you report from your military background?

Accomplishments that enable the employer to envision your future ability to attain the same results you achieved for a past employer



90. How has the organization benefited from your performance?
91. How did you/will you leave this employer better off than before you worked there?
92. What critical strategy components did you identify to propel the organization to a better position?
93. How did you contribute to this employer’s profitability, such as through sales-increase

94. How did you contribute to the firm’s Return on Investment (ROI)?
95. How did you contribute to operational efficiency in each job, such as through cost-reduction percentages?
96. How did you help this employer or a part of the organization to save money, save time, or make work easier?
97. In what ways have you streamlined or automated processes/operations?
98. How did you contribute to or influence productivity, such as through successfully motivating your team?
99. What did you do to improve your organization’s competitive advantage?
100. What did you do to foster relationships inside and outside the organization? What resulted?
101. What was your role in bringing in new customers and satisfying the existing customer base?
102. What role did you play in business growth?
103. In what ways have you helped your organization handle market volatility?
104. What accomplishment best illustrates your ability to lead, facilitate, or handle change?
105. Did you initiate mergers, acquisitions, partnerships, or operating agreements?

106. How have you made your boss's job easier?
107. How have you contributed to your boss's goals?
108. In what ways have you helped the organization toward reaching its goals?
109. How have you served as a catalyst for positive change?
110. Have you helped your organization overcome negative publicity?
111. In what ways have you turned around obstacle-laden situations that could have resulted in lost profits?
112. Most significant comparable accomplishment to each performance objective in the targeted job. Examine job postings to see what employers expect as the performance standards/objectives of the prospective job and identify your accomplishments that exemplify your ability to meet/exceed those standards/objectives. Outline each of those accomplishments in detail as shown below. (Note: This prompt is paraphrased from a technique for interviewing candidates suggested to hiring decision-makers by recruiting expert Lou Adler.)
- A contextual and detailed account of the accomplishment.



- A description of the organization to which you contributed the accomplishment (including size, industry, location, product or service focus, etc.).
- Results metrics: dollars, hours, percentages, level of improvement, etc. (See [Chapter 5](#) about quantification.)
- Date(s) of accomplishment.
- Timeframe: Span of time over which you completed the accomplishment.
- How “mission-critical” was the accomplishment to the organization?
- Your position within the organization.
- Reason you were selected for the project.
- Top several challenges you encountered and how you handled them.
- Examples of how you took the initiative and demonstrated leadership.
- Significant decisions you made.
- Environment and available resources.
- What you did to expand or enhance resources.
- Available budget and your role in preparing and managing it.
- Technical skills you had to have to attain the desired results.

- Technical skills you learned and how quickly you learned them.
- Actual role you played in attaining results.
- Members of the team and their reporting relationships.
- Biggest mistakes you made.
- How you changed and evolved as a result of the project.
- What you would do differently if you had it to do it again.
- Components of the project you truly appreciated.
- Components of the project you did not find enjoyable.
- How the project compared to the plan.
- How you developed the plan.
- How you motivated and influenced others, with specific examples.
- How you handled conflict, with specific examples.
- Anything else you felt was important to the project's success.

Accomplishments that demonstrate subject-matter knowledge

SUBJECT-MATTER KNOWLEDGE

- 113. How have you used current information about your industry to increase performance in your role?
- 114. How you have applied knowledge from another job or other area of your life into your most recent position?
- 115. Identify a situation you would face in a targeted future job. Describe a situation from a past or current job and apply your knowledge to address that situation.
- 116. Describe a time you successfully used specific subject-matter knowledge to solve a problem you were facing.

Accomplishments that indicate that others recognize your value and contributions

RECOGNITION

- 117. What special things did you do to impress your boss so that you might be promoted?
- 118. And were you promoted? (Rapid and/or frequent promotions can be especially noteworthy.)

119. For what qualities and contributions have supervisors complimented you?
120. Check your annual performance reviews for each job. Identify glowing or complimentary quotes from your reviews. Did you consistently receive high ratings?
121. Have you received any complimentary memos or letters from employers or customers? Find quotes from these communications that support your accomplishments.
122. If someone asked your boss from each job to identify your most significant contribution in that job, what would your boss say?
123. How have you been recognized for your contributions?
127. What did you do to make each job your own? How did you take the initiative?
128. How did you go above and beyond what was asked of you in your job description?
129. To what extent did you take on additional roles or functions? Did you do the jobs of more than one person, perhaps in the absence of the incumbent? Did you see a functional gap and step in to fill it?
130. What did you do that was new to your job function to improve what was there before?
131. What do you do in general better than anyone else? Give examples.
132. What does the “best in your field” look like? Give examples of ways you’ve demonstrated you meet that standard.
133. For each job you’ve had, describe why you were the candidate hired. You can also do the same for each project role or assignment for which you’ve been selected and each promotion you’ve attained. Why you over everyone else?

Accomplishments that distinguish you and show uniqueness



“If you think someone else could just as easily be telling your story,” writes Peggy Klaus, “it’s time to dig deeper for the golden nuggets that will set you apart.”

124. In each job, what special things did you do to set yourself apart?
125. How did you do the job better than anyone else did or than anyone else could have done?
126. How have your unique abilities made the jobs of others easier?
134. How have you modified deliverables to be better meet the needs of their consumers?
135. What positive business results and profitability does your work produce?
136. To what extent have you ever changed your way of working to achieve a better business result?
137. How have you removed complexity from your work, made things simpler?

- 138. How have you responded to a changing market in a way that yielded positive results?
- 139. How have you responded to changes inside your own organization in a way that generated successful outcomes?
- 140. How have you helped customers respond to change?
- 141. How have you evolved in your job to address changing business needs, and what successes have resulted?
- 142. How have you helped your organization grow?
- 143. Describe a project or accomplishment that truly showcases your unique skill set.
- 144. What's the one work accomplishment you will always be remembered for?
- 145. What have you always been known for?
- 146. How have helped your organization or people within it succeed through sharing your knowledge?
- 147. How have you trained co-workers to be more effective or efficient?
- 148. How have you guided or mentored someone in your organization to step into a larger role?
- 149. How have you helped someone in your organization believe in himself or herself?

Proof of Performance: Tangible evidence of accomplishments



- 150. What have you developed, created, or built?
- 151. What publications have you produced that provide evidence of accomplishment?
- 152. With what Websites have you been associated – as a designer, developer, programmer, content provider, site manager, or other function? What was special about your role?
- 153. What software apps or programs have you produced or played a key role in producing?
- 154. What products have you developed or played a significant role in developing?
- 155. What new technologies have you introduced at your organization, and how have they impacted the operation?
- 156. What business strategies have you deployed of which you have tangible evidence?
- 157. What programs or policies have you initiated of which you have tangible evidence? What was the result?
- 158. What photographic evidence do you have of your contributions?

Accomplishments resulting in awards, certifications, and honors

AWARDS

- 159. What awards have you won for performance?
- 160. What kinds of awards or recognition has your industry given you?
- 161. What awards have you won for ideas, suggestions, or initiatives?
- 162. What other type of recognition have you attained?
- 163. What media coverage have you received?
- 164. What certifications or other evidence of training/education have you earned? How do they distinguish you?

Creative ways to mine for accomplishments

CREATIVE APPROACHES

- 165. Imagine that you are in an interview with a CEO who has a 10-minute window to see you. He/she asks you to “bottom-line your impact to your current organization in 30 seconds.” How would you reply?
- 166. Describe the result of something you did in each job as though it were a headline. Then back into the

accomplishment to describe why your action was needed and how you executed it.

- 167. What results, successes, and positive outcomes would not have come about in past organizations if you weren't there? What would not have happened had you not done your job well?
- 168. Imagine you had to write an accomplishment on a paper the size of a business card – and get an interview from it. What would you say?
- 169. Imagine you were writing a job posting/job description of your current job (or a previous job). What would a description look like of performing this job or function successfully and at its highest level? How would optimal performance or success in a this job or function typically be characterized, and how do you measure up?
- 170. Illustrate ways that your knowledge of industry trends and governing regulations has resulted in achievements.
- 171. What are you most known for? What is your style or technique for consistently driving results?
- 172. How many people would it take to do your job if you left? How much money have you saved your organization by doing work that should be done by more than one person?
- 173. Imagine you had been a consultant instead of an employee, and your employer had, instead, been your client. In trying to lure future clients to your consulting services, what accomplishments would

you cite? What problems would you say you had solved for your “client?”

Entrepreneurial accomplishments

ENTREPRENEURIAL

174. What successes have you had as an entrepreneur that translate to future work for an employer or future entrepreneurial ventures?
175. What accomplishments have you attained in attracting investors and raising capital for your business?
176. What success have you achieved in navigating the regulatory process? What resulted?
177. How has your business plan resulted in success for your venture?
178. What level of sales have you generated as an entrepreneur?
179. What accomplishments have you had in inventory control?
180. What positive outcomes have resulted from your interactions with suppliers?
181. How have you applied your subject-matter expertise to success in your entrepreneurial venture?
182. Why has your venture succeeded where others have failed?
183. What have you achieved as a result of attracting high-performing staff to your venture?

184. How have you succeeded through your willingness to take risks?
185. What accomplishments can you report regarding running your business in a competitive environment?
186. What successes have you had with your venture in the face of an ever-changing climate?
187. What have you achieved in terms of attracting customers to your venture?
188. What success have you had in converting customers to sales?
189. What achievements have you had in growing your venture?
190. What have you achieved in terms of offering a quality product/service in your venture?
191. What successes resulted after you made initial mistakes with your venture?
192. What has been your experience with building partnerships for your venture, and what positive outcomes resulted?
193. What are you most proud of as an entrepreneur?
194. If you sold your venture, what was the multiplier over the initial investment and/or key reasons a buyer was attracted to your business?

Life accomplishments

LIFE

195. What are some examples of ways you've refused to quit?

196. In what ways have you learned from your mistakes?
197. What are some examples of ways you've made a comeback?
198. In what ways have you shared credit for success?
199. What are some examples of ways you've taken criticism gracefully? What resulted?
200. In what ways have you made someone's day?
201. In what ways have you made a difference in the lives of others?
202. What are you most proud of as you reflect on the past year?
203. How did you turn surprises and disappointments into successes ("make lemonade out of lemons")?
204. What have you done that you consider to be especially interesting or unusual?
205. Tell about something you've done that was very difficult.
206. Craft a accomplishment of something you do unusually well.
207. What accomplishments have come out of your engaging hobby?
208. What have been your proudest accomplishments during volunteer work, community-service, civic organizations, or work with your religious organization?
209. What accomplishment exemplifies your best quality?
210. Describe the accomplishment of creating something, such as a novel, an ebook of poetry, song, or work of art.
211. Recall an accomplishment of overcoming a challenge in your life.

212. What accomplishments would not have been possible without the personality you possess?

Accomplishments specific to your field



Because two exceptional sets of prompts already exist for field-specific accomplishments, I would be foolish to reinvent the wheel. Instead, I happily refer you to these superb repositories:

- "Showcasing Your Achievements" from the Career Thought Leaders Library: <http://tinyurl.com/aol3msy>
- Chapter 6, "Accomplishments: The Linchpin of a Great Resume," of Susan Whitcomb's excellent book, *Resume Magic, 4th Ed.: Trade Secrets of a Professional Resume Writer*, Jist Works, 2010.

Accomplishments from school, unpaid, and entry-level work



Career-marketing professionals advise college students to conduct a thorough inventory and evaluation of academic accomplishments and work with campus career-development counselors or professional resume writers to translate academic achievement, internships, and club or volunteer activities into compelling language that effectively

frames skills and educational background and highlights achievement.

In author Rick Gillis's experience, he notes in his book, *Job!*, "young people always have more to offer than they think they do. Gillis reports that when he works with members of this group, he always helps them uncover up to 10 solid accomplishments.

And don't forget about class projects. For example, at the university where I previously taught, many major courses required completing a project, often with a real client. For example, in a marketing research class, students might work with a local business in uncovering a problem and suggesting solutions.



Beyond school projects, other kinds of unpaid work count, too, which is why the prompts in this section are helpful for folks with non-traditional backgrounds – people whose careers have consisted largely of volunteer work and those re-entering the workforce after a long absence. Experience is experience, and accomplishments are accomplishments; it matters little whether you were paid. "Employers are not so concerned about where experience or knowledge comes from," writes Allan Hay in his book

Memory Mining, "simply that you have it and can produce the results they need."

When describing these student and other unpaid experiences, remember the same rules that apply to describing your work experiences: be specific, always try to quantify your descriptions, and focus on outcomes and project objectives.

213. What technical accomplishments have you had? For example, did you write a software program, design a Web page?
214. What competitions did you excel in?
215. What superlatives can you list, such as the highest grade, the best test score, the strongest essay?
216. What creative accomplishments have you had? Were any of your poetry, plays, accomplishments, music, art published, performed, or exhibited?
217. What leadership positions have you held that demonstrate important skills that relate to the type of position you seek?
218. Did members of your group choose or elect you to a certain position based on special skills you possess? Did a supervisor or professor hand-pick you for additional responsibilities or special project(s)? Also list situations in which you chose to take on additional responsibilities.
219. What kinds of things have your friends and classmates always asked you for help and advice

- about? What are your areas of expertise?
220. What community-service projects did you undertake and what were the results of your efforts? Hint: For group efforts, phrase your accomplishments like this: "Played key role in team effort that raised funds for charity that broke a school record."
 221. How have you used organizational or managerial skills?
 222. What ideas have you come up with to improve the organizations with which you've been involved?
 223. List situations in which you've handled money or budgets. How have you raised, collected, or managed funds?
 224. Give one or more examples of ways you have exhibited interpersonal skills.
 225. List situations in which you have trained, taught, or oriented organization members.
 226. Have you spoken in public or written for an audience?
 227. Have you recruited new members to any organizations?
 228. In what situations have you employed problem-solving, conflict-resolution, or mediation skills?
 229. Did you work with the general public? List situations in which you were required to deal with the public. Describe any situations in which you responded to complaints or smoothed ruffled feathers.

230. How have you demonstrated teamwork (for example, as an athlete)?
231. How have you demonstrated individual drive and determination (for example, as an athlete)?
232. List situations in which you required to juggle many projects simultaneously under deadline pressure.
233. What has been your proudest accomplishment during your education?



**Sidebar by Rich Grant,
director of career services at
Thomas College:**

I work with college students, and most of them (with the exception of those who had internships) don't have work experience in their field of study. Nevertheless, I explain to them about the importance of selling their accomplishments. Even if they think they are merely folding clothes at a Target or Old Navy, they are in fact, merchandising the store to impact sales. On their resumes, they need to note what they achieved, not what they did.

The following is an excerpt of a case study about a student I worked with who had one line to describe his role as a supervisor in a Subway sandwich shop, focusing on "making customized sandwiches." Beyond the questions I

asked him, noted below, I ask students to think about the impact of the work they have done. What are the results of their efforts? Answer the question, “so what?”

“To determine what the student achieved as a supervisor, and what value he brought to the business, we asked questions such as:

- Tell me more about being a supervisor.
- What are you most proud of?
- What has the owner/manager complimented you on?
- What contributions did you make to sales, cost reduction, or customer satisfaction?

Upon reflecting, the student realized that he had made several suggestions to the owner about carrying broader assortments of accessory products, and placing products in certain locations to stimulate impulse purchases. The owner also always complimented him on his ability to sell additional items.

I find out if the student’s employer tracks performance and/or has performance goals to meet. An example in which this standard of performance has been important was a Dunkin’ Donuts counter person who waited on the drive-thru customers. The counter person has a performance standard of about two minutes from the time a customer pulls up to the window until the order has to be ready. Another example was cashier at a large supermarket chain. Some cashiers at grocery stores get measured on transaction time. So, rather than saying “ring up customers” on a resume, a student needs to tout the performance as measured by the employer.

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### ***One final set of prompts: Job-Interview Questions***

Most lists of frequently asked job-interview questions can also serve as prompts to brainstorm accomplishments. The trick is to always consider how you could include an accomplishment in your response to any question. See a list of job-interview questions in the [Appendix](#).

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## CHAPTER 5

### Quantifying accomplishments

Employers and others who evaluate individuals based on their accomplishments love to see numbers. This chapter explains how to quantify and monetize accomplishments wherever possible. It's a step toward enhancing and optimizing your AccomplishNuggets.

#### ***Why quantify?***

As many achievements as possible should be measurable, especially quantifiable. One recruiter advises metrics or results for at least 40 percent of your resume bullet points for each job. "Anytime you can quantify your accomplishments, you give them more credibility," said another. Don't despair, however, if you can't quantify as many accomplishments as you'd like. "Subjective results are well accepted, too," Allan Hay writes in his book *Memory Mining*, "Employers simply want to know if you are someone who will contribute to their organizational goals and objectives."

Most people don't quantify their accomplishments, though. Scot Herrick, of the blog Cube Rules, coaches clients to attach metrics to their achievements. "Asked to produce a single number that would show they increased productivity, I get crickets," he writes.

"When it comes to accomplishments, numbers talk," asserts Sharon Graham of Graham Management Group, a Canadian firm specializing in career transition strategy for six-figure professionals. "Recruiters who are scanning resumes typically notice and hone in on digits." Graham cites the "elimination factors" that provoke employers into rejecting

candidates. One such factor is lack of measurable accomplishments, as she affirmed when she conducted a research study to evaluate 1,000 randomly selected resumes. "There is much literature available to job-seekers," Graham says, "explaining how to quantify their accomplishments, yet most are still missing this point. In our sample, almost none of the resumes included adequate measurable achievements reflective of a six-figure professional."

Metrics are perhaps the most effective way to highlight successes and attract the attention of recruiters. "Metrics is the language of business," says executive branding expert David Topus in "Making Your Resume Recruiter Ready," an ExecuNet publication. "Anything that's measurable and has metrics associated with it is high impact."

If metrics is the language of business, dollars are the holy grail of business-metrics language.

"Show us the money," says one recruiter. Dr. John Sullivan adds that "characterizing the dollar impact of your accomplishments on the organization can be a key differentiator."



#### ***Developing metrics for accomplishments***

This list of metrics is not exhaustive but will give you a good idea of the kinds of numbers employers and other audiences seek:

- sales volume, number of items/ units sold (and ranking in comparison with peers and compared to previous years' performance, competitors, counterparts, forecasts/ projections, industry trends, percent of quota)
- dollars and percentages tied to other types of revenue-generation
- contracts/bids won
- increase in market share
- increase in profitability
- increase in shareholder value
- numbers of customers served
- numbers of customers retained
- numbers, percentages of internal performance benchmarks achieved
- number of direct reports, number of people managed
- number of people you've hired
- size of teams you've led
- amount of money you've saved



- monetary budgets/funds saved
- percentages by which you've improved efficiency
- numbers of anything you've done in great quantity, such as repairing many pieces of equipment
- process-improvement percentages

- cost-containment as compared to industry averages
- number of times selected as team or project lead
- timeframes of accomplishments, especially when you exceed deadlines or expectations
- how you rank in performance; for example, you are the No. 1 performer or in the top 10 percent
- number of awards
- number of publications
- number of successful grant applications

Be sure to provide context. Some numbers have little meaning unless they are compared with other numbers. Take this resume bullet point from a vice president of sales, for example:

Directed 12-person sales force to \$15 million in sales while simultaneously bolstering sales in own territory from zero to \$2.5 million.

The second half of it is excellent because it compares the zero sales initially to \$2.5 million (even better would have been to include the amount of time required to achieve the \$2.5 million in sales). But the first sales figure, \$15 million, doesn't mean much because it lacks context. Is \$15 million good? Compared to what? The job-seeker should have provided, for example, the sales figures from before he was VP of sales.

Another tip about numbers: Some accomplishments involve a range of numbers. Let's say over the span of time in which you worked in a given company, you managed between 15 and 75 employees. Or let's say you've managed budgets ranging from \$750,000 to \$5.2

million. Instead of giving the range, leave off the number at the low end and say:

- Supervised up to 75 employees.
- Managed budgets of up to \$5.2 million.

Those statements are completely honest, but you're placing in front of your audience the more impressive high number.

My personal preference is for a clean, uncluttered resume, so I prefer to spell out "percent," rather than use the "%" sign and abbreviate large numbers as, for example, \$5.2 million, instead of \$5,200,000. Rick Gillis, however, writes in his book, *Job!*, that symbols and zeroes jump out at employers.



### ***Measuring percentages of improvement***

You can use percentages as a metric to show how you improved virtually anything. "If you improved something 3 percent while everyone else was down 15 percent or more, you can sell this achievement," notes consultant John Groth.

How do you come up with these percentages? In many cases, you'll have to estimate, which is acceptable, says Sullivan, as long as you can explain your logic. Sullivan offers this example:

"Implemented changes to the \_\_\_\_ process that resulted in a 32 percent increase in output with no noticeable impact on quality."

### ***Framing accomplishments that are difficult to quantify***

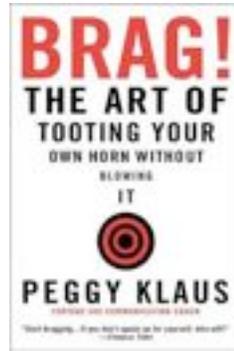
The lament of many of the clients of Darlene Zambruski encapsulates the issue of hard-to-quantify accomplishments: "I don't have any accomplishments, especially quantified accomplishments."

But as author and career-coach educator Susan Whitcomb points out, the work of most people has an impact on the bottom line; if it didn't, their job security would be in jeopardy. "Figure out a way to tie it to the bottom line," Whitcomb advises.

One way Zambruski connects her clients' accomplishments to the bottom line is to ask them: "If you were to quit today, how many staff would your company need to replace you?" Invariably, Zambruski reports, they answer "two." Zambruski's response: "Let's say you're paid \$60,000 annually. If you're doing the work of two people, each paid \$60,000, you're saving your company \$60,000 annually. That's an accomplishment."

Some people feel they must be in very high-level jobs to be able to quantify accomplishments. But as Gillis writes, an administrative assistant or person working in the skilled trades can focus on how he or she added value by working smarter, faster, and more efficiently. My partner Randall Hansen suggests deeply probing into every aspect of your job for aspects you can quantify. Asked by a security officer, for example, how to attach numbers to his accomplishments,

Hansen advised quantifying the number of hours, days, weeks, etc., without incidents; the number of hours of training and professional development; the number (and types) of security devices/technology mastered; number of security investigations successfully closed; and commendations (or other records of achievement) received.



### ***Avoiding over-quantification***

Despite employers' lust for accomplishments metrics, avoid communications so full of quantitative data that they are hard to read and understand. When I surveyed hiring decision-makers for a book I was writing about resumes, several cited overzealous quantification (especially in resumes, in which excessive use of numbers can hurt your document's readability) as a pet peeve. Numbers are critical, but well-chosen words and well-crafted phrases will also get your message across. Don't go overboard.

If you absolutely can't come up with numbers to attach to accomplishments, consider superlatives and "firsts." Use words such as "first," "only," "best," "most," "top," and "highest." Here are examples, taken from resumes:

Established for the first time Tokyo's brand positioning in Japan, followed by design and execution of thematic advertising strategy and calendar, thereby raising the bar for ad agency; implemented consumer communication, PR strategies, and trade operational programs for Japan.

Became consistently top revenue producer; maintained distribution in region within top 10 nationally and was named Finalist, American Women in Radio and Television Awards.

Led creation and development of first international sales and marketing materials for Europe.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Creating AccomplishNuggets: Articulating and communicating your accomplishments**

Once you've identified your raw achievements, what's the most effective way to express them? This chapter explores techniques and gives samples.

"You're naturally good at what you do," assures resume writer Laura Smith-Proulx, "but telling your accomplishment requires a higher level of analysis."

This ability to articulate your accomplishments is more important than you might think because expressing your achievements well is an accomplishment in itself. Take your resume, for example. As recruiting expert Dr. John Sullivan writes, "even though a particular job may not require much or any writing, the writing skills of the applicant will dramatically affect the content and the impact of their resume. Even if you were a top performer, you likely won't get full credit for it unless your writing skills are powerful."

That's a dramatic statement. It's shocking to think a strong candidate would be overlooked if he or she failed to describe his or her accomplishments effectively in writing. The scenario is a worthwhile argument for hiring a professional resume writer if you know that writing is not your strong point – or at least have your resume reviewed by someone with a command of language.

Once you have brainstormed and identified a significant inventory of raw accomplishments using the preceding

chapters, you'll want to refine and polish them by giving them an effective structure, ensuring you've given yourself sufficient credit, adding an element of vulnerability or success-out-of-failure as appropriate, adding detail, removing braggadocio, and relating your accomplishments to your future capabilities. This polishing will result in



AccomplishNuggets, shiny and valuable chunks of golden verbiage that you can tailor to many uses.

### ***Choosing storied frameworks and structures for communicating accomplishments***

When we describe accomplishments, we are essentially telling stories. They have a beginning, middle, and end. Sharon Graham's take on the beginning, middle, and end structure shows how it applies to accomplishment stories:

- *Beginning*: The challenge or event that started the story. Your role/how you got involved in the story. Surrounding details, such as tight deadlines, budgets. Outside perceptions of the extent of the challenge.
- *Middle*: Your role and key actions. Turning point.
- *End*: Results and impact. Effect on stakeholders. Metrics.

Thinking of accomplishments as stories helps to frame them. Communicating accomplishments as stories makes them more memorable, creates a connection and help you establish trust with your

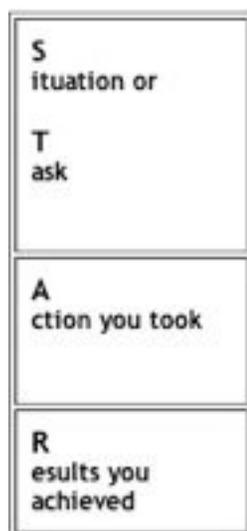
audience, distinguishes you, illustrates what you have to offer, and paints vivid pictures. In her book *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Horn Without Blowing It*, Peggy Klaus notes a real difference in audience response when she started selling herself “using [a] subtle and story-like approach.” Stories make your accomplishment message more authentic and illustrate the connections you seek to make between what you’ve achieved and what your audience needs.

In the job-search world, experts have developed a variety of formulas, abbreviated by acronyms, that embody structures for accomplishment stories. All are similar beginning-middle-end structures; some are embellished with additional elements. The top three on this list, CAR, PAR, and SAR, are the most commonly cited:

**CAR:** Challenge, Action, Result  
**PAR:** Problem, Action Result  
**SAR:** Situation, Action, Result

Example of CAR/  
 PAR/SAR  
 accomplishment:

**Challenge/Problem/Situation:** Company’s order-routing system resulted in unacceptable number of errors, costing repeat business.  
**Action:** Created new order-routing system to enable sales and customer service to understand required information and to reduce errors and cost.



**Result:** Reduced errors by 50 percent and increased customer retention. New system facilitates communication with the customer about choices of standard processing methods and provides a vehicle to communicate special customer needs.

**CCAR:** Context, Challenge, Action, Result

Example of CCAR accomplishment:

**Context:** \$1-billion company was failing.  
**Challenge:** Respond to financial crisis.  
**Action:** Planned and implemented policies, procedures, and operating performance standards for claims, reinsurance, and recovery functions. Deployed effective interventions, crisis-management strategies, and stabilization protocols.  
**Result:** Turned company around.

**PARLA:** Problem, Action, Result, Learning, Application

Example of PARLA accomplishment:

**Problem:** The norm for my work team was to communicate via email, but one member tended to misinterpret emails and take a lot of the team’s time trying to get clarity on issues.  
**Action:** Talked to the member face-to-face about the issue.  
**Result:** We came to a decision that the team would still conduct most of its communications via email, but whenever this team member did not understand something, instead of sending a confusing series of emails, she would either pick up the phone or walk to the other person’s office and resolve the miscommunication quickly and efficiently.

*Learning:* I learned that if a particular means of communication is causing problems, a different channel of communication should be employed to address the problem.

*Application:* I now evaluate the communication channels for each project and ensure they work for everyone.

**SCARQ:** Situation, Challenge, Action, Results-Quantified

Example of SCARQ accomplishment:

*Situation:* Company was losing money by processing claims in-house.

*Challenge:* Negotiate \$60 million claim-handling contract with vendor.

*Action:* Convinced vendor to take over handling of all existing and new claims, as well as all employees at their existing salaries, benefits, and service time.

*Results-Quantified:* Delivered unprecedented results that saved company more than \$40 million.

**SHARE:** Situation, Hindrance, Action, Results, Evaluation

Example of SHARE accomplishment:

*Situation:* Company culture was toxic, and morale was low, resulting in poor financial results and high turnover.

*Hindrance:* Management team had weak members.

*Action:* Conducted regular training sessions to obtain team-member feedback and improve skills; implemented morale-boosters, offsite manager meetings, contests, and consistent communication.

*Results:* Achieved phenomenal turnaround within six months.

*Evaluation:* Improved employee morale; reduced turnover; increased promotions; enhanced employee satisfaction; boosted

results, client satisfaction/client-turnover, and ability to increase pricing

**SIA:** Situation, Impact, Analysis

Example of SIA accomplishment:

*Situation:* Company had high turnover, often losing promising new employees before they could reach their potential.

*Impact:* Increased new-employee retention rate by 30 percent and improved morale by developing cross-training orientation programs that attracted high achieving employees.

*Analysis:* Having tackled the retention and morale issues, I could focus on optimizing benefits packages for employees.

**SMART:** Situation with Metrics (or Situation and More), Actions, Results, Tie-in

Example of SMART accomplishment:

*Situation with Metrics:* Company had revenues of \$500,000 but the potential to earn much more.

*Actions:* Spearheaded development of cutting-edge products.

*Results:* Escalated revenue to \$15M and boosted company's recognition as an industry leader

*Tie-in* (which SMART originator Susan Britton Whitcomb describes as a theme or pattern that can link to key components the employer seeks, as well as communicate enthusiasm or job knowledge): Set the pattern of creative



innovation and offering product-development solutions that have resulted in profitability and US Patents. Pursuit of continuous improvements yields high quality in all aspects of work.

**SOAR:** Situation, Obstacle, Action, Result

Example of SOAR accomplishment:

*Situation:* Two banks were merging.

*Obstacle:* Banks had vastly different cultures and management styles.

*Action:* Advised/trained expatriate management staff in EEO law, coaching and counseling, and performance management.

*Result:* Re-established balance in the workforce and addressed staff relations issues that arose post merger.

**STAR:** Situation, Task, Action, Result

Example of STAR accomplishment:

*Situation:* Hospital authority owed contractors hundreds of thousands in sales

taxes on hospital construction.

*Task:* Find a way to raise sufficient funds to pay taxes.

*Action:* Conducted extensive research of sales-tax laws and regulations; compiled brief supporting position that authority could avoid the taxes and presented case to state senator and Department of Revenue representatives; won the argument.

*Result:* Saved \$1 million in taxes and played role in revised statutes the next year to eliminate problem my research discovered in the law.

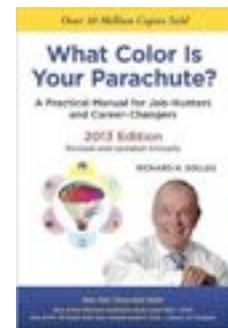
A few more formulas also offer similar beginning-middle-end structures, as well as extra nuances:

The Hero's Journey is a classic story structure featured in literature and popular culture from the Odysseus of ancient times to the modern Luke Skywalker. The structure, broken down extremely simplistically, is:

- *Departure:* The hero realizes his or her life (or situation) is about to change.
- *Initiation:* The hero faces obstacles in confronting the change experience.
- *Return:* The hero undergoes transformation and learning.

(The Internet is packed with information about the Hero's Journey; you can google it for more elaboration on the structure.)

In his classic and perennial bestseller, *What Color is Your Parachute*, Richard Bolles recommends writing about seven experiences. Here's a paraphrased version of his recommended structure:



- Goal you wanted to accomplish
- Obstacle(s)
- Action steps
- Outcome/Result
- Metrics of Outcome

Story practitioner Gerry Lantz recommends giving structural weight to accomplishment stories by emphasizing what was at stake if you had not accomplished what you did. As you are describing a problem you solved, tell

what was at stake – what would have happened if you hadn't solved the problem. Would the company have lost money? Would a customer be disappointed? Would a sale have been lost?

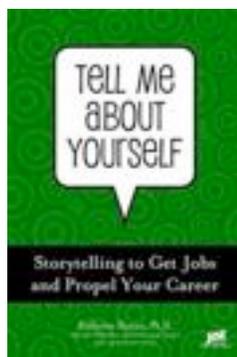
Finally, a structure for proposal-writing from Mary Morel, this structure is as follows:

- *Position:* In what position or role did you find yourself in a past or current job?
- *Problem:* What issue or problem did you encounter?
- *Possibilities:* What options did you have for solving the problems? What avenues did you consider?
- *Proposal:* Which option did you choose to solve the problem?
- *Product:* What was the outcome or result?

I've written an entire book on storytelling in job search and career that provides comprehensive elaboration on the story framework for accomplishments and more. You can read this book in several ways:

*Tell Me About Yourself: Storytelling to Get Jobs and Propel Your Career*

- Paperback via Amazon: <http://tinyurl.com/arn22tg>
- Kindle via Amazon: <http://tinyurl.com/aajp8hk>
- Earlier edition on the Web (free): <http://tinyurl.com/5ff8t2>
- Earlier edition serialized on a blog (free): <http://tinyurl.com/alvy9gl>



I also offer a companion workbook, *Tell Me More About Yourself: A Workbook to Develop Better Job-Search Communication through Storytelling*.

•Ebook: <http://>

[tinyurl.com/ayqaxge](http://tinyurl.com/ayqaxge)

- Kindle version: <http://tinyurl.com/c9wza7l>

### ***Enhancing accomplishment stories by providing just enough detail***

The amount of detail you provide about your accomplishments will depend on the context and communication vehicle you're using. Typically, job-seekers, for example, provide the greatest amount of detail in interview responses, less detail in cover letters, and the least amount of detail in resumes.

Still, resumes shouldn't be overlooked as purveyors of accomplishments detail. "A resume should be a statement of the skills a job-seeker would bring to a new job, as well as an outline of accomplishments in past positions," says human resources manager John Logan. Because the resume is often the only data an employer receives from a candidate, the bullet points must provide context for past work; providing details like number of people supervised, size of project budget, estimated cost savings in dollars (or other appropriate specifics) helps an employer place each candidate in the context of the organization. "I find that most resumes do not provide enough details for me to

understand the scope of the candidate's experience, but are merely a restatement of a job description, which is not helpful to me as an employer," Logan says.

Placing yourself in the context of each organization you've working for, as Logan says, is the key to providing sufficient detail about your accomplishments in each workplace (or other setting in which you've delivered results and successes). You must communicate enough detail and context for the audience to understand how you boosted the organization.

Context and detail also are important when describing project accomplishments, notes a press release from executive-search firm Harris Allied: "When discussing your involvement in a project include the original problem, solution and results." The firm suggests offering specifics about your project involvements and your role as a team member, giving a brief description of the project, including name/location/scale, and the phases in which you contributed and deliverables you produced or to which you contributed. "Remember to put your accomplishments in a broader context and speak to how they apply to the organization or department as a whole," the firm advises. For detailed accomplishments in the job search and workplace, see [this list](#) from the prompts in Chapter 4.

Details make stories more memorable, especially sensory details. Business-storytelling guru and author Annette Simmons recommends bringing your stories to life through sensory details, enabling whenever possible your

audience to see, feel, hear, smell, and taste elements of your story.

### ***Use keywords to describe your accomplishments***

If you're using accomplishment stories for purposes other than job-hunting, keywords aren't too important. For job search, however, they are critical. Keywords are exceedingly important for today's resumes because they are what employers' Applicant Tracking Systems look for when resumes are placed in keyword-searchable databases after you submit them electronically. Keywords should be industry-specific and job-specific and taken right from the job posting. When you're including accomplishments in job-search communications, such as resumes, and cover letter, try to incorporate keywords relating to the targeted job whenever possible.

### ***Giving yourself sufficient credit for team accomplishments***

When I conducted mock interviews with my college students, I frequently found them describing accomplishments using the pronoun "we." The business school in which I taught required many group projects, which logically ended up being touted as accomplishments in interviews. All well and good, but in job-search and workplace situations, you need to describe your role on the team and give yourself enough credit. Credit the team, too, of course, but express your



team-project in “I” terms, rather than “we” terms. Example:

I played a key role on a team conducting marketing research for a local business. I had the strongest analytical abilities on the team, so I led team members in analyzing the data. Through my analytical skills, we discovered that the business had been targeting the wrong market all along; we were able to show the owner the market segment that the business should be targeting.

Because of the limited space available on resumes, explaining your role in a team project can be difficult. “Even though the individual may have been part of the team,” writes Sullivan, “it’s impossible using the resume alone to accurately ascertain the actual role that this individual played in the task or accomplishment.” Thus, you may want to use your cover letter to elucidate your role in the team’s success, or even include in your resume submission a supplemental accomplishments sheet (see [this section](#) of Chapter 7) that draws out how you contributed to team wins.

Even if your role in a team success was small, give yourself credit for the parts of a project where you made the greatest contribution. As Allan Hay writes in *Memory Mining*, “Remember that your results are what is important here, especially if you were pleased that you completed your part of the project well.”

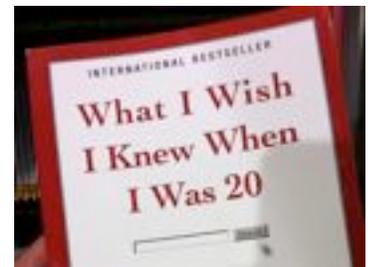
### ***Describing accomplishments that include obstacles, vulnerability, or spring from negative situations or failure***

Several experts who write about accomplishments have noticed that their accomplishments connect better when they include vulnerability, the overcoming of obstacles, or rising from failure. “Whether you are being vulnerable with a conference room full of colleagues or a prospective client,” writes speaker, coach, and trainer Alexia Vernon, “the more you can employ your storytelling skills to show how you have turned your garbage into gems, the more you will engender true, sustainable credibility, and buy-in.” Adds Peggy Klaus: “People like to learn from others how they have overcome obstacles. It’s one of the best bragging tools in your arsenal.”

Want a good way to identify your vulnerabilities to help you construct accomplishments of conquering obstacles or emerging from failure? Write a “failure resume.”

Tina Seelig, a Stanford PhD in neuroscience and the director of the Stanford Technology Ventures Program, suggests the failure

resume in her book, *What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20*: “A failure resume is a quick way to demonstrate that failure is an important part of our learning process, especially when you’re stretching your abilities, doing things the first time, or taking risks. We hire people who have experience not just because of their successes but also because of their



failures.” Accomplishment statements and accomplishments that lack vulnerability and a bit of humility can lack credibility. It’s hard to swallow a collection of completely glowing statements that portray the person as nothing short of perfect.

This human tendency to want to see ourselves and others triumph over obstacles, vulnerabilities, and foibles manifests itself in a type of job interviewing called “motivation-based interviewing,” in which high performers are seen as achieving better results despite obstacles, while low performers think the obstacles are responsible for their not achieving the high performance. Thus, a new variation on the types of standard acronyms/formulas for accomplishment stories we saw earlier in this chapter is Situation → Action → Positive Overcoming of Obstacles → Result, or SAPOOOR. Because studies have shown that consumers, for example, are far more likely to choose an underdog brand, we can extend that finding to the job search and speculate that employers are more likely to choose the underdog candidate – the one who has overcome obstacles in a positive way.

Even as you expose vulnerabilities, you want your accomplishments to end on a positive note. In a resume, for example, resume writer Barb Safani noted in a blog post, job-seekers don’t need to gloss over negative situations; instead they “can



show their ability to influence positive outcomes, even when the deck is stacked against them and business conditions are exceptionally challenging.” Safani suggests accomplishments of selling in a challenging market, providing leadership in environments plagued with infighting, salvaging a damaged client relationship, preparing for a failed company’s closing, and managing poor performers.

### ***Substantiating subjective claims about yourself with accomplishments-driven facts and metrics***

Particularly in job-search communications, especially resumes, we all have a tendency to make subjective claims about ourselves. I have long advocated for a section atop the resume – called “Professional Profile” or “Qualifications Summary” – that lists top selling points. Today, I advise concrete qualifications in this space – qualifications that are substantiated with facts or accomplishment bullet points. However, I once used unsubstantiated claims, such as “exceptionally organized manager,” “proactive team builder,” and “strong communicator.” Numerous job-seekers – and even resume writers – still use unsubstantiated value judgments like those. Many hiring decision-makers have told me that they pay no attention to claims like these unless they are backed up with real accomplishments, ideally with metrics. Example:

Highly analytical decision-maker who has demonstrated ability to turn around troubled companies five times in 10 years.

“If [candidates] say ‘oversaw development of strategic solutions,’” says Meg Steele, director of recruitment and employment mobility at Swedish Medical Center in the Seattle area, “they should have some more specific examples of said ‘strategic solutions’ and what the impact was to the business [and] the employees.”

### ***Don’t leave out the results***

I’ve mentioned results numerous times up to this point, but it’s time to underscore how important they are to the accomplishments



equation. As we saw earlier in this chapter, results are part of the top two tiers of [accomplishments building blocks](#). In a 2010 report, “The Current State of Performance Management and Career Development,” from Hewitt Associates, most respondents said their organization measures both “what” someone accomplishes and “how” they do it; however, they tend to weigh results much more heavily, with 62 percent of respondents stating that executives are either measured solely on results (30 percent) or more on results than competencies/behaviors (32 percent). As blogger Scot Herrick writes, companies care only about your work that helps the company achieve results.

### ***Relating past accomplishments to future opportunities***

Providing context about your past accomplishments is important, but when you seek to take the next step, you also need to show how those past

accomplishments relate to the next organization you wish to join – how they, as Deborah Walker writes, “connect to corporate bottom-line objectives.”

In your resume, for example, it’s about showing “a clear connection between your past achievements and your future direction,” writes Safani. “If your resume merely represents your chronology it may be difficult for a hiring manager to understand how your past experience relates to their current position. This is especially true if you are trying to transition to a new job function or industry. Your resume needs to be idiot proof. Be sure to connect the dots between past performance and future value to the organization (I recommend a profile at the top of the resume to accomplish this). No one will connect the dots for you. Take the time to create a clear roadmap from past accomplishments to future value,” Safani says.

Similarly, in a report by ExecuNet, “Overcoming Today’s Toughest Resume Challenges,” author Marji McClure suggests that preparing a strong resume requires candidates to take a closer look at the past (and what they have accomplished in their career for previous employers) as well as the future (how they can bring the knowledge gained from those accomplishments and achieve similar successes for a new employer.)

One way to do that, says resume writer Jessica Hernandez, is to incorporate language into your accomplishments statements that shows your commitment to the previous organization as the driving force behind your accomplishments; for example, stating that you “organized and conducted

organizational-development research to further the company's mission of enhancing its work environment and employee morale." Hernandez explains that "by showing that you were invested in your previous company's mission, the prospective employer can assume you'll feel the same way about it."

### ***Rehearsing communicating about accomplishments***

Ideally at this point, you've identified raw accomplishments using the prompts in [Chapter 4](#), and are refining them using the guidelines in this chapter. While many of your uses for your inventory of accomplishments will be in writing, many others – such as networking and job interviewing – will require oral delivery. You'll want to rehearse speaking them as part of your refinement process to see how they sound.

But rehearsal offers other benefits. Even mental rehearsal helps you to learn what your accomplishments are and boosts your confidence. "Rehearse your accomplishments," advises career trainer Bob McIntosh. "Recite them to friends, family, networking partners, to anyone who will listen. Relating your accomplishments to others will give you a sense of pride and increase your self-esteem. This is a key component in understanding who you are."

Experts frequently cite rehearsal's positive effect on a job interviewee's self-assurance. In an academic article, Victoria Seitz and William Cohen write that "through mental rehearsal, job-seekers can practice interviews with a successful outcome until the unconscious mind believes it has already happened."

Mental rehearsal, for many years espoused by sports psychologists and practiced by athletes to relieve anxiety, contains the important element of visualizing success. Peak-performance expert Peter Murphy, who notes that rehearsal's success is based on neuro-linguistic programming, recommends that you mentally rehearse both from the interviewer's perspective and your own. "In your imagination," Murphy writes, "visualize yourself at the interview comfortable and at ease meeting people, feeling relaxed and confident." Positive self-talk will help ward off any self-doubt that may creep in during the rehearsal.

One technique is to rehearse accomplishments aloud by yourself, enabling you to hear how they sound and adjust your verbiage as needed. Recording these rehearsals and then listening to the recordings from the audience's perspective can help you refine and polish substandard accomplishment stories. You can also try rehearsing in front of a mirror to check out your nonverbal mannerisms.

Written rehearsal is another effective technique. Composing and refining your accomplishment stories will help cement them in your mind and help you refine them.

Rehearsal as a technique for successful job-interview preparation is the entire premise behind *The Interview Rehearsal Book* by Deb Gottesman and Buzz Mauro. They advise practice in telling accomplishment stories but caution against memorization, which will



result in the candidate's sounding "stilted and mechanical" in interviews. "Instead, ad-lib from your memory of what you've written," the authors recommend. Research on memory has stressed the role of rehearsal and repetition.

### ***Titling your accomplishments***

Once you have a refined inventory of accomplishments, given each one a title. Doing so will help you better remember them when called upon, say in an interview.

### ***Checklist for refining your AccomplishNuggets***

- Is the accomplishment recent? For job-seeking, ideally accomplishments should focus on the last two years and/or your two most recent jobs. Not every accomplishment needs to be recent; sometimes accomplishments about early interest in your field can be effective. But the majority of accomplishments should be fairly recent.
- Is the theme of the accomplishment clear? Can the audience easily identify the accomplishment, skill, trait, passion, value, etc., that the accomplishment intends to convey?
- Is the accomplishment compelling? Will it draw in the audience? Is it interesting? Will the audience want to learn how it turns out? Suspense isn't required, but it doesn't hurt.
- Does the accomplishment have an overall positive tone and end on a positive note? It's vital and

expected to have many accomplishments that start with a problem or negative situation. Still, the overall



tone of the accomplishment should remain positive. You should not cast blame or negativity on past employers or team members. Most importantly, your accomplishment should end on a positive note. A few accomplishments in your inventory may simply not have a positive outcome, but end on an optimistic note by talking about lessons learned and how you will improve in the future.

- Have you given yourself enough credit? Especially when talking about team projects, be sure you make your role clear and give yourself sufficient credit. Praise the team, but emphasize your own contribution to the team's success over the team's success itself.
- Have you asked yourself, "So what?" Put yourself in the mindset of an employer asking "so what?" about each of your accomplishments. Does the accomplishment address something that's important to an employer? If your accomplishment can't answer the "so what" question for a specific employer or type of employer, you may want to consider a different one.
- Have you included a variety of accomplishments? Your inventory should feature accomplishments that cover a variety of skills, values, traits, interests, strengths. While most should come from recent jobs, it's fine to include a

few from school, hobbies, sports, organizations, and your personal life. If you're a job-seeker, try to find outside-of-work accomplishments that pertain to skills needed on the job.

- Have you added metrics where appropriate?

Now that you've polished your raw accomplishments into dazzling AccomplishNuggets, you're ready to apply them.

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## CHAPTER 7

### Tailoring your accomplishments

Each communication channel requires a nuanced approach to broadcasting accomplishments. This chapter explains those nuances and provides samples.

When determining how you should tailor messages about your accomplishments in various situations, always analyze your audience – employers, clients, admissions officers, investors, or whomever. Ensure that you understand their needs and have chosen to communicate accomplishments that connect with those needs.

#### ***Tailoring accomplishments to networking***

Although I have written articles about elevator speeches and elevator “stories,” an obvious use for communicating accomplishments while networking, I have never been completely comfortable with the concept of this type of short pitch in networking situations. (Elevator speeches are so named because they are designed to be spoken in the time it would take an elevator to travel up or down a building – typically around 30 seconds.) Some experts, in fact, have declared the elevator speech dead. These days I prefer what Stephanie West Allen calls the “Wow! How?” statement, which she defines as “a short statement of what good you do for a person or organization.” It’s a low-key way to grab attention and be memorable in networking situations by dropping a teaser line that intrigues the listener into asking you to tell your accomplishment.

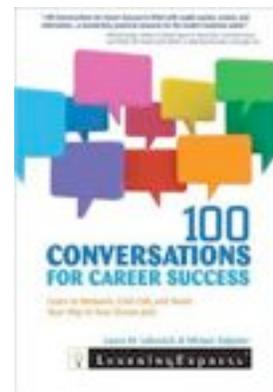
One of Allen’s examples: “I show organizations how to raise the productivity of their people by incorporating a very positive mood, atmosphere and spirit.” (See more examples here: <http://tinyurl.com/3j2sm54>).

“After you make your statement,” Stephanie writes, “... they will say, ‘Wow! How?’” That’s when you can tell a accomplishment about how you do what you do.

Overall, keep your audience in mind when sharing accomplishments with network contacts. Think in terms of mutual benefit. How might your accomplishments offer value to the other person? Author Peggy Klaus recommends that accomplishment communications delivered in networking situations be meaningful and valuable to the other person, spoken in the context of your conversation with that person, and imbued with style and substance.

Audience is a key feature of the “pitch” approach that authors Miriam Salpeter and Laura M. Labovich recommend in their excellent book, *100 Conversations for Career Success*. They offer sample networking pitches of varying lengths that spell out the target audience, the “problem I solve,” and impact/results. Sample of a short pitch with impact/results:

As a project manager and senior adviser in the environmental energy



industry [target audience], I've had a significant impact on energy and environmental policies and can bridge the gap between the technical community and the management interests [problem I solve]. At Company X, I developed and led a green-I.T. project, which resulted in a 30% reduction in electricity costs — translating to a savings of \$65,000 per year [my impact/results]

Convey any accomplishment delivered orally – not just during networking, but also in job interviews, performance evaluations, client pitches – with excitement and enthusiasm, but also humility.

### ***Tailoring accomplishments to social media***

I've listed social media right after networking because social media is a form of networking (and is, in fact, sometimes called “social networking”) and because your approach to touting accomplishments in social media should be similar to what it is in networking situations.

Posting about accomplishments has become a standard practice in the major social-media venues – Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Some people communicate their successes in these venues gracefully, while others are quite annoying. I have a Facebook friend who clogged my feed with constant posts about all the wonderful things he did and all the recognition he was receiving for them. As you can guess, his posts fell into the annoying category. He's still my Facebook friend, but I changed my settings to “hide” all his posts from my feed. Now I

don't have see his boastful announcements anymore.

Why should anyone consider touting



accomplishments in social media – and just how do you do it gracefully? Publicizing your successes can help you establish your reputation as an expert in your field. After all, if you're having achievements and results, you must know your stuff, right? The practice also helps you manage your career, notes Charlotte Weeks, CEO, Weeks Career Services, adding, “you'll remain top of mind, which will increase your chances of opportunities coming to you.” Social-media strategist Phillipa Kiripatea agrees: “If you've won an award related to your business or are in the media or have been interviewed by a reputable person, or have been asked to speak at a conference, let your community know!”

Humility, moderation, and letting others speak for you are the watchwords experts advise. As career trainer Bob McIntosh writes: “I just won best employee of the month. Woot, woot, woot!” is different from writing: ‘It was an honor to be acknowledged for my work in retail management.’ The second points out how the person's superiors acknowledge her accomplishment, not how she touted her award in a bragging way. The differences are small, but the second person is more appreciative of her achievement.”

Kiripatea's sample post reflects similar humility: “Wow, I can't believe it! I've just been nominated for a business award! Fingers crossed with me that I win.”

Unwritten norms guide the broadcasting of accomplishments in the social sphere. “With Twitter you can post numerous times, Facebook a few, and Linked In the least,” says wellness coach and health/fitness author Kevin M. Norris, noting that “Linked In does have a section contained in your profile to list accomplishments.” Flouting these norms, Norris notes, “may leave a negative impression or dismiss your accomplishment.”

Praise from others for your accomplishments often has much greater impact than what we say about ourselves, as personal leadership and life strategist Paul A. Coulter, observes. “Include the praise you received from others about big changes that made a difference in their lives as a result of their work with you,” Coulter says. “People are less interested in your accomplishments and more interested in stories or successes others have had that relate to outcomes similar to what they are seeking.”

Noting that “recommendations from others’ mouths are a great way to talk about yourself,” Coulter used me as the centerpiece of a sample post:

Katharine’s blogs have changed my whole perspective. Her wit and ability to touch my heart shocked me into an awareness of a me I didn't know existed. She’s become my new role model and my catalyst to a new life! Katharine the Great is great! Check her out at ....

LinkedIn offers additional opportunities for others to sing your praises – in its Recommendations feature and the newer Endorsements.

Consider adding a dimension to your social-media post or tweet that makes it just as much about your reader as about you, such as Norris’s suggestion to “include a relevant link or blog post with your accomplishment that can give the reader some value.” Communications consultant Michelle Auerbach adds, “give them help, hints, downloads, a laugh, access to part of your book, whatever it is you have to offer. No one really wants to hear you toot your own horn if all that is in it for them is a sore ear.”

Here are additional resources on touting accomplishments in social media:

- “Bragging on Social Media: Four Ways to Avoid Oversharing,” by Forbes Contributor Jessica Kleiman, <http://tinyurl.com/cs55sup>
- “How To Become Authoritative By Sharing What You Are Accomplishing,” by Clark T. Bell on ClutchFuse, <http://tinyurl.com/cjbo96s>

### ***Tailoring accomplishments to your resume***

Your resume must – with a future-oriented flavor – emphasize results, outcomes, and career-defining performance indicators. Using numbers, context, and meaningful metrics (see [Chapter 5](#)), the resume must paint a picture of you in action – meeting needs/challenges, solving problems, impacting the company’s big picture, growing the business, enhancing revenue, and driving profits. If you can achieve the important



step of identifying your accomplishments, the rest will fall into place.

“The most important thing any job-seeker should do before attempting to write a resume,” advises my partner Randall Hansen, “is to first sit down and make a list of your skills and accomplishments from all your previous experiences (work, volunteer, school, etc.) because you will take from this list those critical skills and accomplishments that highlight your fit for the next job you are seeking.”

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS VS. DUTIES/ RESPONSIBILITIES

This advice from resume writer JoAnn Nix is what got me started on my crusade to encourage job-seekers to emphasize accomplishments on resumes:

“A resume should be accomplishment-oriented, not responsibility-driven. The biggest mistake that I see in the resumes people send me is that they list responsibilities. That doesn’t grab anybody’s attention. People aren’t interested in your responsibilities. They already know the general responsibilities of a position, so they don’t want to know what you do from day to day. They want to know that you’re a mover and a shaker: How you contribute to the organization, how you show initiative, that you can be a key player. That’s what they want to see. “For example, if you’re a sales and marketing manager, you could say: ‘Joined organization to spearhead



sales and marketing initiative for newly developed territory. Led the aggressive turnaround of a poorly performing district and propelled sales from one to six million in 14 months.’ That’s the type of accomplishment they want to see.”

I want to hammer home this point – and have enlisted the opinions of several career experts and hiring decision-makers to help me do so – because I have for so long seen resumes whose authors did not understand that resumes cannot be what recruiting expert Dr. John Sullivan calls “merely summaries of their previous job responsibilities.” Sullivan and I aren’t the only ones. “The vast majority of resumes I see read like a series of job descriptions,” writes Alison Green in “21 Things Hiring Managers Wish You Knew.” Sullivan notes that “this format will cause them to omit information on key assessment factors like skills, tools, and accomplishments.” They will also omit the answer to the question Green poses: What did you accomplish in this job that someone else wouldn’t have?”

Entrepreneur and speaker Tory Johnson concurs: “The biggest mistake is a resume that rehashes responsibilities instead of celebrating accomplishments. I don’t just want to know what you did, but, more importantly, how well you did it. The reader should understand in a heartbeat where you excel and what you do best.”

Why do job-seekers make this mistake? Whether out of sheer laziness or the kind of paralysis that sets in when an individual is faced with writing a resume, they take the job description they were given when they were first hired and copy

and paste it into their resume. This information on your resume does absolutely nothing to distinguish you. “The reality is that people in similar jobs perform similar job tasks,” notes resume writer Barbara Safani. “An accountant in company A may not have job tasks that are that different from the accountant in company B,” Safani notes, “yet, the value that each brings to their organization may be totally unique. Minimize content about job tasks and focus on more compelling accomplishments.”

Most employers do not need to know about your past duties and responsibilities. “When an organization has a vacancy,” notes resume writer Sharon Graham, “the hiring decision maker is well aware of the responsibilities of the position. To feature the career successes of the candidate, resumes need to focus on achievements instead of job duties,” Graham writes in “Research Study: How Does Your Resume Compare?”

If it’s not already obvious, understand that you must avoid expressions like “Responsibilities included,” “Duties included,” and “Responsible for” on your resume. Describing your job responsibilities is tantamount to reciting a job description, which in turn suggests to the prospective employer that you did the bare minimum in the job. As Patrick Erwin writes in a comment to a blog post, “When someone very dryly lists responsibilities and duties, it comes off as ‘I had a gun pointed to my head making me do this every day.’ It’s much better to put it in the context of, “I *made* this happen.” How did you take initiative in the job? What did you do on the job that was different or better than anyone else holding that job? It’s not always easy to

describe the value you added for your former employers, but doing so is a lot more effective than listing responsibilities and duties. (My aim in this book is to make the task a little easier.)

Duties and responsibilities are also dull and lifeless. “When I see ‘duties included’ or ‘responsible for’ on a resume, I know that what follows is going to be boring and obvious,” writes author Donald Asher. “Focus on accomplishments, not duties,” Asher echoes. “What did you do that was important? What did you accomplish or contribute? What did you learn on the job or in special training? What did you create that was above and beyond the scope of the job that was handed to you. That’s what sells.”

OK, so I’ve driven home the point that you need to emphasize accomplishments on your resume and not duties and



responsibilities. As we saw in [Chapter 6](#), however, it’s not enough to simply list accomplishments on your resume; you must demonstrate that you’ve researched that organization and can tie your accomplishments to the employer’s needs – showing the future employer what you *can* do rather than simply what you did. “A good resume will show what you know, what you did, and how those things translate into value to the organization,” says David Topus. “You have to show the outcome, how you made a difference.”

How do you show employers what you can do? “It’s what we in the field call prioritizing statements, or targeting your resume to each company to which you

apply,” writes Bob McIntosh in his article, “Write a resume recruiters and employers will want to read; not one they dread.” In other words, illustrate how your qualifications and accomplishments match the employers’ requirements in order of importance.”

What are some techniques to ensure you are prioritizing accomplishments on your resume in a way that tailors the document to each specific employer and that employer’s needs? One way is through scrutinizing the job posting to which you’re responding. In “How to Decode a Job Posting,” Jerome Young of AttractJobsNow.com advises focusing on the responsibilities section of a job posting: “The responsibilities section,” he writes, “describes what will be expected of the employee in the position. You’ll often find that there are five to 10 bullet points in this section, but in our research with recruiters and hiring managers we’ve found that the first three responsibilities are the most important. Job postings are usually based on a primary business need, to which additional responsibilities are added to create a full-time position. Your resume should focus on your experience, results and accomplishments in the tasks outlined in the first three bullets in the responsibilities section. Also you’ll find keywords in those first three bullets that recruiters will use in searching for qualified candidates.” If you’re working with a recruiter, ask him or her to help you identify the accomplishments most relevant to the needs of his or her client company.

If you haven’t already guessed, you probably can’t have just one resume anymore. “If you have multiple potential

targets for your job search,” advises resume writer Karen Siwak, “you may need to create completely different resumes, highlighting the accomplishments that are most relevant for each target.” For each resume, you may want to re-prioritize the bullet points you present under your jobs, giving greater emphasis to an accomplishment that will be meaningful to the employer you’re targeting. You’ve undoubtedly held jobs that encompassed a broad scope, many accountabilities, and numerous achievements. Fine-tune these to a razor-sharp list of those that are most relevant to the job you seek next. Eliminate any accomplishment that fails to support what you seek to do next.

As I noted at the top of this chapter, comprehensive research on targeted employers will aid you in this tailoring quest.

“Before you sit down to write, get really clear on who your target audience is and what their challenges, goals, and pain points are,” Siwak advises. “Try to understand their buying motivators, the criteria that they will use to find the right candidate. Clearly define your value proposition, and back it up by evidence from your training and career accomplishments.”

#### AN ACCOMPLISHMENTS SECTION VS. ACCOMPLISHMENTS THROUGHOUT THE RESUME

Two opposing schools of thought prevail about how accomplishments should be organized on a resume:



1. Don't isolate accomplishments in a section by themselves. Everything on your resume should be accomplishments-driven, because isolating accomplishments suggests that the other things you did in your jobs were *not* accomplishments.

**OR**

2. Include an isolated list of accomplishments, preferably at the top of the resume, so it quickly catches the reader's eye.

You can find convincing arguments for both positions:

Curtis Pollen, senior director of talent recruitment for the American Heart Association, Wallingford, CT, rails when the "content layout doesn't flow smoothly, for example, [the candidate] will list all accomplishments up front then just provide jobs and dates down below. I like to see what accomplishments were achieved in a particular job to ensure there is a match for the position I am recruiting for."

"I'm on the side of including your accomplishments within each job," says Indianapolis-based corporate recruiter Todd Rogers. You are conveying the idea that everywhere you go, you do things that are beyond what was expected of you – a pattern of surplus. The implication drawn is, wow, if I hire this person and she continues as she has, my department/company will be the recipient of the same results. I'll take two of them, please."

"I believe bullet points in the beginning of the resume sometimes throw the [reader], because I wonder where the person accomplished the bullet items," notes Eric Bleiweis, CPC, director of

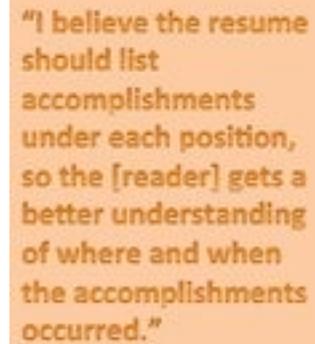
recruitment and employee engagement at Liberty Lutheran. "I believe the resume should list accomplishments under each position, so the [reader] gets a better understanding of where and when the accomplishments occurred."

On the other hand, in a CareerBuilder study (<http://tinyurl.com/8ptayzq>), 51 percent of surveyed hiring managers, when asked what catches their eye the most on a resume, said: Bulleted list of accomplishments.

"I prefer an isolated list personally," says Kellie Shumaker, MBA, PHR, owner/consultant at Alternative HR, LLC, "because I go through so many resumes that I prefer them to summarize their accomplishments, skills, etc., to try to keep [the resume] to one page." Resume writer Julie Walraven isolates accomplishments lists at the top of her clients' resumes. "You don't have to put every accomplishment you have in the front section," she says, "and you do need to tie it to the company you worked at to give it value and perspective, but this [list] will give you an edge over the candidate who has buried all the accomplishments deep in the resume."

How do you know which path to choose?

- You can experiment with both techniques and see which one gets better results.
- You can include both techniques on your resume – isolated accomplishments list at the top,



"I believe the resume should list accomplishments under each position, so the [reader] gets a better understanding of where and when the accomplishments occurred."

but also accomplishments-rich bullet points throughout. The risk is redundancy.

- You can attempt to ask your targeted hiring decision-makers which approach they prefer.
- You can consult a professional resume writer.
- You can create one or more resume addenda to supplement your resume. See next section.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS-RICH RESUME ADDENDA

Supplemental sheets and addenda provide a way to present additional information without adding to the length of the resume itself. They can also address the issue of whether to isolate accomplishments on your resume or spread them throughout the resume. If you use one or more accomplishments-rich addenda, you can isolate the accomplishments on that supplementary document while also integrating them throughout your resume. An addendum simply calls extra attention to your achievements and expands on them (you don't want them to read exactly the same way on the resume and the addendum).

You can choose to have an addendum each category of accomplishments. "A suite of addenda," says CEO Coach Deborah Wile Dib, president of Executive Power Brand, can be "a strategic way to mention presentations, awards, published works, extensive education, and expanded success studies." Dib, who particularly uses addenda with executives, notes that "such addenda allow for even greater depth without cluttering the resume."

Creating various supplements and addenda enables you to choose which pieces to send along with the resume. You might instead choose not to send any addenda but to bring them to the interview. See some sample addenda here: <http://tinyurl.com/6pssqnz>.

#### TIPS FOR PRESENTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS ON YOUR RESUME

- **Tell accomplishments stories "backwards" in resumes.** As we saw in [Chapter 6](#), the story structure most commonly suggested for job-interview responses: Situation → Action → Result, sometimes expressed as Challenge → Action → Result or Problem → Action → Result or a similar structure. Since a hiring decision-maker reads your resume quickly (between 2.5 and 20 seconds on average), you need to tell the accomplishment story backwards. Grab the reader's attention by giving away the ending first. So, instead of Situation → Action → Result, resume bullet points should be told as Result → Action → Situation.

Result → Action → Problem

- **Keep resume accomplishment stories brief.** How long should accomplishments be on a resume? One expert recommends about two sentences.
- **Be authentic and truthful.** Be sure you are totally truthful about the accomplishments you list on your resume. Have you really

accomplished all the things you say you did on your resume? Remember that a resume is a statement of facts. While you can put a spin on your accomplishments, the bottom line is that they all must be truthful statements. By the way, young people are more likely to stretch the truth about accomplishments, reports Anne Fischer on CNNMoney.com.



**•Pack your resume with accomplishments.**

How many accomplishments should you include on your resume. As we saw in the previous section, many experts argue

for a resume that is *entirely* accomplishments-driven. Sullivan, for example, asserts that all your accomplishments should be included, writing: “Everyone wants employees who produce results, so you need to find a way to list every significant result, output, or accomplishment. Your resume should include dozens of performance-related references. (Example: Achieved 100% of \_\_\_\_ rollout project milestones while being first to implement \_\_\_\_ within the division.)”

- **Consider depicting accomplishments using a chart or graph on your resume**, suggests Career Directors International, for such accomplishments as showing progress in fiscal responsibility,

beating colleagues in goals, meeting/exceeding quotas, or simply showing the volume of sales achieved each year. See a sample resume with a chart at <http://tinyurl.com/c59f25d>. Of course, charts are best used in the paper, “print” version of your resume that you use for networking, take to interviews, or submit via postal mail to employers. Employers’ Applicant Tracking software may have difficulties with charts in resumes that are submitted electronically.

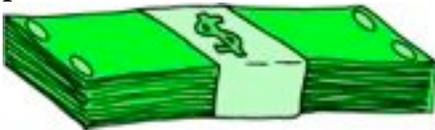
- **You may want to hire a professional resume writer.** “Resume writing is less about the actual writing and more about the strategy than many people realize,” writes Safani. “A resume writer can look at your background objectively ... and create a strategy that emphasizes your overarching accomplishments and doesn’t dwell on your more difficult to explain roles and transitions.”

**SAMPLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS-RICH RESUME BULLET POINTS**

Note that most of these contain metrics.

- Saved company \$1.5 million by motivating team to beat software-conversion deadline by two weeks.
- Doubled revenue to \$3.9M, resulting in region’s consistently representing up to 40 percent of distribution revenue.
- Increased revenues in voluntary, group dental product 124 percent, doubling membership in 18 months.

- Selected by Vice President to turn around subsidiary that lost \$11.3 million in 2011 and delivered \$2.4 million profit within 12 months for Florida's largest optometric franchise with \$4.5 billion in annual revenues.
- Doubled cable distribution to 90 percent, establishing region's No. 1 news channel.
- Boosted membership in group, self-insured product 126 percent by dramatically improving TPA operational efficiency and maintaining low-cost producer position.
- Grew hotel client base by 50 percent and achieved maximum distribution by licensing UBTI to other markets such as schools, hospitals, newspapers, ships, and North Sea oil rigs.
- Developed strategy that returned product line to profitability: loss ratios to 65 percent.
- Led five directors and 17 professional staff in three-year, \$32-million project designed to overhaul existing product portfolio.



- Won Profitability Achievement Award in 2009 and 2010, achieving 76.3 percent and 78.8 percent loss ratios respectively.
- Improved cash flow from a negative \$13 million to positive cash flow by restructuring company.
- Boosted sales from \$450,000 to \$2.6 million.

- Grew organization to be largest cellular operating company within a year of going live. [superlative]
- Exceeded plans for growth, achieving revenue of \$100 million within two years while maintaining high profitability levels.
- Directed 12-person sales force in \$15-million Industrial Sales organization while simultaneously bolstering sales in own territory from zero to \$2.5 million.
- Reduced time spent on quality assurance and decreased product defects by enhancing development procedures for firmware and software development.
- Improved company's competitive market position by reducing product costs, accelerating delivery of new features, and increasing overall product quality.
- Accelerated time-to-market for embedded software by 25 percent through use of appropriate software quality tools, improved debugging methods, and timely personnel training.
- Spearheaded 35 percent cost reduction by leading hardware/software redesign of access control system, resulting in improved performance, increased reliability, and additional features.
- Led global team in developing hardware and software platform utilized enterprise-wide.
- Increased sales revenue with product that simplifies retrofit of competitive facility equipment and that was awarded a US Patent.
- Dramatically improved product margins and quality levels by

implementing new Design-for-Manufacturing programs.

- Escalated annual revenue from \$500K to \$15M and boosted company's recognition as an industry leader by developing cutting-edge products.
- Led development of process-control instrument that was completed 20 percent under budget and generated sales at 10 times higher than projected.
- Played key role on team that successfully achieved ISO 9001 certification.
- Awarded U.S. patent for developing solution to common industry problem related to calibration; solution resulted in lower maintenance cost for customers.
- Promoted regularly throughout tenure at company.
- Generated 139 percent incremental video sales and 130 percent incremental income in Japan in 2011, as well as 296 percent incremental sales and 207 percent incremental income in 2006, by introducing catalog re-pricing program.
- Executed turnaround via non-cash acquisition of local equity, converting to wholly foreign owned; prepared thorough acquisition management analysis; neutralized and improved hostile shareholder relationships.
- Launched the most effective integrated marketing and brand-building programs ever in South Africa's jewelry industry, resulting in nation's position as world's No. 2 natural resources market; increased annual revenue to record-high US\$3 billion+ (224

tons) against high international gold price of US\$390+/oz.

- Realized annualized savings of \$2.5 million per project by implementing manufacturing improvements.
- Achieved 125 percent annual increase in business with targeted accounts by formulating and implementing key marketing and sales-management programs.
- Introduced flexible time schedule that reduced labor costs by 27 percent.
- Reduced lead time 50 percent and increased sales volume 500 percent by leading team efforts in new-product design, quality, and process design.
- Reduced lead time on quotes from average of 3-5 days to 1.5 days by implementing system to track quote-lead times, which previously resulted in loss of business;
- Increased orders by interacting with suppliers to create extended pricing and reduce dependence on quote-lead times.
- Won manufacturer certification for new process by reverse-engineering the procedure.
- Saved \$50K+ yearly by incorporating additional functions with no staffing increase.
- Led team to increase recycling rates of up to 49 percent monthly; achieved 100 percent compliance during eight vigorous inspections.
- Created new method of transistor fabrication that will soon be produced at multiple semiconductor manufacturers.
- Led base to achieve No. 1 ranking out of 12 bases for Base Appearance/Commander-in-Chiefs (CEO equivalent) excellence

award, No. 1 Environmental Award out of 10 installations, and No. 1 of nine Administrative and Personnel units in command. [superlative]

- Achieved 20 percent reduction in development time and 12 percent reduction in development cost by directing development and implementation of operations improvements and change-management strategy for R&D division of national manufacturer.
- Attained fast-track promotion through series of increasingly responsible positions.

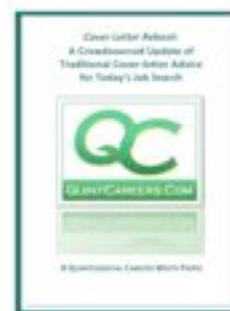
### ***Tailoring accomplishments to your cover letters***

Cover letters afford job-seekers greater opportunities than do resumes to describe accomplishments in detail and with more context. Cover letters offer job-seekers relatively wide latitude to tell stories about accomplishments and successes because letters are quite compatible with the narrative form. In a cover letter, you can engage the employer, make an emotional connection, show results, and become instantly memorable by including at least one paragraph in the form of a powerful accomplishment.

Hiring decision-makers vary in the importance they place on cover letters. Not all employers read cover letters (about a third don't), but those who read, do truly read the letter, unlike the resume, which they almost always skim. Cover letters, effectively crafted, frequently distinguish the candidate. Of the employers who favored cover letters in the white paper I wrote, *Cover Letter Reboot: A Crowdsourced Update of*

*Traditional Cover-letter Advice for Today's Job Search* (<http://tinyurl.com/bxg894t>), many

wanted to see accomplishments included, particularly accomplishments targeted specifically to the hiring organization's needs. Fred R. Cooper, managing partner, Compass HR Consulting, LLC, for example, wants to see "what have you accomplished that is relevant to my needs and my company. Here's what others said:



"I want to see the 3-4 juicy accomplishments from a candidate's career (that match my advertised need). These highlights must excite me to such a level that this candidate becomes a can't-miss prospect. If I am not swept away by the cover letter, then reading the resume is often anticlimactic and doomed for failure."  
– Ron Kubitz, recruiting manager, Brayman Construction Corp., Saxonburg, PA

"I like a bullet list of key accomplishments that can be backed up with quantitative data – real numbers – that prove to me you have a 'proven track record.' ... I also look for how well the candidate understands what I need in the way of a solutions-provider and problem-solver."  
– J.T. Kirk, J.T. Kirk Industries, author of *Confessions of a Hiring Manager Rev. 2.0: Getting to and Staying at the Top of the Hiring*

*Manager's Short List in a Confused Economy (2011)*

Let's look at some ways paragraphs about accomplishments can fit into a typical cover-letter structure.

**1**

The **first paragraph** should spark the employer's interest, provide information about the benefits the employer will receive from you, and help you stand out from all the other job-seekers who want the job. Focus on your Unique Selling Proposition (USP) – the one thing that makes you different from all the other job-seekers – and identifying benefits you can offer the employer.

*Accomplishments-driven first paragraphs. Note that in both the following examples, the job-seeker provides a summary of ongoing accomplishments, laying the groundwork for specifics later on:*

I have increased the size and sales levels of my client base in every position I have held, which in turn has increased the revenues and profits of my employers. I want to bring this same success to the account position you have posted on your Website.

As HR director for the Kearney Public School District, I restored the administration's faith in contracting with temporary agencies and workers, contributed my professionalism during a staffing crisis, and provided valuable insight to help the district recruit and retain productive, happy employees. I am convinced I can bring the same leadership to your school district.

**2**

The **second paragraph** should provide more detail about your professional and/or academic qualifications. Expand on specific items from your resume that are relevant to the qualifications sought in the job you seek. Or, if responding to a job posting or job ad, tailor this paragraph to the qualifications and employer needs described in the posting.

These qualifications might include skills, values, or experience.

*Accomplishments-driven second paragraph that spotlights a skill (strategic ability):*

As director of the Tokyo Tourism Board, I have demonstrated my strategic abilities by developing programs that resulted in an 18 percent increase in traffic to Tokyo in 2007, traffic growth of more than 10 percent in 2006, total spending and per-capita spending growth of 15 percent and 5 percent respectively, as well as 5 percent growth in length-of-stay to 3.66 nights.

*Accomplishments-driven second paragraph that spotlights a value (motivation):*

My high degree of motivation has been recognized by my previous employers who have quickly promoted me to positions of greater responsibility. I was promoted from assistant editor to editor of *Alexandria Monthly* after only five months.

*Accomplishments-driven second paragraph that spotlights experience (in marketing):*

My marketing experience is extensive and diverse – from opening up new markets to tapping into my vast pool of contacts in both business and government. During my marketing career with Pepsico, I influenced the objectives and direction of franchised bottler management, engendering significant credibility, mutual trust, and respect, and facilitating solid growth when the rest of the country was experiencing decline during the toughest year.

3

The **third paragraph** should relate your accomplishments to the company, giving details why you should be considered for the position. Expand on your qualifications while showing knowledge of the company.

*Accomplishments-driven third paragraph that connects accomplishments to the employer's requirements:*

I have built on my distinctive background in information technology leadership by developing exceptional expertise in managing large-scale technology projects, consistently delivering results within time and budget constraints, and developing teams to produce innovative solutions in bureaucratic environments. For example, I successfully executed CIO operations of a 2,000-person, \$600 million Superfund Toxic-Dump Cleanup Project. The parallels between your requirements and my ongoing contributions for municipalities in Maryland are remarkable.

*Accomplishments-driven third paragraph that connects accomplishments with knowledge of the employer:*

I'm no stranger to John Hancock, having conducted a cultural profile on financial services companies nationwide, thus providing consumer bank leaders with feedback and data to help them to clarify the direction for strategic planning. This work was so successful that our consulting practice, Colorado River Consulting, was entrusted to participate in a worldwide change effort.

*Accomplishments-driven third paragraph that connects accomplishments with a specific employer need:*

You seek someone who can bring greater systems stability to your operation. One of my most rewarding accomplishments was stabilizing a Fortune 500 company's infrastructure by examining areas where the outages were occurring. I generated buy-in to implement a preventive-maintenance schedule that proactively rebooted systems during scheduled downtimes. I then oversaw database cleanup during scheduled outages to reduce unplanned outages. My plan reduced the number of high severity incidents from multiple instances a week to less than one per quarter.

4

The **fourth paragraph** of your cover letter requests action – a job interview or meeting. It's unusual, though not unheard of, to include accomplishments in this paragraph:

Because my solid record of 26 patents and 60 publications provides strong evidence that I am a productive scientist, I know I can produce results for your organization. That's why I'd like to request that we meet at your earliest convenience.

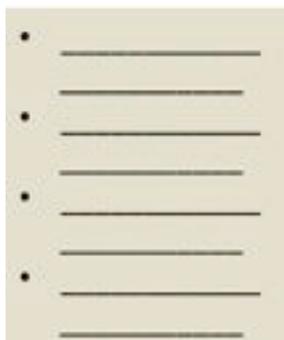
#### TIPS FOR PRESENTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN YOUR COVER LETTER

**Consider bullets**, writes Deborah Brown-Volkman, president of Surpass Your Dreams, Inc. a career, life, and mentor coaching company. "Bullets work well in

making your accomplishments easy to read." Brown-Volkman suggests leading into this bulleted accomplishments list with a phrase along these lines: "Here are relevant examples of what I have done that match with what you are looking for..." Caution: When you bullet accomplishments in your cover letter, you may come perilously close to rehashing your resume. Rephrase them and provide additional details to avoid redundancy

**Frame your accomplishments with the journalism questions** – who, what, when, where, why and how, advise the folks at OptimalResume.com – and do it succinctly.

**Use a two-column format.** A particularly effective way to showcase accomplishments is to show how they qualify you to meet an employer's requirements using a two-column format (also known as a "T-formation" letter) in



which you quote in the left-hand column specific qualifications that come right from the employer's job posting and in the right-hand column, your attributes that meet those qualifications. The two-column format is extremely effective when you possess all the qualifications for a job, but it can even sell you when you lack one or more qualifications. The format so clearly demonstrates that you are qualified in so many areas that the employer may be willing to overlook the areas in which your exact qualifications are deficient.

One of my former students describes her success in using the two-column format: "Several months ago, you referred me to your Website where there was a sample of a cover letter using a 'you require/I offer' table format. Believe it or not, I sent in my resume along with a cover letter in this format to a job that was posted on Monster.com, and I actually got an interview!! The position is with [name of company], and I can't even imagine how many applicants they had. When I went in for the interview, the person that I met with complimented me on the cover letter and actually said that that's what got me in the door ahead of so many others! I used one of my own letters as a sample of an accomplishments-based two-column letter: <http://tinyurl.com/brswxvs>.

**Consider opening your cover letter with an accomplishment.** As we saw in the preceding section describing the parts of a cover letter, opening your letter with an accomplishment is a terrific attention-getter. Typically, an opener contains a summary of accomplishments, which may be detailed further in the body of the letter. A couple more samples of openers:

I have increased the size and sales levels of my client base in every position I have held, which in turn has increased the revenues and profits of my employers. I want to bring this same success to the account position you have posted on your Website.

Here's one from resume writer Ross Macpherson:

Over the past 12 years, I've won 38 national sales performance awards including Salesperson of the Year (6x) and President's Circle (15x).

**Try a cover letter that opens with an accomplishment summary, supported by bullets describing specific accomplishments.** This variation on the accomplishments opener immediately leads into specifics in the form of bullet points, as in this sample:

My solid sales background, experience in Department of Defense and other federal sales, as well as my success with management and client service, make me an ideal candidate for the VP of sales position that you are currently advertising. Throughout my extensive career, I have proven my motivation, sales expertise, management, and operational skills. For example, during my time as Director, Army Major Programs, and Director, DoD Sales, at FuturaFind, I have:

- Increased unit sales from \$4 million annually to more than \$30 million yearly.
- Boosted backlog from \$3 million in 2008 to \$40+ million in 2012.
- Overseen achievement of more than 50 percent of total

company revenue out of three company business units.

- Led growth of the Army team from \$50K in backlog to \$31+ million in backlog in three years, and recently closed a \$15 million contract negotiation that accounted for 45 percent of total company orders in 2012.

**Consider the “Get attention → Stimulate desire → Reinforce with reasons” format.**



Storytelling guru Steve Denning suggests a formula that can be applied to cover letters.

**Get attention** by describing a problem the

prospective employer has or a need the organization desires to fill. It must be a problem or need the employer has acknowledged – say, in a job posting or in a networking conversation.

**Stimulate desire** by telling how you can solve the problem or meet the need for the employer.

**Reinforce with reasons** by describing an accomplishment in which you solved a similar problem or met a similar need for a past employer. This technique works because employers know that past

behavior is the best predictor of future performance.

The format can use accomplishments for each of these three elements; in this sample, accomplishments are featured in the “desire” and “reasons” portions”

<http://www.quintcareers.com/GetAttentionCoverLetter.pdf>.

### ***Tailoring accomplishments to career portfolios/Brag Books***

A career portfolio is a worthwhile tool to create for yourself and bring to interviews because it enables you to show tangible proof of your accomplishments through samples of your work. Typical items that you can include in a career portfolio are reports; white papers; studies; brochures; projects; presentations; published papers; conference proceedings; certificates of awards and honors; testimonials from customers, clients, colleagues, and past employers; lists of conferences, seminars, and workshops you’ve participated in and/or attended; a listing of professional-development activities, such as professional association memberships and conferences attended; and a description of community-service activities, volunteering, or pro bono work you have completed, especially as it relates to your career.

When the interviewer asks a question that calls for a response that truly demonstrates a specific skill, piece of knowledge, or accomplishment, consider presenting evidence in your portfolio. For example, the interviewer might ask you to describe the most complex project you ever oversaw. You can say, “I’d be glad to describe my most complex project. In fact, I have the project-management matrix in my portfolio. Let me walk you

through that and show you photos of the key deliverables.” For a question like “Do you have any experience with forecasting strategic modeling?”, you could say, “Yes, I do. Let me show you the modeling spreadsheet in my portfolio.”

As we saw in [Chapter 3](#), a Brag Book is virtually the same as a career portfolio. The term is commonly used in pharmaceutical sales, and the artifacts in the Brag Book tend to be sales oriented.

### ***Tailoring accomplishments to interviews***



Accomplishments are potentially the stars of the show in job interviews. Most interview questions can be answered with an accomplishments story, and employers will appreciate it if you tell these stories copiously because they provide solid examples of the qualifications hiring managers seek – whether skills, experience, values, subject-matter expertise, industry knowledge, or other criteria. Employers “want to hear stories that point to a specific and relative outcome or accomplishment, experience, or even a failure they can measure against their perceived needs,” writes Allan Hay in *Memory Mining*.

More than in resumes and cover letters, you can elaborate on your accomplishments in an interview and provide greater detail. Just as in resumes and cover letters, always endeavor to

communicate your accomplishments in a way that helps the prospective employer envision you performing the targeted job. Research the key performance indicators the employer seeks in the new hire, and describe accomplishments that align with those criteria (especially important if you seek to move into a new field). See more in [this section](#).

Let's look at the common types of interview questions and examine whether an accomplishment could be included in a response to each type:

### **Traditional interview questions:**

Essentially, traditional interview questions are those that don't fit into the other categories described. They are also the kinds of frequently asked questions you've probably been asked in interviews and that you can find lists of all over the Internet – questions like: “Tell me about yourself.” “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” “Why should we hire you?”

Your response to most traditional interview questions is to use a phrase such as “Let me give you an example...” as part of your response. Let's see how this approach works in practice with some questions in this category:

*Question:* Tell me about yourself.

*Accomplishments-driven response:*

I'm a problem-solver. I can walk into situations, review symptoms, talk with people, analyze data, and work my way down to the fundamental problem. Once I've uncovered the problem, I then quickly move forward to devising a solution. For example, I was hired as marketing director for an under-achieving consumer Web start-up. The founders were great tech guys

– and the Website had all the bells and whistles, certainly the top in its class.



But sales were extremely disappointing, and they hired me to turn things around. So, I did what I do best. I spent a few weeks talking with key personnel, studied traffic and purchase patterns, and produced a quick-and-dirty live survey with consumers while they were on the site. I had my hunches going in after my initial review of the site, and the efforts I completed in those first few weeks confirmed them – while the site was fresh and exciting and generated good traffic, customers were let down once it got to the purchase decision. There was no method for seeking help from customer service, very little product information, and many customers left the site before completing their purchases. I implemented some initial tweaks to the site that immediately raised customer conversion rates; we then conducted a more detailed analysis of our competitors and a thorough study of our customers and visitors. The final implementation of changes resulted in a fairly dramatic turnaround in sales. When I arrived, the conversion rate was under 1 percent; after our full-scale final implementation, our conversion rate had increased 20-fold to slightly more than 20 percent – and the numbers continue to improve.

*Question:* What are your strengths?

*Accomplishments-driven response:*

One of my greatest strengths is that I am an excellent organizer. For example, my service organization undertook a last-minute project to raise funds to help 16 children at The Children's Home Society – to help give these underprivileged kids who came from broken homes a good holiday season. We had just a week to pull it off. I took the initiative to lead this challenge and orchestrated the event. We raised more than \$1,500 in that short period. I get goose bumps talking about it because it is one of the things of which I am most proud – I really feel like I had a positive impact on a few lives, and that is what I live for.

*Question:* What are your weaknesses?

*Accomplishments-driven response that emphasizes learning from a negative situation:*

I've always had a knack – an instinct – for seeing the big picture. I can review an analysis of a situation and within a short period, develop a strategy that will result in positive return for the company.

What's been harder for me, though, is that I was raised in a family with poor people skills, and for many years when I first started in this business, this inability to talk to colleagues hurt my career. Luckily, when I was working for GE, I found a mentor who showed me the error of my ways and helped me get the training I needed. He flat-out told me that I would never advance beyond middle management



unless I learned how to communicate with people. It was an eye-opening experience, and while I still believe my greatest strength is my knack for strategic problem-solving, I can honestly say that I am now quite good at communicating that message in a way that motivates my employees and helps move the company forward at an even more successful rate.

*Question:* Why should we hire you?

*Accomplishments-driven response:*

Anyone can say they do a better job than others – and at this level, I certainly hope there is at least some truth in that belief. But rather than simply saying, yes, I can transform the marketing functions of this company better than anyone else can, let me give you an example of why I am confident I can do a better job than any other candidate.

As the marketing director for Hansen Beverage Company, I built on the founding family's early – but regional – successes with high-quality all-natural beverages and leveraged the marketplace by introducing new products and expanding distribution nationally. Within just a few years, I transformed this regional and rather small company into the leader in the natural alternative soda and energy-drink markets. I accomplished this transformation – supported by an amazing team – by understanding our core consumer base. I carefully analyzed changing consumer preferences and identified strategic opportunities. We also outwitted our competition while spending much less in marketing and advertising costs. For example, our Monster Energy drink is one of the most popular

products in its category, yet we do very little advertising for the brand – relying more on a carefully crafted mix of powerful word-of-mouth and strategic sponsorship agreements. We also encourage our customers to comment about the brand and offer suggestions – and from these conversations, we have added several flavors that quickly became top sellers.

I bring to the table experience and expertise in all aspects of marketing, from branding and advertising, to customer relationship management, to pricing and packaging. My strengths lie in understanding a brand’s core consumers and strengthening existing brands while developing new brands that exploit an opportunity in the marketplace. I thrive in a competitive environment where my marketing initiatives take share away from other brands – all while focusing on existing and emerging marketing strategies that are both efficient and cost-effective.

*Question:* YES or NO Questions, such as “Are you a team player?”, “Are you goal-oriented?”, “Do you handle conflict well?”, or “Do you handle pressure well?”

*Accomplishments-driven response to “Are you goal-oriented?”:*

I sure am. Let me give you an example. When I was hired as vice president for training for a very large accounting firm, top management told me the company was experiencing a



systemic problem with decision-making. Decisions were being made based on “the way we’ve always done it” rather than strategic, big-picture approaches that looked at the long view. I made it my goal to – within a year – change the way decisions were made and save the company a bundle of money wasted through ineffective decision-making. I sought facilitator training for me and my sharpest deputy. We then initiated a series of workshops for managers in which we stressed teamwork, creative problem-solving, and planning. We taught managers to look for and analyze the root causes of problems, as well as how to anticipate the issues that might crop up after implementing new decisions. I set up a program to recognize and reward instances of the new decision-making process that yielded bottom-line results. I also developed an offsite retreat for the senior leadership team to apply the new techniques to work through decision-making simulations based on real situations in the company. At the end of the year, I had exceeded my goal. The new decision-making process was much clearer and more strategic. I calculated that the process saved the firm \$65 million that first year and would save hundreds of millions over the next decade.

**Behavioral interview questions:** The interviewee is asked about past behavior in various situations, based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior on the job. Behavioral questions are tailor-made for accomplishments responses. Be aware, however, that these questions often have a negative flavor to them, which is why

it's wise to brainstorm accomplishment stories that started negatively but ended positively. The interviewer is looking for ways you surmounted obstacles, overcame challenges, learned from your mistakes, and solved problems. Behavioral questions usually begin with a phrase such as "Tell me about a time when ..." or "Describe a situation when ..." or "Give an example of a time when ..." Since a behavioral question is already phrased in such a way as to invite you give an example, you have no need to introduce your response with "Let me give you an example ..." Here are a few accomplishments-driven responses to behavioral questions (again, keep in mind that virtually all responses to behavioral questions will be – or should be – accomplishments-driven):

#### *Examples:*

*Question:* Tell me about a time when you creatively solved a problem.

*Accomplishments-driven response:* When I took over as CEO of the Snicky Snax Company, growth had come to a virtual halt, and performance was stagnating. The snack-food products had once been the leaders in the market. But when I arrived, the snacks were thought of as being targeted at grade-school kids, while competitors were seen as hipper and more desirable to preteens and teens with discretionary money to spend. Distribution channels were very narrow and limited. The staff was conservative and set in its ways. The few people who injected creativity into marketing the products were scorned, especially by the former CEO.

When I came in, I immediately developed an action plan that

introduced the idea of change and a new spirit of creativity – gradually so the conservative staff could get used to the new ways. I gathered a task force to conduct a competitive analysis to see where Snicky Snax was vulnerable. I held a retreat where teams could brainstorm creative ideas. To honor the roots of the company that the staff so respected and clung to, I used the Appreciative Inquiry technique, which asks employees to look at what's working in the organization and ask how we can do more of it. I created an atmosphere in which creativity was encouraged and rewarded. I brought back to the company one of the innovative folks who had quit in



frustration. I communicated a vision of a growing company that energized and empowered its employees. In the Appreciative Inquiry exercise, we noted that teens and pre-teens had fond, nostalgic feelings about our market leader, Snicky Chips, but tended to abandon them because they felt they were "kids' stuff." So we hit on the idea of extending the brand to a hipper, teen-targeted line with more sophisticated packaging and bolder flavors. I was proud to be the one who came up with the tagline: "Snicky Chips: All Grown Up." We repositioned the brand and opened up the distribution channels to target teens and preteens. The new line was a runaway smash hit. Perhaps even

more importantly, creativity began to flourish at Snicky Snax.

*Question:* Tell me how you have applied knowledge from another job or other area of your life into your most recent position.

*Accomplishments-driven response:* This might sound kind of funny, but it's a true story and one that I actually discuss with new hires – to show them that not everything they need to know about their work comes from the classroom, textbooks, or even past business experience. I am an avid gardener, and have always had a garden wherever I lived. About midway in my career, however, I took a position with Time-Warner in New York. I lived in the city, and thought that might be the end of my gardening until I found there was a community garden a few blocks from my co-op. To my dismay, the garden was in complete shambles. The story goes that the garden was one person's dream, but when he passed away, no one stepped up to keep it going. That's where I entered the picture – a young hotshot manager who thought he could march in there and take charge of the garden. What I learned in those couple of summers was that there was much more to leadership and teamwork than simply having a good plan. You need people to buy into a plan – most often long before the plan is even fully developed. You need to understand people's motives and goals, and most importantly, you need to understand their personalities – understand what makes them tick and how you can use that information to form a cohesive group focused on a common goal. It was a truly

enlightening experience for me, and one I still use to this day in working with colleagues and in leading and managing my staff. Oh, and it did take a few summers, but before I left for my next position, the garden had a vibrant group of gardeners and a small volunteer board that ensured its continued success long after I left.

**Situational interview questions:** A situational interview is similar to a behavioral interview, except while behavioral questions focus on a past experience, situational questions focus on a hypothetical situation. For example, in a behavioral interview, the interviewer might start a question with, "Tell me about a time you had to deal with..." In a situational interview, the interviewer asks, "How would you handle..." The best way to respond to a situational question is to treat it like a behavioral question. The most credible response to how you *would* handle a situation is to describe how you *did* handle the same situation in the past. Your introduction to your accomplishment would go something like this: "I can tell you precisely how I would handle that situation because I've faced that exact situation in a past job. [Describe accomplishment that matches the situation.] Here's an example:

*Question:*  
How would you handle a difficult subordinate?



*Accomplishments-driven response:* I've been in that very situation, so let me tell you how I handled it. When I was CEO of a group of assisted-living

facilities, I had a problem with the executive director. On one hand, she was brilliant and innovative, developing many initiatives that attracted new clients and raised our visibility. For example, she came up with an intergenerational program in which our residents had the opportunity to connect with young children and play grandparent roles with many of them. Knowing that family members worry about abuse to and theft from their loved ones, this executive director put webcams in residents' rooms so family members could monitor their treatment. Her innovations really put the organization on the map and helped grow the number of facilities.

However, this person was also abrasive, tactless, and completely lacking in diplomacy. She alienated employees and members of the board alike. The issue with her irritating personality came to a head when representatives from a pharmaceutical firm were touring our flagship facility because the company was considering sponsoring a new recreational program. The executive director made an extremely offensive comment about dementia patients. The worst part was that a reporter had come along on the tour, and the reporter included the remark in her coverage, prompting public outcry. I was under pressure from the board to fire this executive director. I could see their point, but I also knew how valuable her ideas were and how she had contributed to the organization's bottom line.

After asking the board to give me one more chance to rehabilitate this

executive, I tackled the problem in three steps. I insisted that she write heartfelt letters of apology to those she had offended, including the employees. I then told her she must work closely with an executive coach to improve her communication skills. Finally, I promoted a mid-level manager to a new position as executive director for communications, making him the new spokesperson and public face of the company. Without really taking anything away from the executive director's position or prestige, I simply added a buffer that would keep her blunt remarks from doing further damage. The company flourished with this solution, enjoying the benefit of the executive director's brilliance while ensuring better communication.

**Resume interview questions:** This line of questioning focuses on the content of your resume. The interviewer uses the resume as an outline and asks questions such as, "Tell me more about this job and what you did." This type of questioning, again, provides an excellent opportunity to talk about accomplishments. Every time you're asked "what you did," deliver a results-rich accomplishments story.

Example:

*Question:* Tell me more about your job as a Forest Service District Ranger and what you did."

*Accomplishments-driven response:* My proudest accomplishment in that job involved the partnerships I was able to foster with key constituencies



– county officials, local ranchers, loggers, environmental groups, ORV enthusiasts, hiking and biking organizations, and the general public. These partnerships – real working partnerships – were critical to the successful development and implementation of our forest-management plan. Many of these groups are skeptical of the forest service – and of each other – and it took my best efforts of communication and persuasion to bring them all together to agree not only on a basic set of principles, but on detailed plans related to forest grazing rights, motorized and non-motorized trail development and access, managed logging for forest health, and designated conservation areas. By working with these groups both individually and in public meetings, I was able to help forge a 10-year plan in which all parties compromised on some of their initial demands because I helped each group understand that the result would be a plan that was to their benefit – as well as to the prolonged health and life of the forest itself.

#### TIPS FOR PRESENTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN INTERVIEWS

##### **Choose interview themes and accompanying accomplishments.**

When communications professionals learn media relations, they are taught to develop one or more messages. No matter what the media asks them, for example, in a press conference, they integrate the message(s) into their response. Similarly Tim Tyrell-Smith suggests developing three themes for each interview. The set of themes will likely vary according to the

employer you are targeting, although plenty of overlap will occur. To implement this approach, choose an employer you want to target, identify the three most important selling points that you want to convey about yourself, and then develop a accomplishment for each of these. “Research your target company, target position, and interview team,” Tim writes. “What are they looking for? What does the perfect candidate look like? What skills and experience are they drooling over?” Choose themes and accomplishments that align with your research.

##### **Practice mental juggling so you can adapt the same accomplishment to many interview questions.**

Because interview questions – especially behavioral questions – are unpredictable, you may find yourself needing to adapt one accomplishment to a variety of questions. You would not, of course, tell the same accomplishment over again in response to multiple questions. The idea is that you might be able to recall only a limited number of your accomplishments while under the pressure of the interview, so you might have to do some mental tweaking to make a recalled accomplishment fit into your response.

You can practice your ability to mentally juggle and tweak accomplishments. Choose a single accomplishment from those you brainstormed using the prompts in [Chapter 4](#). Ideally it will be an accomplishment that (a) encompassed multiple skills (b) began negatively but ended triumphantly thanks to your



efforts and (c) involved teamwork or collaboration. Next, think about each of the interview questions in the [Appendix](#), and see if you can tweak the accomplishment in your mind so the response would fit that question. No need to write down the tweaked versions of the accomplishment; the idea is to stretch your brain and practice this skill. Test your accomplishment against as many questions as you can. You can also try it with additional accomplishments.

**Try a strengths-based response to “Tell me about yourself.”** The most commonly

asked interview “question” is “tell me about yourself.” As



I write in the article here, <http://tinyurl.com/63jqmvx>, the proprietary Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (DSAP) provides an excellent accomplishments-rich way to respond to the “tell me about yourself” request. DSAP participants are taught to respond like this:

“There are a number of things I do well. Three of those are [strength], [strength], and [strength]. Which one would you prefer I talk about first?”

After describing a accomplishment that illustrates your effectiveness using the strength the interviewer has asked to hear about, you can ask the interviewer if that’s the kind of information he or she is looking for. Then you can offer to elaborate on the other strengths.

The most effective way to complete this exercise is to partake in an 18-hour Dependable Strengths workshop;

however, users can attain the benefits in two other ways.

- Read about the process in this article, <http://tinyurl.com/63jqmvx>, and informally identify your three top strengths that would fit the above interview response.
- Take Dependable Strengths for the Internet for \$24.49 (<http://tinyurl.com/b3hktch>)

After identifying three strengths, develop accomplishments about them as though you were responding to the “tell me about yourself” request.

**Keep responses concise.** Responses to interview questions should be no more than two minutes long, and even that timeframe is pushing the limits of what an interviewer can listen to in our attention-deficit world. Tell a rich, meaty accomplishments story as your response, but trim the fat and don’t ramble.

**Back-burner family and personal accomplishments.** Particularly when asked a broad question such as “What is your proudest accomplishment?”, many interviewees are tempted to respond along these lines: “Marrying my spouse...”, “Having my children ...” Those responses aren’t terrible, but since they are not job-related, they aren’t nearly as effective as achievements that reflect on-the-job results. They also open up uncomfortable lines of conversation with the interviewer, who must avoid asking you questions that suggest the possibility of discrimination (Are you married? How many children do you have?). If you feel you simply must give a nod to a family or personal accomplishment, make it a postscript onto a more substantive response: “By the way, I’m also very

proud of having raised my three children.”

**Address employer needs with your accomplishments.** A good interviewer will ask you questions that require you to describe accomplishments that apply to specific needs and challenges the hiring company has (“What have you done that’s comparable to [description of specific requirement] of the job you’re interviewing for?”). If you, however, approach the end of the interview, and the interviewer hasn’t asked any questions like that, you can ask, “What’s the greatest challenge your organization faces?” Ideally you’ll be prepared with an accomplishment about handling a similar challenge in a current or past job. Your accomplishments-rich response gives you the opportunity to strengthen your bond with the employer by empathizing with the challenge – and even better, showing how you tackled a similar issue in the past.

To prepare for this approach, research your targeted employer, and try to predict what the interviewer’s response would be to “What’s the greatest challenge your organization faces?” Next, develop a accomplishments-driven response following the structure below:

I understand what your organization is experiencing. My current/former employer had a similar crisis/problem/difficulty/dilemma. [Describe the situation in accomplishment form]

My current/former employer endured the same trials/tribulations/made the wrong decisions/took incorrect roads. I wanted to change the situation. [Tell the

accomplishment of the action you took to change the situation.]

I figured it out, and now I’m sharing it with you. [Tell how you could apply your action/solution to the interviewer’s organization’s challenge.]

**Ask about goals beyond the job description/job posting.** Given that crafting job descriptions/job postings often involves a number of people and evolves over time, Hay advises asking these questions:

- Since this job description was written, are there additional goals you would like to see accomplished in this job? If so, what would they be?
- Other than the functions listed in the job description, are there other projects or objectives you would like to see this position accomplish in the first six months or upcoming year?

You will then be able to tailor your accomplishments-driven responses directly to the interviewer’s answers because you’ll know which of your achievements lines up with the stated additional goals. Best of all, no one else is likely to ask these questions, so you’ll have an advantage.

## PRESENTATION INTERVIEWS

At the behest of the employer or on his or her own initiative, an interviewee may deliver interview content in the form of a presentation, often accompanied with slides. In “Consider Delivering a Sales Presentation in Your Job Interview,” Eric



Kramer suggests including a section of the presentation called Success Stories – “examples of when the candidate was at his or her best – these success stories are ‘behavioral’ examples of what the candidate has done in the past and what he or she can do for the prospective in the future.” As long as you’re using slides, why not also include photos or even videos of yourself in action?

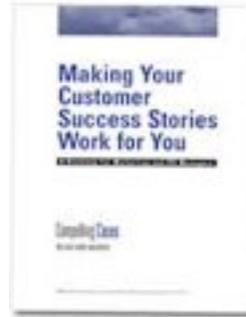
As with accomplishments you choose to spotlight in your resume, cover letter, and non-presentation interview, be sure to research the employer and prioritize achievements according to the employer’s needs. Practice your oral delivery so you can smoothly connect your past successes with the issues facing the prospective employer. Don’t say: “I did X, X, and X.” Say: “My success in doing X will contribute to my ability to do XY for you.”

### ***Tailoring accomplishments to pre-employment screenings and assessments***

Employers are increasingly using pre-screening and assessment techniques early in the interviewing process, typically after one or more initial phone screenings and before the first face-to-face interview or between the first and second interview. Sometimes they are used only when the field is narrowed down to just a few candidates.

The variety of assessments used is surprisingly wide. Some are objective-style “tests;” others are essay- or questionnaire-style assessments that require narrative responses and include questions about accomplishments.

The best advice assessment experts offer is to track accomplishments so you can be



prepared for this type of screening. One recruiter who uses these tools advises keeping a journal of successes and past work accomplishments in some detail to ensure accuracy in describing successes. If

you’ve followed the suggestions in the book, you should be well prepared for screenings in which you are asked to list accomplishments.

### ***Tailoring accomplishments to performance reviews***

Performance evaluations are tailor-made for communicating your accomplishments, and if you’ve been brainstorming and tracking successes in the period leading up to your review, you’ll find it effortless to prepare. Your accomplishments offer the best evidence that you are not only doing your job, but doing it well, perhaps going beyond what’s expected of you.

Accomplishments are integral to both aspects of a performance review – the dialog you have with your supervisor, and the self-analysis that many employers ask you to complete before sitting down with the boss.

The self-analysis/evaluation is your chance to truly prepare for your review and to be armed with information that will demonstrate a high level of performance to your boss. In fact, Scot Herrick in his blog, CubeRules, calls these self-reviews “ultimate influencers,” citing an example in which he gave a subordinate the highest performance-review rating he’d ever meted out

(resulting in a raise and bonus) simply because the staffer wrote an excellent, accomplishments-rich review. Peggy Klaus quotes an employer who says employees who spend time preparing for performance reviews are the ones who get his attention. “I just see them as more committed to their career and the company’s future,” he says.

Conversely, those who don’t prepare may not fare well in a review. “The less information you keep about your results,” Herrick writes, “the easier it is for management to prove whatever they want about your work. Proving whatever they want, by the way, rarely means proving you have an outstanding performance review rating.”



Herrick advises describing your accomplishments in your self-review “not in a way that is outstanding, but in a way that reflects reality. No one is perfect. No one is horrible. Call your accomplishments as you see them: some great, some fabulous, but great work overall.” That kind of authenticity lends credibility to your self-review, he says. He also suggests using metrics to the extent possible. Klaus advises prioritizing accomplishments in your review, placing the greatest emphasis on those that are “mission-critical.”

Following are some typical self-evaluation questions with prompts to help you identify areas in which you’ve shined and ways to optimize the way you communicate your responses:

- Have your job responsibilities changed [since you were hired or since your last review]? Has your job’s scope expanded; have you taken on new responsibilities? *Prompts:* Have they changed because you took the initiative to expand your role? If they changed because you were asked to take on more/different responsibilities, how did you rise to the occasion? How did you go above and beyond?
- How would you assess your own performance in executing your top three to five responsibilities as well as the full scope of your responsibilities? *Prompts:* How have you performed compared to how you did in the past? How have you performed compared to others with the same responsibilities? What kinds of metrics can you attach to your performance? Scan the prompts in [Chapter 4](#) to see if they suggest any shades of meaning you can attach to your performance.
- How have you succeeded? During the past performance-review period, what contributions have you made? *Prompts:* Be sure to emphasize successes and contributions that align with the performance standards that have been set for you and that are most important to your boss. Think about metrics to enhance your successes. Scan the prompts in [Chapter 4](#) if you’re having difficulty coming up with successes.
- In what ways do you think you could have done something

different and/or better? In what areas, if any, do you need to change or improve? *Prompts:* Consider what positive spin you can put on your self-improvement ideas. Try to accompany any self-criticism with a small success.

*Example:* “I need to be more aware of my audience when I give sales presentations. This year, I made a flippant remark at the end of a presentation, and a customer in the audience was turned off. I rectified the situation by apologizing profusely. Since then, I’ve been much more careful to respect audience members and think before I speak. In fact, the same customer was in the audience at a recent presentation, and he complimented me on how well I connected with the audience.”

- What strengths have you demonstrated on the job? *Prompt:* Use an accomplishment story to illustrate each strength. Again, focus on strengths that align with your boss’s and the organization’s priorities.
- Describe working on a project team with others. *Prompt:* Be sure to make your role on teams clear and give yourself sufficient credit while also crediting others. Choose accomplishment stories that emphasize interpersonal, communication, and teamwork skills.
- What goals from the last review period have you accomplished? *Prompt:* Try a “sandwich” technique here. Let’s say you had a list of goals from the last review period. You accomplished some in a big way; others were lesser

successes. List a major goal-achieving accomplishment first and last. In between, sandwich the smaller accomplishments. That way, you start big and end big.

But don’t wait until your annual performance review to communicate to your boss about your achievements. “Unless you provide some sort of written report that shows what you accomplished during the week,” cautions Herrick, “your performance is solely based on the perception of the manager. Doesn’t it make a lot more sense to put your accomplishments in front of your manager every week to help ensure that performance perception is the one you want to have?” See the [next section](#).

Of course, the employer’s actual review or evaluation of you is the other component of the review process. Most forms for this process rate the employee in various areas on a scale. Some include a narrative section in which the reviewer can expand on the ratings given. Providing your boss with well-expressed accomplishments in your self-review can help him or her articulate your strengths in written narrative. If self-review is not part of the process at your organization, there’s no reason you can’t submit a self-review anyway at performance-evaluation time. Use the prompts in this section to guide you in what to say about your performance. See [next section](#).

To ensure you prepare the most effective, targeted accomplishments for the review *after* your next one, ask your boss for specific goals for you to strive to reach.

## ***Tailoring accomplishments to status reports to your boss***

As we just saw, it's virtually always a good idea to keep your boss regularly informed of your accomplishments. After all, we often don't even see our bosses very often anymore, especially in the age of telecommuting. My partner used to send his boss a monthly email listing his successes. Ask your boss how (email, phone, memo, voicemail, in person) and how often he or she would like to receive this information. (If he or she says "not at all," take that as a sign that you don't have a great boss, and you may want to be wary.)

In many organizations, status reports, completed weekly, are a part of the job. Herrick asserts that status reports can be "the perfect vehicle for storing our accomplishments," indeed, "an accomplishment repository." His advice for making the most of these weekly document mirrors typical advice for resume writing: favor accomplishments over activities and functions; use action verbs; focus on deliverables of meetings, not the meetings themselves; apply the "so what?" test, and include results.

You can also keep your boss updated in more informal ways, such as brief voicemail messages and copying your boss on communications (such as memos and emails) that discuss project progress and milestones. Don't share these communications for every tiny detail of your work; be discriminating and save the best successes for sharing.

## ***Tailoring accomplishments when you request a raise or promotion***

The investment of most organizations in the possibility of giving you a raise or promotion lies in how much you've done to boost the bottom line.



Therefore, the accomplishments you choose to spotlight in a proposal for a salary increase or promotion must show significant ways you've contributed to the organization's success. The subtle message you want to plant in the employer's ear is: "This person is so critical to our success that we want to ensure he or she stays with us."

Here's an example of deploying accomplishments in a request for a salary increase:

I appreciate the opportunity I have had during the last three years of serving as a vital member of the marketing and sales support team. This past year has been an especially challenging business environment, but my accomplishments have continued to build on my earlier achievements, and I have high expectations for this success to continue for the foreseeable future.

Here are some highlights of how I have helped the department and the company in the past year:

- Developed a proposal that brought a client from the brink of terminating our services to renewing at a higher level than

ever before, adding a net gain of \$500,000.

- Partnered with several sales team members to attract new business opportunities totaling \$1.2 million.
- Conceptualized, proposed, and produced a market-research study that serves as a valuable tool for our industry, increasing our visibility, and making it easier for our sales team to call on prospective clients.
- Served on the team of two company-wide task forces that identified redundancies, cut costs, and save the company several million dollars.
- Participated in and attended four professional meetings, increasing the visibility of the company within the industry.
- Mentored and trained three interns who handled many routine functions within the department, freeing up team members to focus on new client development and current client retention.
- Proposed new projects, and completed all new tasks and assignments when requested to do so.

I look forward to continuing to play a key role within the department, and given all of my recent accomplishments and that my salary is still below industry averages, I am confident that you will offer a salary increase that reflects these issues and my standing in the department.

With minor tweaks in wording, the same accomplishments-driven approach can be applied to a promotion proposal.

### ***Tailoring accomplishments to prospective clients***

“Before you sell anything, writes Peggy Klaus, “you’ve got to first sell yourself in a personal and memorable way.”

Clients considering hiring your services want to know what you’ve done for other clients like them and how you’ve helped clients like them obtain the kind of results they are looking for. Ask yourself how your accomplishments align with the product or service you want prospective clients to buy.



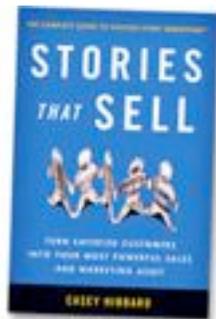
Develop an origin story for your business – how you came to be in business and developed the product or service you’re selling. That accomplishment story should become the foundation for every other achievement you detail to your prospective clients.

Accomplishments targeted at customers and clients should have these characteristics:

- They establish your credibility as an expert in your field.
- They enable your targeted clients/customers to envision that the results you obtained for others are similar to the results you will get for them.
- They are interesting and memorable, so that even if your target doesn’t bite right away, he or she will recall your message and seek you out later. Stories with emotional content work well for this purpose because they are likely to be remembered.

Case studies, especially case studies about past customers/clients, are an especially effective way to communicate accomplishments to future customers/clients. “Detailed case studies that showcase our current customer successes are powerful tools that give potential customers and investors the confidence in what we have to offer,” says Casey Hibbard, of Compelling Cases. Hibbard’s free ebook, *Making Your Customer Success Stories Work for You: A Roadmap for Marketing and PR Managers*, can help you craft such case studies. Download it from this page:

<http://tinyurl.com/aluqlwy>. She also offers a more comprehensive book, *Stories That Sell: Turn Satisfied Customers into Your Most Powerful Sales & Marketing Asset*, available in several formats and prices at <http://tinyurl.com/bemgtc5>.



allows for reflection, planning, and setting your sights on the future. See more about this process in the final two chapters.

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### ***Tailoring accomplishments for goal-setting, personal advancement, and growth***

When you’re taking stock of your accomplishments and setting goals, the way the accomplishments are expressed is not of prime importance. In this situation, you are your own audience, so you can tailor your accomplishments any way that’s comfortable for you. I mention the notion of accomplishments for goal-setting, personal advancement, and growth, however, as a reminder that tracking achievements isn’t just for external audiences. It’s a process that

## CHAPTER 8

### Conducting annual and other regular personal accomplishments reviews

This chapter discusses ways to get into the habit of reviewing accomplishments regularly.

#### ***When and how often should you review accomplishments?***

If you're reading this book, chances are you haven't brainstormed or tracked your accomplishments before reading it. Ideally, you now have some good ideas for establishing a baseline of accomplishments and continuing to track them throughout your career – and perhaps, life. Think of any documentation you make of your accomplishments as what author Rick Gills calls “a living document,” a dynamic record that is constantly evolving.

To gain the best value from reviewing your accomplishments, I recommend you do it at least annually. You will probably find, however, that you won't remember everything you'd like to if you brainstorm successes only once a year. Even if you just record them in a very rough form (perhaps using the techniques in [Chapter 3](#)), such as daily scrawls on a desk calendar, weekly emails to yourself, or monthly journal entries, you'll have a full set of memory prompts for your more formal personal review.



If you choose an annual review, you might like to conduct it at the end of a calendar year so you can reflect on the year and consider how it went. Or you

might prefer to do it at the beginning of a new year so you can set goals based on what you have left to accomplish from the previous year.

Many people update their accomplishments inventory in conjunction with updating their resume annually. Executives polled by Accountemps, a temporary staffing service, said they believe only half of managers would be ready to send out application materials if they were to unexpectedly lose their jobs. “Those who keep an ongoing record of professional achievements are better positioned for the job search because they can more readily recall details of past responsibilities and accomplishments,” said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps and author of *Managing Your Career For Dummies®* (Hungry Minds, Inc.). “This is particularly important for professionals who have been with the same employer for many years and, as a result, have not actively looked for a new position in some time.”

Don't forget to update your resume and accomplishments list when you change jobs, too. Jeff King, a veteran specialty recruiter for the medical device industry, even suggests updating your resume every time you get a performance review or raise. That's, after all, when many of your accomplishments are being discussed, along with the impact they had on the company. (Maybe your boss will even remember an accomplishment you forgot.) That's a good time to update your resume with accomplishments and their results while they're still fresh in your mind.

### ***Questions to ask yourself as you review accomplishments.***

- What new skills/competencies have you developed, and how have you applied them?
- What new learning or expertise did you apply to your accomplishments?
- What goals have you met that you set for yourself at your last review?
- What obstacles have you overcome?
- What unexpected developments got in the way of accomplishing what you wanted to?
- What did you learn from your accomplishments and/or your failure to accomplish some of your goals?
- What has been your single proudest accomplishment of the year [or other review period]?
- To what extent do you feel you've grown since your last personal review?
- Have you made a difference in anyone's life?
- How have you improved your level of performance in the last year? Give examples.
- In what areas did you truly excel and in what areas do you feel you still need to improve?
- Overall, to what extent are you satisfied with the level and quality of accomplishments you achieved?

### ***Involving others in your personal review***

Just as you can when you establish your baseline set of accomplishments, you can enlist other people when you update and review your achievements. Ask co-

workers what they feel you accomplished during the review period. Ask a spouse, friend, colleague, or family member to drill down into what you did in the most recent period and ask probing questions about each one (see [Chapter 4](#)). Ask others to hold you accountable for the accomplishment goals you set for your next review.

### ***Adding value to future accomplishments***

Perhaps you've identified a solid set of accomplishments through this book, but perhaps you wonder if you can raise the level of your accomplishments. Chances are you can if you choose to.



We've seen that, on the job, people who do only the minimum required of them by their job descriptions are not as accomplished as they might be. Do more than your job description requires. Take the initiative. Make your job your own. Communicate with your boss, however, to ensure your going above and beyond aligns with organizational goals.

If you see something that needs to be done, either do it, or propose a way to do it. Don't wait for someone to tell you to do it. Can you increase the quality of your deliverables to your constituents (boss, customers, co-workers) so they better meet needs? Is there more you could be doing to help your organization reach its desired business results? Can you make your work more efficient or cost-effective? Are you keeping up with change; could you be doing more to meet evolving needs? Could you be doing more to keep up with growth and/or contribute

to growth? Could you be doing more to assist your colleagues?

### ***Setting goals to achieve by your next personal review***

One great value that can emerge from a regular review of accomplishments is that it can help you set goals for the future. Accomplishments are the indicators that we have met our goals, and goals give us the motivation to have accomplishments.



Perhaps your accomplishments seem paltry. Maybe not many of them pass the “so what?” test. Maybe they don’t support what you really want to be doing with your life and career. Perhaps you just don’t feel as proud of them as you’d like. Maybe you feel you can do more.

On the other hand, you may be thrilled with your accomplishments, but you’d still like to set goals – perhaps to do more of the same, perhaps to strive to improve because there’s always room for improvement.

Here are some questions and prompts to help you set goals for the next time you review accomplishments:

- What did I not accomplish since my last review that I would like to accomplish next time?
- What obstacles stand in the way of my accomplishing what I want to? What would it take to remove those obstacles and reach my goal?
- What resources can I marshal to reach my goal?
- What learning or expertise do I need to develop to reach my goals?

- How can I apply past experience and past accomplishments toward reaching my goals?
- Should any of my goals be broken into smaller goals or steps?
- Do any of my goals need to be accomplished sooner than the time of my next personal review?
- How will I plan my time for reaching my goals?
- Are my goals measurable? What metrics do I want to apply to know I’ve reached my goals?
- How will I keep myself accountable and on track toward reaching my goals?
- What types of accomplishments would give me the greatest personal pleasure and pride?
- What types of accomplishments would most help me advance in my career?
- What do I most want to accomplish by the time of my next review?
- Which goals would it not bother me if I didn’t accomplish by the time of my next review?
- What goals do I want to accomplish that require assistance or participation from others?
- Which goals am I most motivated to accomplish?
- What would it mean for my life and career to accomplish each goal on my list? How will I benefit? How will others benefit?
- Will I reward myself for reaching my goals? How?

You may want to set goals with a series of milestones. What do you want to accomplish in the next week? Month? Year? Five years? Ten years? By the end of your life?

You can certainly set pie-in-the-sky, bucket-list life goals. For years, I've wanted to write a novel and become fluent in Italian. I've done little toward accomplishing those goals, but just having them on my list guides me in knowing what I need to accomplish if I want to feel completely satisfied when I leave this planet.

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## CHAPTER 9

### ***You are accomplished!***

It's time to bask in the realization that you are truly more accomplished than you realized.

#### ***Take the accomplishments post-test.***

Now that you're close to the end of the book, how are you feeling about your accomplishments? Let's repeat the test from the beginning of the book. Answer **true** or **false** to these statements:

1. I consider myself an accomplished person.
2. If asked today to state my proudest accomplishment, I can readily provide a detailed response.
3. If I lost my job today and had to update my resume, I could fill it with rich, results-driven accomplishments.
4. I know how to quantify many of my accomplishments.
5. I understand the best ways to frame my accomplishments so I can communicate them to best advantage.
6. I am comfortable talking about my accomplishments – in networking, interviews, and other oral situations.
7. I know what tools to use to brainstorm my accomplishments.
8. I regularly share my accomplishments with my boss.

9. I have a plan in place to regularly monitor, track, and self-report my accomplishments.
10. As I review my accomplishments, I set goals for the future.

If you've not only read this book but begun to implement its ideas, you should be able to answer "true" to most of these statements. If not, consider reviewing critical elements of accomplishments.

#### ***Applying what you've learned about yourself***

Let's look at the unlikely scenario that, even after reading this book and applying its tools, you still feel you have had minimal accomplishments. The lesson is to **start accomplishing!** One way, as we saw in [Chapter 8](#), is to set goals for yourself. Chris Strom writes about setting a goal to write a blog post every day for a year. Not only did he have the satisfaction of achieving this accomplishment, but his blog posts generated three books!

#### ***Taking pride in your accomplishments***

It's time to start thinking of yourself as an accomplished person. Even if you're not satisfied with the roster of accomplishments you've mined as a result of this book, know that you are accomplished because everyone is accomplished. Everyone makes a difference in the lives of others.



This book has focused on accomplishments that are somewhat recent. You may find it interesting and

eye-opening to go back to your early life and recall accomplishments. Can you remember any achievements before the age of 5? The age of 10? Accomplishments from elementary school, middle school, high school? Successes from Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4H, or other youth organizations? Early sports achievements? Reviewing early achievements can reveal interesting patterns, perhaps indicating activities you truly enjoyed and excelled at. Perhaps you've lost threads from your early years that you'd like to pick up now.

Best of all, though, you can look back at those early years and take pride in the fact that you've always been a person of accomplishment. "We've been accomplishing things all our lives," writes Peggy Klaus. "Since taking our first breath, we haven't stopped. We each have a history of hundreds, if not thousands, of successes that make us memorable."

***Leveraging your accomplishments:  
What's next for you as an  
accomplished individual?***

How will you apply your newly discovered knowledge of your own accomplishments? This book's strong focus on career, job-search, and workplace accomplishments should certainly light a path toward leveraging your accomplishments the next time you search for a job, keep your boss updated on your projects, undergo a performance review, or ask for a raise or promotion.

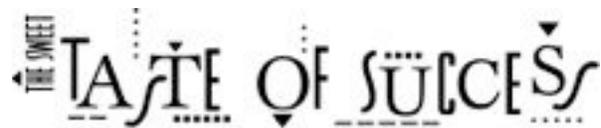
If you are regularly tracking your accomplishments, you will be well prepared if you should unexpectedly find yourself unemployed. You'll be able to quickly update your resume and will be

well-equipped for even the most grueling interview questions.

Many other doors open up to you, as well, from developing a deep understanding of your successes. You are better prepared to go back to school or start your own business.

Perhaps most importantly, you have established a baseline for setting future goals and accomplishing what you really want to in life.

What will you do next as a person of accomplishment?



## Appendix

### Typical interview questions that can be used as prompts for brainstorming accomplishments

- How would you describe yourself?
- What specific goals, including those related to your occupation, have you established for your life?
- How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?
- Please describe the ideal job for you.
- What influenced you to choose this career?
- At what point did you choose this career?
- What specific goals have you established for your career?
- What will it take to attain your goals, and what steps have you taken toward attaining them?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?
- How do you determine or evaluate success? Give me an example of one of your successful accomplishments.
- Do you have the qualifications and personal characteristics necessary for success in your chosen career?
- What has been your most rewarding accomplishment?
- If you could do so, how would you plan your college career differently?
- How would you describe yourself in terms of your ability to work as a member of a team?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- Given the investment our company will make in hiring and training you, can you give us a reason to hire you?
- Would you describe yourself as goal-driven?
- Describe what you've accomplished toward reaching a recent goal for yourself.
- What short-term goals and objectives have you established for yourself?
- Can you describe your long-range goals and objectives?
- What do you expect to be doing in five years?
- What do you see yourself doing in ten years?
- How would you evaluate your ability to deal with conflict?
- Have you ever had difficulty with a supervisor or instructor? How did you resolve the conflict?
- Tell me about a major problem you recently handled. Were you successful in resolving it?
- Would you say that you can easily deal with high-pressure situations?
- Are you more energized by working with data or by collaborating with other individuals?
- What personal weakness has caused you the greatest difficulty on the job?
- What were your reasons for selecting your college or university?
- Before you can make a productive contribution to the company, what degree of training do you feel you will require?
- Describe the characteristics of a successful manager.
- Why did you decide to seek a position in this field?
- Tell me what you know about our company.

- Why did you decide to seek a position in this company?
- Which is more important to you, the job itself or your salary?
- What are the most important rewards you expect to gain from your career?
- How would you define “success” for someone in your chosen career?
- What qualifications do you have that will make you successful in this company?
- What skills have you acquired from your work experience?
- What have you learned from your experiences outside the workplace?
- What criteria are you using to choose companies to interview with?
- If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- How would you describe your leadership skills?
- Which is more important: creativity or efficiency? Why?
- What have you accomplished that shows your initiative and willingness to work?
- What was the toughest challenge you’ve ever faced?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- Some people work best as part of a group – others prefer the role of individual contributor. How would you describe yourself?
- How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give examples.
- What kinds of things have you done at on the job that were beyond expectations?
- What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful business relationships?
- What sorts of things have you done to become better qualified for your career?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way?
- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Describe a time when you had to use your written communication skills to get an important point across.
- Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Give me an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Sometimes it's easy to get in "over your head." Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment.
- Give an example of how you applied knowledge from previous coursework to a project in another class.
- Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
- Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your supervisor's expectations.
- Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you tell or talk to about it? Did the manager take any steps to correct your colleague? Did you agree or disagree with the manager's actions?
- When given an important assignment, how do you approach it?
- If there were one area you've always wanted to improve upon, what would that be?
- When you have been made aware of, or have discovered for yourself, a problem in your work performance, what was your course of action?
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.
- What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision.
- We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example(s) of how you have done this.
- In a supervisory or group leader role, have you ever had to discipline or counsel an employee or group member? What was the nature of the discipline? What steps did you take? How did that make you feel? How did you prepare yourself?
- Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle that situation? How did that make you feel?
- Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? Were you happy with the outcome? What one step would you have done differently if given the chance?
- What was the most complex assignment you have had? What was your role?
- How was your transition from high school to college? Did you face any particular problems?
- Tell of some situations in which you have had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?
- Compare and contrast the times when you did work that was above

the standard with times your work was below the standard.

- Describe some times when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?
- What are your standards of success in school? What have you done to meet these standards?
- Tell of a time when your active listening skills really paid off for you – maybe a time when other people missed the key idea being expressed.
- What has been your experience in giving presentations? What has been your most successful experience in speech making?
- Tell of the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle -- perhaps an angry or irate customer. Be specific and tell what you did and what was the outcome.
- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle that person?
- Describe a situation where you found yourself dealing with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?
- Give me a specific example of something you did that helped build enthusiasm in others.
- Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do?
- Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision. How did you make the decision? How does it affect you today?
- Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. Were you successful?
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a time you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?
- Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision, but didn't have all the information you needed.
- What suggestions do you have for our organization?
- What is the most significant contribution you made to the company during a past job or internship?
- What is the biggest mistake you've made?
- Describe a situation in which you had to use reference materials to write a research paper. What was the topic? What journals did you read?
- Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker or classmate criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has that event shaped the way you communicate with others?
- Everyone has made some poor decisions or has done something that just did not turn out right. Give an example of when this has happened to you.
- How have you differed from your supervisors in evaluating your performance? How did you handle the situation?
- Give examples of your experiences in a job that were satisfying. Give

examples of your experiences that were dissatisfying.

- What kind of supervisor do you work best for? Provide examples.
- Describe some projects or ideas (not necessarily your own) that were implemented, or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.
- Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- Have you found any ways to make a job easier or more rewarding or to make yourself more effective?
- Give me a specific example of a time when you sold your supervisor or professor on an idea or concept. How did you proceed? What was the result?
- Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines? How do you stay focused?
- Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company/class/organization was facing. What was the challenge? What role did others play?
- Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you got co-workers or classmates who dislike each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What

were the repercussions? What did you learn?

- Describe a time when you put your needs aside to help a co-worker or classmate understand a task. How did you assist him or her? What was the result?
- Give two examples of things you've done in previous jobs or school that demonstrate your willingness to work hard.
- Describe the last time that you undertook a project that demanded a lot of initiative.
- What is the most competitive work or school situation you have experienced? How did you handle it? What was the result?
- What do you do when you are faced with an obstacle to an important project? Give an example.
- Tell about the most difficult or frustrating individual that you've ever had to work with, and how you managed to work with that person.
- Tell about a time when your trustworthiness was challenged. How did you react/respond?
- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.
- Tell about a recent job or campus experience that you would describe as a real learning experience? What did you learn from the job or experience?
- Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What could you have done to prevent it?
- Recall a situation in which communications were poor. How did you handle it?
- Describe a time when you had to make a difficult choice between

your personal and professional (or academic) life.

- On occasion we are confronted by dishonesty in the workplace. Tell about such an occurrence and how you handled it.
- What motivates you to go the extra mile on a project or job?
- Describe a project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities.
- Give an example of when you took a risk to achieve a goal. What was the outcome?
- Tell about a time when you built rapport quickly with someone under difficult conditions.
- Some people consider themselves to be “big picture people” and others are detail oriented. Which are you? Give an example that illustrates your preference.
- Describe a situation where you felt you had not communicated well. How did you correct the situation?
- Describe a time when you took personal accountability for a conflict and initiated contact with the individual(s) involved to explain your actions.
- Give me an example of when you were able to meet the personal and professional (or academic) demands in your life yet still maintained a healthy balance.

## Acknowledgments/Directory of Experts

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**Peggy Klaus.** Author “Are You Up To Snuff When It Comes To Soft Skills?” <http://tinyurl.com/d8g3w32> and *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It!*, <http://tinyurl.com/cuhmwcw>.

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**ResumeBucket.** Free online employment service. “ResumeBucket Unveils Most Searched HR Keywords, Top Job Industries in Q3” <http://tinyurl.com/2dff79e>

**Linda Matias.** Nationally Certified Resume writer. CareerStrides.com <http://careerstrides.com/>

**Bob McIntosh,** CPRW. Career trainer. <http://tinyurl.com/7gd4kqu>. “Write a résumé recruiters and employers will want to read; not one they dread,”

<http://tinyurl.com/cphch37e>

**Phil Hey.** Professor of English and writing at Briar Cliff College. “Questions and Answers with Career Expert Phil Hey,” <http://tinyurl.com/cuujoxa>.

**Deb Walker.** President of Alpha Advantage, Inc., and career coach. Alpha Advantage <http://www.alphaadvantage.com>. “Is Your Resume Lost in the Great Internet Void?”, <http://tinyurl.com/c484lwc>

**Rachelle Canter, PhD.** President of San Francisco-based executive development firm RJC Associates. <http://www.rjcassociates.net/>.

**Carol Johnson.** Owner of Plan B Consulting, Derby, CT.

**Glen Stansberry.** “5 Reasons to Keep a Work Diary.” <http://tinyurl.com/bw57g7f>

**Rick Gillis.** *Job!: Learn How to Find Your Next Job In 1 Day*. The Really Useful Job Search Company. 2012. <http://tinyurl.com/cdozqu2>

**Cheryl Roshak,** CPC. Transition and career coach and president of Cheryl Roshak Associates. <http://www.croshak.com/>

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**Paula Sanders.** Hunt4Staff.com. <http://hunt4staff.com>.

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**Ford Myers.** Career coach and author. <http://www.careerpotential.com/>.

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**Todd Rhoad.** Director of BT Consulting, a career consulting firm in Atlanta, GA and the creator of MBAWriters and the Henry Series of books for MBAs.

**Donald Asher.** Author, *The Overnight Resume*, <http://tinyurl.com/c2ztwwx>.

**Julie Walraven.** Design Resumes. <http://designresumes.com>. “Start thinking of your Super Stories for your Resume!”, <http://tinyurl.com/ca2b8vj>.

**Beverly Harvey.** Resume writer and coach of C-level and six-figure executives. “Tips for Ensuring Your Resume is Compelling,” <http://tinyurl.com/cgrwj7c>.

**Lou Adler.** Recruiting expert and author. “The 2-Question Performance-based Interview, Part 1,” <http://tinyurl.com/d49hzlb> and “Prepping Candidates and Taming Hiring Managers,” <http://tinyurl.com/c7qlf2a>.

**Susan Whitcomb.** Author of *Resume Magic: Trade Secrets of a Professional Resume Writer*. <http://tinyurl.com/6rjekbt>.

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**Sharon Graham.** Founder and executive director of Career Professionals of Canada, president and principal consultant at Graham Management Group. “Research Study: How Does Your Resume Compare?,” <http://tinyurl.com/cfyx8cd> and “Career Stories that Capture Attention.” <http://tinyurl.com/3fmt5op>

**Marji McClure.** ExecuNet contributing editor, and **David Topus,** executive branding expert. “Peer Point of View: How to Make Your Resume Recruiter-Ready,” <http://tinyurl.com/cdp2zqt> and Marji McClure. Author, ExecuNet’s “Overcoming Today’s Toughest Resume Challenges,” <http://tinyurl.com/3xm4xt7>.

**Dennis Abenanty.** Creator of KareerKit career-advice site. <http://www.kareerkit.com>

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**Meg Guiseppi.** C-level executive job-search coach. <http://executiveresumebranding.com/>.

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**John Groth.** Consultant.

**Dr. John Sullivan.** Recruiting expert and HR thought leader. “What’s Wrong With Using Resumes For Hiring? Pretty Much Everything,” <http://tinyurl.com/d6xapkn> and “Your Resume Is Boring — And How to Increase Your Career Opportunities,” <http://tinyurl.com/25yw4n7>

**Richard Bolles.** Author, *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, <http://tinyurl.com/d3l9rg4>. Note: The book is updated annually, so be sure to locate the edition for the current year.

**Gerry Lantz.** Consultant, Stories That Work. <http://www.storiesthatwork.com/>.

**Mary Morel.** Author. <http://marymorel.blogspot.com>.

**John Logan.** Human resources manager. “Questions and Answers with Career Expert John Logan,” <http://tinyurl.com/cdcvevc>.

**Harris Allied.** <http://www.harrisallied.com>. Executive search, technology and quant analyst placement services. “The Complete Presentation: Five Things Every Technology Professional Must Know Before Looking For A Job,” <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2011/01/prweb4990664.htm>

**Annette Simmons.** Speaker, author, and consultant. <http://www.annettesimmons.com>.

**Alexia Vernon.** Speaker, coach, and trainer. “Why Owning Your Accomplishments Might Be Sabotaging Your Success.” <http://tinyurl.com/ckohpxr>.

**Tina Seelig.** Director of the Stanford Technology Ventures Program. Author of *What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20*.

**Barbara Safani.** Career expert and owner of Career Solvers. “How to Communicate Difficult Stories on Your Resume,” <http://tinyurl.com/436az9p> and “Ten Reasons Why Your Resume Isn’t Working” <http://tinyurl.com/cr7lecx>

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**Victoria A. Seitz and William A. Cohen,** “Using the Psychology of Influence in the Job Interview,” *Business Forum*, 17. 3 (Summer 1992): 14.

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**Jerome Young.** AttractJobsNow.com (<http://attractjobsnow.com/>). “How to Decode a Job Posting” <http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/20/job-posting-listing-leadership-careers-hiring.html>

**Karen Siwak.** Resume writer. “Throw that resume out....not so fast!” <http://tinyurl.com/bwgzdx3>

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**Jennifer Grasz.** CareerBuilder contributor. “More Than One-in-Five Hiring Managers Say They Are Less Likely to Hire a Candidate Who Didn’t Send a Thank-You Note, Finds New CareerBuilder Survey,” <http://tinyurl.com/8ptayzq>

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**Anne Fischer.** Fortune/CNNMoney.com contributor. “Are young job seekers less ethical or just desperate?” <http://tinyurl.com/cdvw5yv>

**Deb Dib.** Career industry early adopter/Innovator/Educator. <http://www.executivepowerbrand.com>

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*Today’s Job Search*, <http://tinyurl.com/bxg894t>.

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**Erik Kramer.** Author of *Active Interviewing* (<http://www.activeinterviewing.com>) and founder and chief innovation officer for Innovative Career Services, a career-services firm, and creator of the InterviewBest Interview Presentation (<http://www.interviewbest.com>). “Consider Delivering a Sales Presentation in Your Job Interview,” <http://tinyurl.com/bqazejr>.

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**Chris Strom.** Blogger and author. “366 or How I Tricked Myself into Being Awesome,” <http://tinyurl.com/87m6vza>.

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## AFTERWORD

The beauty of an ebook is that it can easily be updated and revised. I plan to do that with this book.

I welcome your crowdsourcing help in making future editions of this book even better.

What suggestions do you have?

Have ideas for prompts to add?

See a typo or other error? Want to suggest a resource?

I welcome all input and feedback.

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