

Why Relying on Resumes Won't Produce an Offer

By Perri Capell

Ronald R. Evans is senior vice president of People Management Inc., a search firm based in Avon, Conn. He's the author of "Kiss Your Resume Goodbye: Six Rules that Rule the Job Market" (Hudson House).

- **You say in your book that many job hunters leave their common sense at the door. Why?**

Most people are obsessed with fear of not finding [a job], and they become very tactical. It's as if their house is on fire, and they look for a window to hurl themselves out of, instead of saying, "How much time do I have, and what is the most sensible thing I should do under these circumstances?" It's the pressure. If you aren't on the phone smiling and dialing, you feel as though you aren't doing anything.

- **Why do you maintain that resumes are ineffective?**

Focusing all your energy on your resume shifts the responsibility of clearly defining who you are and what problems you solve from you, the seller, to the buyer. I get 100-plus resumes a day, and what most people are saying is, "Help me figure myself out and fit somewhere." Buyers don't have the time to do that.

Resumes are the most voluminous form of spam out there. They are choking up the Internet. Most importantly for job hunters, sending out a resume doesn't achieve what they want to achieve. They do mass resume-distribution campaigns because they fail to be strategic about their job hunts. If they were strategic, they would spend their time focusing on only the right companies.

- **If job hunters 'kiss their resume goodbye,' what should they do then?**

First, define what you have to sell or your "personal value proposition." This is what a venture capitalist would demand to know if you were an emerging-technology company seeking funds. It should not be lengthy. Clearly and briefly define the value you bring to the marketplace.

Second, clearly define the businesses that require this value proposition. Think about the kinds of business and services you worked for in the past. Now ask yourself, "Who are the suppliers, competitors and customers to this segment?" Your universe is these three camps.

Identify 10 businesses in each of these groups that are most likely to want you. Figure out which ones are suffering from problems you have solved. Rank them from one to 10 and then choose only the top five in each of the three categories. Now you have 15 companies that have some sort of connectivity with you.

Look at the problems you have solved and select the companies that are struggling with those types of problems. Approach them about your ability to help them solve those problems. This puts you in a conversation with them about their problems, instead of your coming to them with a resume and saying, "Can you help me?"

- **What is the best way to contact those companies?**

Most people let their network lead them. They say, "Here I am. Whom do you know?" Your network contacts don't know your value proposition and what your targets are. If you don't know, they'll lead you all over hell's half acre.

Ask yourself, "Whom do I know who could provide a door-opener to one of those companies?" Lawyers and accountants are good prospects. They are probably plugged into any company we could dream up, and they are keen on ingratiating themselves to their customers. It behooves them if they can make a strategic introduction.

If you say, here's my personal value proposition and the companies I want to target, you can take advantage of the concept of "six degrees of separation," meaning we are only six people away from anyone we want to meet. You are telling the market, "This is where I am going," versus it telling you.

If you can't get an introduction, call a contact at the company to discuss something you are familiar with at that company. Perhaps it's a supply-chain issue. This gives you your opportunity to talk with them. Follow up the call with an e-mail or a letter.

- **Do you even need a resume?**

Yes, but only after an employer says, "That person is really sharp. We could use him." Then you whip it out. You don't send it as a door-opener, because it isn't. It's at the back of the process. It should be short and sweet. Give employment dates and accurate titles. Don't fudge with stuff like that.

- **Who has used your method successfully?**

The first time I encountered someone doing this sort of thing was when I was doing a treasurer's search for a Fortune 500 company. A candidate called me out of the blue with the right credentials and background. I asked him how he got my name. He said he was doing research on competitors of his past employers. He had noticed that several had real problems that he had dealt with and he called one of them and talked with the chief financial officer. The chief financial officer told him the company was searching for a new treasurer, and he should call the recruiter handling the search, which was me. That person became the archetype for showing job hunters how to tackle things this way.

One person used the methodology to move to a different industry. He mapped the target companies and developed his contacts with them around a value proposition. He said he had solutions for issues they were struggling with and set up his meetings around that offer. That meant he had a different type of conversation with them -- he was giving before asking.

This isn't the tactic most people use. Most people drown in their own stew. I have watched for 20 years from the buying side. All the advice job hunters get comes from people on the sell side, and that alone should make you curious.

-- Ms. Capell is a senior correspondent for CareerJournal.com. She can be reached at frances.capell@dowjones.com.