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Taking Control

This month, Steve and Greg offer their thoughts on resumes, experience and the art of marketing yourself.

by Steve Crandall



Greg and I receive many e-mails during the year that, individually, aren't substantial or compelling enough to constitute an entire column. Although, when possible, we

respond to them individually, most of them tend to fit into a couple of categories I'd like to summarize and address. The other advantage to bundling them is that I won't embarrass any individual; but if your mail fits into one of these categories (and you know who you are), take heed:

"Could you possibly take time out of your busy day to look over my resume and make any suggestions/give me some pointers/tell me why no one will hire me?"

In a word, no. The only resumes I want to see are mine and ones submitted for positions for which I'm hiring. Seriously, there are two reasons why I won't review your resume: I really don't have the time and, more important, I believe a good resume has to be tailored to the specific position you're seeking. That's the beauty of word processing—you can set up a "master" resume containing all your information and then pick and choose what you want to send to a particular company. For example, if you're responding to an ad for a senior support position, make sure the goals and specific experience you highlight on your resume are related to that position. I remember placing a newspaper ad a few years ago for a very specific technical marketing position, and the first resume I received in the mail was from an accountant. Attention to detail? I don't think so.

A great source of resume help is your local library. There are hundreds of books on resume writing, polishing and distributing.

"I'm just entering (or re-entering) the IT job market, so the first thing I did was spend a lot of time and money getting certified—but nobody will hire me. They say I also have to have something called 'experience.' Where can I go to get that?"

There are two Catch-22s in this one. The first is obvious—how do you get experience when no one will hire you without it? The second one is a little trickier. If you're reading this, you're probably already certified, so it's too late to say, "Delay getting certified until you get some experience."

Why did you get certified first? Probably because you heard or read that certified people make more money than those without certification. Well, as you've seen, that's less true now—the marketplace is returning to the more sensible posture that experience is worth more than certification. Besides, if you're really just in it for the money, why don't you set your sights on the serious money? Become a professional basketball player, rock star or movie actor.

What's that? You say that would take too long and you'd have to work too hard at it? Bingo! No matter your line of work, the same rules apply: Start

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at the bottom, pay your dues and work your way up. Going after the certification first may make you appear overqualified for entry-level positions, yet under-experienced for anything above that.

This leads to my last point: If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving probably isn't for you. Your certification card isn't an admission ticket that guarantees you a job in the industry. Some people will never find a job in IT, no matter what they do. And it isn't just a matter of personal hygiene or the proper use of language.

One of my favorite interviewing questions used to be, "Imagine a continuum, with machines/systems on one end and people on the other. Which end do you see yourself leaning toward?" I expected all technical candidates to be toward the systems side. Besides the knowledge and the experience, you have to have a passion for things technical—you have to have a relatively high degree of "geekiness." If it's all the same to you whether you're doing systems integrations or selling used cars, you probably won't be very good at either.

Please don't let what I've said discourage you from sending us e-mail and questions (but, again, no resumes!). In the upcoming year, we'll all be facing many challenges, including a shrinking job market and an accelerated pace of new technology. We're all in this together. If we can help point you in the right direction, that's what we're here for. 

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