

## **KISS Me, Baby**

### *Simple Resume Advice*

By Christopher M. Palatucci, Ph.D.

I know. I should have a little more respect for the recently departed, but I'm taking my lead from Don Ho. His trademark catchphrase – “Kiss me, baby” – reminds me of an adage that's been around forever, but that many potential candidates appear to have forgotten: K. I. S. S., or “Keep It Simple, Stupid.” When your spouse says it to you, you can choose to live under the delusion that it's really “Keep It Simple, Sweetie” if that helps. (The final “S” may have other meanings when it comes from your spouse, but I'll leave that to you to figure out.) A popular variant is “Keep It Short and Sweet.” No matter how you choose to assign words to the acronym, there is only one relevant interpretation, and that is to get to the point quickly and efficiently. Now, I'll probably ignore my own advice and prattle on in this article longer than I should, but the content is so prophetic, you'll want to read the whole thing.

While the “KISS principle” is customarily directed to people giving speeches or other presentations, it applies equally to a variety of circumstances, including when it comes to writing your resume. In the recruiting business, our stock and trade is resumes. Thousands come into a typical office every month. With that kind of volume, no recruiter has time to read every single word of every resume that passes in front of them (picture taking a sip from a fire hose). As a candidate, you need to get to the point quickly so recruiters – notorious for their short attention spans – can put your resume in the “keep” pile. If you're just not qualified, it's not going to make it in any case, but if you are, you want to make sure it doesn't get tossed because it was so dense that it was unreadable. Some resumes come in that are more like autobiographies. It almost guarantees that the salient points are buried so deep in the text that they never get read.

So the first piece of advice is to keep it concise. Here are six more pearls.

#### ***Focus on your skills***

Don't confuse features and benefits. A *feature* of a car is that it has a six speed automatic electronic transmission. The *benefits* of that feature are smoother shifts, improved performance and better fuel economy. A feature of your resume might be “installed new Cisco network at 5 worldwide sites.” But that doesn't tell the recruiter/employer that the benefit was a reduction in the company's operating costs, or that it allowed global order entry and increased sales 12%. There are some plain facts that you need to communicate: supervised a team of 7; responsible for \$3M budget; etc. But if those facts can be cast in terms of why they helped reach an objective or created a business opportunity or contributed to organizational efficiency, state that in your resume. Just don't go overboard (the new Cisco network was probably not the only causative element in the sales increase).

### ***Be clear***

This is a bit of a judgment call, but avoid “technobabble.” Obviously, there are certain acronyms (VC, CRM, P&L, R&D) and standard shorthand terms (med device, fables, BizDev) that just about everyone in industry knows and is comfortable with. However, if there are terms of art or acronyms that are peculiar to your particular industry, or worse, your narrow segment of the industry, they are better left off your résumé. Just spell them out. OK? 10-4?

### ***Be honest***

People are always shocked when they hear about someone lying on a resume. The recent dismissal of Marilee Jones, MIT's dean of admissions (Oh, sorry, does everyone know what MIT is?), is an indication of just how flagrant it can be, even in high-profile positions. Outright lying is an uncommon, extreme example, but resume inflation is much more insidious and pervasive. If your title is Manager, everyone knows that when you indicate on your resume that you were “responsible for the launch of the company’s lead product,” or “doubled product revenues,” chances are you weren’t single-handedly “responsible” for the accomplishment. Is it appropriate to take credit for it? Yes, but only if you were truly responsible for all the heavy lifting. If you were part of a team of three manager-level people, no. It will ultimately come out in the diligence, so don’t exaggerate. Think of it this way: if your title is CEO and your resume states “responsible for...,” it has a very different meaning from the same wording on the resume of a manager at that company who was tasked with that objective. Recruiters and employers appreciate that distinction, but don’t get caught making your role something it’s not. An inflated resume might get you a job in which you are successful for many years. If an overstatement is discovered, however, at a minimum you jeopardize your relationship with your employer; at a maximum you risk your job. Just ask Ms. Jones.

Sins of omission are just as bad. Older candidates often omit dates from their educational experience so that recruiters and employers can’t do the math to figure out how old they are. When you are sending out your resume where the objective is to get a recruiter to focus on your content and not your age, it’s a reasonable strategy (even though when recruiters see dates missing they know something’s up). At some point, however, you will be face to face with the other party, so your age will be evident, unless you’re spending lots of money at the Lancôme counter or on Grecian Formula. If you’re an accomplished executive, it won’t matter – your experience and accomplishments will speak for themselves. Also, don’t omit bad decisions or gaps. You don’t need to label every moment you were out of work or at a position that didn’t work out after the first three months, but again, it will eventually come out, so make sure the dates on your resume are consistent and add up. Lots of people now do “different” things (opening a Vermont country inn) during an otherwise straightforward career trajectory. Don’t be embarrassed by them, cast them as broadening, learning experiences. It is far more common than it used to be, and doesn’t carry the same stigma it once did. You don’t need to highlight these left turns, but don’t try to hide them, either. They will come back to haunt you.

### ***Standard formatting***

This is becoming less of an issue given the emergence of web-based applications for the search industry, but nonetheless, the reality is that the vast majority of “back office” work in recruiting is done electronically, so stay away from fancy formatting. Your resume will be entered into some kind of database, so you don’t want to make it hard to read in an application

with comparatively rudimentary formatting capabilities. Tables can be a disaster, indents don't usually work, custom bullets are a nightmare, headers and footers can wreak havoc, and forget about photos. Many firms don't re-format what they receive from candidates, so you want to think about how you will be reflected to your potential employer. Remember that if you're putting all those things in your resume, you greatly increase the likelihood that something won't import correctly. They all look nice on paper (using YOUR software, on YOUR printer...), but may not do so well when transmitted over the internet.

### ***Company information***

Give a brief (ONE or TWO sentence) description of each employer listed on your resume. Even the most experienced recruiter can't claim to know every single company in a given industry, let alone those outside his or her given area of expertise. When you list a company, provide some context: xyloPhlegm, Inc., Evansville IN, is a public biotech company with \$25M in annual revenues in 2006 and a market cap of \$127M. Key products include xyLoxin for male pattern baldness and xyTox for sepsis. Name, location, public/private, industry, how big it is, products. Not the annual report; just enough for your reader to get a general sense for the organization. You may think that everyone has heard of your company. Indeed, perhaps they should have. But don't think that just because your company is "...the world's largest provider of blue widgets to the defense industry," that someone from outside that world will know anything about it. In an increasingly technologically driven world, recruiters often need to hire out of a mature industry for a position in a bleeding edge one because there simply are no experienced managers in the new industry. It helps if you can tell us what your present company is doing to amuse itself.

### ***Contact information***

Is your contact information accurate? A certain amount of back room trading of resumes goes on in the search business. If yours does not have up-to-date contact information on it, recruiters won't be able to get in touch with you, and it's always surprising to see errors in things like phone numbers on a resume. Many potential candidates are concerned about releasing their information too broadly. There is a balance here – you need to provide enough information to allow yourself to be contacted, but not so much that your privacy is at risk. In this age, though, it is painfully simple to have multiple email addresses, so use a potentially disposable email address (THAT YOU CHECK REGULARLY) on your resume. Home addresses are usually preferred – they change less frequently than work addresses. Perhaps more important than an address, though, is a phone number. If you put your work number on your resume, be prepared to receive a recruiter call at your work number. If you're concerned about that, either don't put it on, or make a note on your resume that you are conducting a confidential search. Whatever you do, don't make it hard for a recruiter to find you – you increase the chances that they'll just move on to the next resume.

### ***Summary Statements***

Many people have a summary statement at the beginning of their resume stating what their strengths are and what type of position they are seeking. There are differing schools of thought on whether or not it's valuable. Some argue that it is an easy way for someone to get a sense of who and what you are without reading the entire resume. Others say that a few sentences may direct the reader's thinking to one or two aspects of the document, and they may

not go any further if they don't read what they're looking for. Still others say nobody reads it anyway. This is a judgment call. The dark secret is that it's true – not everybody reads them. Again, it's a volume question. When a recruiter is dealing with a defined position description and a client who is keen on several key elements in a candidate's background, he or she needs to scan resumes quickly to see if the key elements are there. The summaries don't have that level of detail. My recommendation is to have one on a general resume that you use to share with colleagues and recruiters, but when you have a position description and are applying for a particular position, I'd delete it (or at least recast it to the position) before sending in your resume. The one exception here is if you have done two or more substantively different things in your career, and you need to avoid the pitfall that a recruiter scans your resume quickly and, by just looking at company names or titles, typecasts you. That is, if you were, for example, primarily responsible for diagnostic sales at companies that are predominantly known as pharma companies, or if you were doing software sales early in your career (let's say for a healthcare software company) and you transitioned into pharma sales, you might want to say a few words about that at the top of your resume.

Another trend is to aggregate all your "features" (Built..., Led..., Developed..., Organized..., Conducted..., Provided...) at the beginning of your resume. Many of my colleagues (and I) don't like this format because it doesn't indicate where (what company) these wonderful accomplishments occurred. A straightforward, reverse chronological format is generally preferred.

Well, if this were my resume, I wouldn't be surprised if nobody read it – it's way too long. The take home message is to keep your resume uncluttered, bulletized instead of long prose, and think about the typical short attention span recruiter reading it and trying to decide whether to keep it or toss it. It shouldn't be a list of every gold star you got in your career, but rather, where you made significant contributions. State clearly what the contribution was and why it mattered. Remember: it's a resume, not your molecular structure. Get your point across succinctly and you'll have much better luck getting in the door – which is the point of having a resume in the first place.

### About the Author

Chris Palatucci, PhD, is the founding Partner of Palatucci Executive Search, LLC (PES), a rapidly growing boutique retained executive search firm focused on the life sciences and bio-related cleantech industries. Prior to founding PES, Chris was recruited to build the life sciences practice at Polachi, a leading retained executive search firm. He has successfully completed senior searches for companies ranging from venture-backed startups to major multinationals.

Dr. Palatucci has over 15 years experience in the life sciences, with demonstrated success in business development, marketing, operations, sales and government affairs. Previously, Chris served as senior director, business development and licensing at Interleukin Genetics, Inc., director of business development at Athena Diagnostics, Inc. and at Kendall Strategies, Dr. Palatucci conducted strategic and financial analysis on a wide range of therapeutic and other products in multiple disease areas.

He is invited frequently to speak at both the local and national levels on topics ranging from the genetics of renal disease to public policy issues related to the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries.

Dr. Palatucci received his undergraduate degree (Biology and Computer Science) from the University of Rochester and his Ph.D. (Neuroscience) from Clark University, where his research was the first demonstration of behavioral improvement following brain injury using a novel glial-derived molecule. He also conducted pre- and post-doctoral research on the basic neurobiology of the vertebrate olfactory system at the Worcester Foundation for Biomedical Research.

