
Your resume's regular "maintenance schedule"

By Eli Amdur

With so much attention being paid to writing great resumes, let's turn to something that needs as much emphasis: maintaining your resume on a regular and frequent basis. Keeping your resume up to date is just as important as writing a good one to begin with.

But how many people do this? Honest now, when was the last time you updated your resume as a regular exercise, not because you suddenly found yourself out of a job? If it was more than six months ago, that's too long.

In an age when we've learned to think proactively (there's that word again – my primary recurring theme for this year) about things like preventative medicine, eating right, exercising, energy, and so on, we haven't seemed to transfer that thinking to resumes. And in this age of rapid, seismic changes, keeping your resume current makes even more sense.

This has always been important; now it's critical. More than ever, we have to be prepared for anything – in our careers, jobs, and (in general) life. If the last decade has taught us anything about the job market, it's that anything can happen at any time.

And when those things happen, either you've been ready all along or you have to react. Which sounds better? What if you were continuously in a position of not having to react? What if you were one step ahead of the curve, not one step behind it? What if you were "always tucked up and ready for a start," in Henry David Thoreau's immortal words from *Walden*?

Proactive means many things: being current in your field, staying abreast of new developments, keeping educational and professional development up to date, networking regularly, and having a resume that is no more than six months old. Of all these initiatives, keeping your resume current is the easiest. Yet it's the most neglected.

Not one person who ever called me over my years as an independent career coach has ever answered my "When's the last time you updated your resume?" question with the right reply. (You don't even want to know some of the worst answers!)

There are three critical reasons to keep resumes current. First, anything can happen at any time, including losing your job. In the "Great Recession" there is no one who hasn't lost a job or knows someone who has. Although things are decidedly improving, the trend is not over. Therefore, plain and simple, you're probably going to need an up-to-date resume sooner than you might want to think.

Second, it's part of proactive networking. Another thing we've learned while taking our lumps over the last five years or so, is that networking is more important than ever, and the cardinal rule of networking is "A.B.C." – "Always Be Connecting." So while you're connecting, you must be ready to follow up and follow through with an up-to-date resume.

And third, your memory isn't as good as you think. It's actually funny (in a self-deprecating way if you're an older boomer like me), that there seems to be an immutable law of career nature that an inverse relationship exists between length of resume and length of memory. Alas, they go in opposite directions, fellow boomers, y'know? And as for all you young-uns, it's coming!

Seriously, can you remember everything you did since the last time you updated your resume: every project, committee, accomplishment, or result? Of course not! No one can. As time moves on, we tend to forget details first, followed by the bigger ideas, to the point that we forget entire episodes that should be in the resume. But those are all the things that make your resume a compelling document.

Actually, to do this well, you don't even want to get to the six-month point and then ask, "OK, what have I done?" Stuff still will have slipped through the cracks. So starting now, make sure you do this twice a year without fail.

Here are five simple steps.

1. Keep a log. Each week, take 15 minutes to jot down the things you've done. Surely you won't be entering major, earth-shattering accomplishments every week, but that's actually all the more reason to keep ongoing records of what you do. Sooner or later, that project is over or that committee finishes its work. The end result is important, but often, some of the details make for a great story.

2. While you're keeping that log, go back and review your emails and other correspondence. You'll find nuggets in there, for sure.

3. Regularly review your goals and objectives. These are your accomplishments waiting to happen. As you reach them, they're really writing your resume for you.

4. Every six months, critically examine your six-month old resume. Is that last bullet point on the job from 17 years ago still significant? Are the positive results from one of your most recent accomplishments still coming in? In other words, that client base you expanded to 200 clients, has it grown to 250? Have revenues continued to climb even though you were promoted out of that job a year ago? As time passes, things should naturally fall off your resume as newer ones become pre-potent.

5. Mark your calendar ahead of time with your update dates. Adhere to this schedule.

Maintain your resume like you service your car – regularly – so when you need it, it will be in good running condition.