

THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT REPORTS

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1. Ten Keys to a Dynamite Resume

To help you construct a better, more powerful resume, here are ten overall considerations in regard to your resume's content and presentation:

- 1. Position title and job description.** Provide your title, plus a detailed explanation of your duties and accomplishments. Since job titles are often misleading or their function may vary from one company to another, your resume should tell the reader exactly what you've done.
- 2. Clarity of dates and place.** Document your work history and educational credentials accurately. Don't leave the reader guessing where and when you were employed, or when you earned your degree.
- 3. Explicitness.** Let the reader know the nature, size and location of your past employers, and what their business is.
- 4. Detail.** Specify some of the more technical, or involved aspects of your past work or training, especially if you've performed tasks of any complexity, or significance.
- 5. Proportion.** Give appropriate attention to jobs or educational credentials according to their length, or importance to the reader. For example, if you wish to be considered for an engineering position, don't write one paragraph describing your current engineering job, followed by three paragraphs about your summer job as a lifeguard.
- 6. Relevancy.** Confine your information to that which is job-related or clearly demonstrates a pattern of success. Concentrate only on subject matter that addresses the needs of the employer.
- 7. Length.** Fill up only a page or two. If you write more than two pages, it sends a signal to the reader that you can't organize your thoughts, or you're trying too hard to make a good impression. If your content is strong, you won't need more than two pages.
- 8. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation.** Create an error-free document that's representative of an educated person. If you're unsure about the correctness of your writing (or if English is your second language), consult a professional writer or editor.
- 9. Readability.** Organize your thoughts in a clear, concise manner. No resume ever won a Nobel Prize for literature; however, a fragmented or long-winded resume will virtually assure you of a place at the back of the line.
- 10. Readability.** Be sure to select a conventional type style, such as Times Roman or Arial, and choose a neutral background or stationery. If your resume takes too much effort to read, it may end up in the trash, even if you have terrific skills.

Finally, I suggest you write several drafts, and allow yourself time to review your work and proofread for errors. If you have a professional associate whose opinion you trust, by all means, listen to what he or she has to say. A simple critique can make the difference between an interview and a rejection.

2. Resume Design: Tips and Templates That Get Results

Employers prefer crisp-looking resumes that get to the point. By using the example on this page as a template, you'll improve both the style *and* the substance your resume.

Layout

Add interest and clarity by using bullets, indents and varying font styles (such as bold and italic letters). Avoid using unconventional fonts or adding photos or graphics.

Length

The general rule is: one page for early-career (entry level to 5-10 years); two pages for mid-career candidates.

Job Data

Provide the reader with relevant detail about your past and present employers, such as product information, size and physical location.

Measurables

Quantify your job duties, reporting relationships and achievements with actual numbers.

Job and Education Dates

Make sure the dates are clear and without gaps. If you're a mid- to late-career candidate, you can save space by lumping early-career jobs together.

Degree Credentials

Please be accurate—and *honest*. Misrepresenting your degree is unethical, and could result in consequences that are embarrassing—or worse.

3. A Stronger Resume Will Increase Your Odds

Reality Check: Given the choice of two candidates of equal ability, hiring managers will always prefer to interview the one with the most artfully constructed and attractive resume. For that reason, candidates with superb qualifications are often overlooked. And companies end up hiring from a more shallow pool of talent; a pool made up of those candidates whose experience is represented by powerfully written, visually appealing resumes.

Of course, many of the best candidates also have the best resumes; and sometimes, highly qualified candidates manage to surface through word-of-mouth referral. In fact, the referral method is the one I use to present talented people to my client companies.

But unless you can afford to rely on your “reputation,” or on the recommendation of a barracuda recruiter, you’ll need more than the right qualifications to get the job you want—you’ll need a dynamite resume.

In today’s competitive employment market, your resume has to stand out in order to get the attention of the decision maker and create a strong impression. And later on, when you meet the prospective employer face to face, a strong resume will act as a valuable tool during the interviewing process.

Truth in Advertising

The best way to prepare a dynamite resume is not to change the facts, just make them more presentable. This can be accomplished in two ways: [1] by strengthening the content of your resume; and [2] by enhancing its appearance.

Although there’s no federal regulatory agency like the FDA or FCC to act as a watchdog, I consider it to be ethical common sense to honestly and clearly document your credentials. In other words, don’t make exaggerated claims about your past.

Remember, your resume is written for the employer, not for you. Its main purpose, once in the hands of the reader, is to answer the following questions: How do you present yourself to others? What have you done in the past? And what are you likely to accomplish in the future?

In addition to providing a factual representation of your background, your resume serves as an advertisement. The more effective your 30-second commercial, the more the customer—the employer— will want to buy the expertise you’re selling.

4. Choosing The Best Resume Format

Your resume can be arranged in one of two basic formats: summary or chronological.

- The *summary* (or functional) resume distills your total work experience into major areas of expertise, and focuses the reader's attention on your accumulated skills.
- The *chronological* resume presents your skills and accomplishments within the framework of your past employers. (Actually, it should be called a reverse chronological resume, since your last job should always appear first.)

Although the information you furnish the reader may essentially be the same, there's a big difference in the way the two resumes are constructed, and the type of impact each will have. My experience has shown that the chronological resume brings the best results, since it's the most explicit description of the quality and application of your skills within a specific time frame.

The summary resume, on the other hand, works well if you've changed jobs or careers often, and wish to downplay your work history and highlight your level of expertise. If a prospective hiring manager is specifically interested in a steady, progressively advancing employment history (as most are), then the summary resume will very likely work against you, since the format will seem confusing, and might arouse suspicions as to your potential for longevity.

However, if the employer's main concern is your technical or problem-solving ability, the summary resume will serve your needs just fine. Either way, you should always follow the guidelines mentioned earlier regarding content and appearance.

Crafting Your Resume "Objective"

Most employers find that a carefully worded statement of purpose will help them quickly evaluate your suitability for a given position. An objective statement can be particularly useful as a quick-screen device when viewed by the manager responsible for staffing several different types of positions. ("Let's see; programmers in this pile, plant managers in that pile...")

While a stated objective gives you the advantage of targeting your employment goals, it can also work against you. A hiring manager lacking in imagination or who's hard pressed for time will often overlook a resume with an objective that doesn't conform to the exact specifications of a position opening. That means that if your objective reads "Vice President position with a progressive, growth-oriented company," you may limit your options and not be considered for the job of regional manager for a struggling company in a mature market—a job you may enjoy and be well suited to.

If you're pretty sure of the exact position you want in the field or industry you're interested in, then state it in your objective. Otherwise, broaden your objective or leave it off the resume.

5. Beefing Up an Anemic Resume

To get the most mileage out of your resume, you'll want to emphasize certain aspects of your background. By doing so, you'll present your qualifications in the most favorable light, and help give the employer a better understanding of your potential value to his or her organization. To build a stronger case for your candidacy, try highlighting the following areas of interest:

Professional achievements of particular interest. For example, if you're in sales, the first thing a hiring manager will want to know is your sales volume, and how you ranks with your peers. If you've won awards, reached goals or made your company money, let the employer know.

Educational accomplishments. List your degree(s) and/or relevant course work, thesis or dissertation, or specialized training. Be sure to mention any special honors, scholarships, or awards you may have received, such as Dean's List, Cum Laude, or Phi Beta Kappa.

Additional areas of competency. These might include computer software fluency, dollar amount of monthly raw materials purchased, or specialized training.

Professional designations that carry weight in your field. If you're licensed or certified in your chosen profession or belong to a trade organization, by all means let the reader know.

Success indicators. You should definitely include anything in your past that might distinguish you as a leader or achiever. Or, if you worked full time to put yourself through school, you should consider that experience a success indicator, and mention it on your resume.

Related experience. Anything that would be relevant to your prospective employer's needs. For example, if your occupation requires overseas travel or communication, list your knowledge of foreign languages. If you worked as a co-op student in college, especially in the industry you're currently in, let the reader know.

Military history. If you served in the armed forces, describe your length of service, branch of service, rank, special training, medals, and discharge and/or reserve status. Employers generally react favorably to military service experience.

Security clearances. Some industries require a clearance when it comes to getting hired or being promoted. If you're targeting an industry such as aerospace or defense, give your current and/or highest clearable status, and whether you've been specially checked by an investigative agency.

Citizenship or right to work. This should be mentioned if your industry requires it. Dual citizenship should also be mentioned, especially if you think you may be working in a foreign country.

In a competitive market, employers are always on the lookout for traits that distinguish one candidate from another. Not long ago, I worked with an engineering manager who mentioned the fact that he was a three-time national power speed boat champion on his resume. It came as no surprise that several employers warmed up to his resume immediately, and wanted to interview him.

6. The Dangers of Resume Overkill

Nearly everything written about resume design concentrates on what you should put in. But let's look at what should be left out, or at least minimized.

Item #1: Salary history or salary requirements.

I've never heard one good reason to mention your past, current, or expected salary. If you see a classified ad that says, "Only resumes with salary history will be considered," don't believe it. If your resume is strong enough, you'll be contacted. Once contacted, be forthright.

Item #2: References.

If you have high-impact or well known professional references, fine. Otherwise, "References: Available Upon Request" will do just fine. Avoid personal references like your minister or your attorney, unless they happen to be Billy Graham or Sandra Day O'Connor.

Item #3: Superfluous materials.

When submitting a resume, avoid enclosing such items as your thesis, photos, diplomas, transcripts, product samples, newspaper articles, blueprints, designs, or letters of recommendation. These are props you can use during your interview, but not before. The only thing other than your resume that's acceptable is your business card.

Item #4: Personal information.

Leave out anything other than the absolute essentials such as, "Married, two children, willing to relocate, excellent health." By listing your Masonic affiliation, save-the-whales activism or codependency support group, you could give the employer a reason to suspect that your outside activities may interfere with your work.

Not long ago, I received a resume from a candidate who felt the need to put his bowling average on his curriculum vita. The person must have thought that kind of information might improve his chances of being interviewed. Given the choice, would I show his resume to an employer? Not a chance.

Remember, the greater the relevancy between your resume and the needs of the employer, the more seriously your candidacy will be considered. Say what you need to get the job—and nothing more.

7. The Secret to Interview Success

Assuming you're qualified for the job, the outcome of your employment interview will be dependent on your ability to discover needs and empathize with the interviewer.

You can do this by asking questions that verify your understanding of what the interviewer has just said, without editorializing or expressing an opinion. By establishing empathy in this manner, you'll be in a better position to freely exchange ideas, and demonstrate your suitability for the job.

In addition to empathy, there are four other intangible fundamentals to a successful interview. These intangibles will influence the way your personality is perceived, and will affect the degree of rapport, or personal chemistry you'll share with the employer. They are:

Enthusiasm. Leave no doubt as to your level of interest in the job. You may think it's unnecessary to do this, but employers often choose the more enthusiastic candidate in the case of a two-way tie. Besides, it's best to keep your options open. Wouldn't you rather be in a position to turn down an offer, than have a prospective job evaporate from your grasp by giving a lethargic interview?

Technical interest. Employers look for people who love what they do, and get excited by the prospect of tearing into the nitty-gritty of the job.

Confidence. No one likes a braggart, but the candidate who's sure of his or her abilities will almost certainly be more favorably received.

Intensity. The last thing you want to do is come across as "flat" in your interview. There's nothing inherently wrong with being a laid back person; but sleepwalkers rarely get hired.

Most employers are aware of how stressful it can be to interview for a new position, and will do everything they can to put you at ease.

Other Important Factors

Since interviewing also involves the exchange of tangible information, always make sure to present your background in a thorough and accurate manner and gather data concerning the company, the industry, the position, and the specific opportunity

A worthwhile interviewing goal is to link your abilities with the company needs in the mind of the employer so you can build a strong case for why the company should hire you. The more you know about each other, the more potential you'll have for establishing rapport, and making an informed decision.

8. Don't Talk Yourself Out of a Job

There are two ways to answer interview questions: the short version and the long version. When a question is open-ended, I always suggest to candidates that they say, "Let me give you the short version. If we need to explore some aspect of the answer more fully, I'd be happy to go into greater depth, and give you the long version."

The reason you should respond this way is because it's often difficult to know what type of answer each question will need. A question like, "What was your most difficult assignment?" might take anywhere from thirty seconds to thirty minutes to answer, depending on the detail you choose to give.

Therefore, you must always remember that the interviewer's the one who asked the question. So you should tailor your answer to what he or she needs to know, without a lot of extraneous rambling or superfluous explanation. Why waste time and create a negative impression by giving a sermon when a short prayer would do just fine?

Let's suppose you were interviewing for a sales management position, and the interviewer asked you, "What sort of sales experience have you had in the past?"

Well, that's exactly the sort of question that can get you into trouble if you don't use the short version/long version method. Most people would just start rattling off everything in their memory that relates to their sales experience. Though the information might be useful to the interviewer, your answer could get pretty complicated and long-winded unless it's neatly packaged.

One way to answer the question might be, "I've held sales positions with three different instrumentation companies over a nine-year period. Where would you like me to start?"

Or, you might simply say, "Let me give you the short version first, and you can tell me where you want to go into more depth. I've had nine years experience in instrumentation product sales with three different companies, and held the titles of district, regional, and national sales manager. What aspect of my background would you like to concentrate on?"

By using this method, you telegraph to the interviewer that your thoughts are well organized, and that you want to understand the intent of the question before you travel too far in a direction neither of you wants to go. After you get the green light, you can spend your interviewing time discussing in detail the things that are important, not whatever happens to pop into your mind.

9. How to Answer Interview Questions

Here are eight of the most commonly asked (and basic) interviewing questions. Do yourself and the prospective employer a favor, and give them some thought before the interview occurs.

- What, in your opinion, are the companies strengths and weaknesses at this point? With the weaknesses, what strategies are in place to overcome them?

What do you think sets you apart from the competition?

- What are the companies greatest challenges right now and how are these challenges going to be met?
- How do you think this industry will change in the next five years?
- What is the companies' vision within the next 2-5 years? How are my job objectives aligned with that?
Could you describe your companies management style and what type of employees that would fit well with it?
- How important is this role with upper management and what skills you are seeking within the next individual?
- Why do you enjoy working for the company? Is there anything you would change if you could?

The last question is probably the hardest to answer: *What do you like least about your current job?*

I've found that rather than pointing out the faults of others (as in, "I can't stand the office politics," or, "My boss is a jerk"), it's best to place the burden on yourself ("I feel I'm ready to exercise a new set of professional muscles," or, "The type of technology I'm interested in isn't available to me now."). By answering in this manner, you'll avoid pointing the finger at someone else, or coming across as a whiner or complainer. It does no good to speak negatively about others.

I suggest you think through the answers to the eight questions above for two reasons.

First, it won't help your chances any to hem and haw over fundamental issues such as these. (The answers you give to these types of questions should be no-brainers.)

And second, the questions will help you evaluate your career choices before spending time and energy on an interview. If you don't feel comfortable with the answers you come up with, maybe the new job isn't right for you.

10. What Should You Ask the Interviewer?

A job interview will quickly disintegrate into an interrogation or monologue unless you ask some high quality questions of your own. Candidate questions are the lifeblood of any successful interview, because they create dialogue and help clarify your understanding of the company and the position responsibilities.

In addition the questions you ask serve to indicate your grasp of fundamental issues, reveal your ability to probe beyond the superficial and challenge the employer to reveal his or her own depth of knowledge and commitment to the job.

Your questions should always be slanted in such a way as to show empathy, interest, or understanding of the employer's needs. After all, the reason you're interviewing is because the employer's company has a piece of work that needs to be completed, or has a problem that needs correcting. Here are some questions that have proven to be very effective:

- What's the most important issue facing the company (or department)
- How can I help you accomplish this objective?
- How long has it been since you first identified this need?
- How long have you been trying to correct it?
- Have you tried using your present staff to get the job done? If so, what was the result?
- Is there any particular skill or attitude you feel is critical to getting the job done?
- Is there a certain aspect of my background you'd like to exploit to help accomplish your objectives?

Questions like these will not only give you a sense of the company's goals and priorities, they'll indicate to the interviewer your concern for satisfying the company's objectives.

11. Four Classic Interview Questions—and How to Prepare for Them

Experienced job seekers know there are four basic types of interview questions—and they prepare accordingly.

First, there are the *resume* questions. These relate to your past experience, skills, job responsibilities, education, upbringing, personal interests, and so forth.

Resume questions require accurate, objective answers, since your resume consists of facts which tend to be quantifiable (and verifiable). Try to avoid answers which exaggerate your achievements, or appear to be opinionated, vague, or egocentric.

Second, interviewers will usually want you to comment on your abilities, or assess your past performance. They'll ask *self-appraisal* questions like, "What do you think is your greatest asset?" or, "Can you tell me something you've done that was very creative?"

Third, interviewers like to know how you respond to different stimuli. *Situation* questions ask you to explain certain actions you took in the past, or require that you explore hypothetical scenarios that may occur in the future. "How would you stay profitable during a recession?" or, "How would you go about laying off 1300 employees?" or, "How would you handle customer complaints if the company drastically raised its prices?" are typical situation questions.

And last, some employers like to test your mettle with *stress* questions such as, "After you die, what would you like your epitaph to read?" or, "If you were to compare yourself to any U.S. president, who would it be?" or, "It's obvious your background makes you totally unqualified for this position. Why should we even waste our time talking?"

Stress questions are designed to evaluate your emotional reflexes, creativity, or attitudes while you're under pressure. Since off-the-wall or confrontational questions tend to jolt your equilibrium, or put you in a defensive posture, the best way to handle them is to stay calm and give carefully considered answers.

Remember, your sense of humor will come in handy during the entire interviewing process, just so long as you don't go over the edge. I heard of a candidate who, when asked to describe his ideal job, replied, "To have beautiful women rub my back with hot oil." Needless to say, he wasn't hired.

Even if it were possible to anticipate every interview question, memorizing dozens of stock answers would be impractical, to say the least. The best policy is to review your background, your priorities, and your reasons for considering a new position; and to handle the interview as honestly as you can. If you don't know the answer to a question, just say so, or ask for a moment to think about your response.

12. How Do I Discuss the Subject of Money?

During the employment interview, there's a good chance you'll be asked about your current and expected level of compensation. Here's the way to handle the following questions:

Question: What are you currently earning?

Answer: "My compensation, including bonus, is in the high-forties. I'm expecting my annual review next month, and that should put me in the low-fifties."

Question: What sort of money would you need to come to work here?

Answer: "I feel that the opportunity is the most important issue, not salary. If we decide to work together, I'm sure you'll make me a fair offer."

In the answer to the first question, notice the way a range was given, not a specific dollar figure. However, in a situation in which the interviewer presses for a exact answer, then by all means, be precise, in terms of salary, bonus, benefits, expected increase, and so forth.

With respect to the second question, if the interviewer tries to zero in on your expected compensation, you should also suggest a range, as in, "I would need something in the low- to mid- sixties." Getting locked in to an exact figure may work against you later, in one of two ways: either the number you give is lower than you really want to accept; or the number appears too high or too low to the employer, and an offer never comes. By using a range, you can keep your options open.

Don't Come On Too Strong

Unless you're pinned down in the early stages of the interview, the best time to talk about money is after you've established mutual interest. If you initiate a discussion about salary and benefits, you run the risk of giving the employer the impression that money is the most important reason for your job search.

From a tactical standpoint, it makes the most sense to build your value and exercise restraint before the subject ever comes up. The greater your asset value is in the eyes of the employer, the stronger your offer will be. The principal objective during the first and second interview is to explore the opportunity and your potential contribution relative to the goals of the department or organization. Focusing on the money only sidetracks the greater issue of whether you and the employer can be productive and happy working together.

Once you know the job fits—and the employer sees your value—you'll usually be able to agree on a fair price for your services.

13. How to Evaluate a Job Offer

Let's assume your employment interview went well, and there's sincere and mutual interest on both sides. You now need to decide two things: first, whether the new position is right for you; and if so, what sort of offer you'd be willing to accept. To help in the decision-making process, take the following test as a way to compare the two positions.

Position Comparison Guide

Directions: Compare the new job with what you already have.

Old job	New job	Element under consideration
		Position title
		Supervisory responsibility
		Project authority
		Decision-making autonomy
		Freedom to implement ideas
		Ability to affect change
		Promotion potential
		Challenge of tasks
		Ability to meet expectations
		Access to professional development
		Professional growth potential
		Company/industry growth
		Company/industry stability
		Starting salary, benefits, perks
		Future compensation
		Commuting distance
		Travel requirements
		Work environment
		Rapport with co-workers
		Rapport with management
		Comfort with corporate culture
		Other considerations (specify)
		Total score: New job vs. old job

14. Your Next Job: What Does it Really Pay?

Compensation will be a key factor in your decision whether to accept a new position. However, few people take the time to really understand their economic choices, mostly because there are so many hidden factors, such as cost of living, benefits, and so forth. To help you put your choices into perspective, use the following guide to evaluate your prospective compensation package with what you're currently earning.

Position Compensation Guide

Directions: Compare the economics of the old and new job.

Current Job	New Job	Element to Consider
\$	\$	Base salary
\$	\$	Bonus, commissions
\$	\$	Additional perks
\$	\$	Profit sharing potential
\$	\$	Value of stock or equity
\$	\$	Pension
\$	\$	401(k) contribution
\$	\$	Reimbursed expenses
\$	\$	Cost of living differences
\$	\$	Moving expenses
\$	\$	Travel expenses
\$	\$	Insurance premiums
\$	\$	Property taxes
\$	\$	State, local taxes
\$	\$	Sales taxes
\$	\$	Other expenses (specify)
\$	\$	\$ Difference (+/-)

Regardless of where compensation ranks on your list of priorities, it's a good idea to know what you may be getting into when faced with a career decision.

15. Salary Negotiation Techniques

The best approach to putting the deal together is to decide whether you want the job before an offer is extended. This allows you to clarify whether the job suits your needs. Unless you're motivated solely by money, it's doubtful a few extra dollars will turn a bad job into a good one.

The term "bottom line" refers to the amount of compensation you feel is absolutely necessary to accept the job offer. If, for example, you really want \$76,000 but would think about \$75,000 or settle for \$74,000, then you haven't established your bottom line. The bottom line is one dollar more than the figure you would positively walk away from. Setting a bottom line clarifies your sense of worth, and helps avoid an unpredictable bargaining session.

I recommend against "negotiating" an offer in the classic sense, where the company makes a proposal, you counter it, they counter your counter, and so on. While this type of back-and-forth format may be customary for negotiating a residential real estate deal, job offers should be handled in a more straightforward manner.

Here's how: Determine your bottom line in advance, and wait for the offer. If the company offers you more than your bottom line, great. If they offer you less, then you have the option of turning the offer down or revealing to them your bottom line as a condition of acceptance. At that point, they can raise the ante or walk away. And once the bottom line is known, you can avoid the haggling that so often causes aggravation, disappointment, or hurt feelings.

By determining your own acceptance conditions in advance, you'll never be accused of negotiating in bad faith or of being indecisive. Whether you're representing yourself or working with a recruiter, learning to differentiate between financial fact and fantasy will facilitate the job changing process.

If you feel the need to justify your salary request, you can itemize any loss of income that may result from a differential in benefits, geographic location, car expenses, and so forth.

Often, there are considerations aside from money that need to be satisfied before an offer can be accepted. Factors such as the new position title, review periods, work schedule, vacation allotment, and promotion opportunities are important, and should be looked at carefully.

You can use this approach to quantify each consideration or "point" you need to satisfy as a condition for acceptance. Once you and the company settle on each point, you won't need to go back later to negotiate "one more thing." Knowing your bottom line puts you in a better position to get what you want, since you've established a set of quantifiable conditions needed for acceptance.

16. The Strategic Case for Changing Jobs

There are many deeply personal reasons to change your employment situation. However, from a purely strategic point of view, there are four good reasons to change jobs within the same (or similar) industry three times during your first ten years of employment:

Reason #1: Changing jobs gives you a broader base of experience: After about three years, you've learned most of what you're going to know about how to do your job. Therefore, over a ten year period, you gain more experience from "three times 90 percent" than "one times 100 percent."

Reason #2: A more varied background creates a greater demand for your skills: Depth of experience means you're more valuable to a larger number of employers. You're not only familiar with your current company's product, service, procedures, quality programs, inventory system, and so forth; you bring with you the expertise you've gained from your prior employment with other companies.

Reason #3: A job change results in an accelerated promotion cycle: Each time you make a change, you bump up a notch on the promotion ladder. You jump, for example, from project engineer to senior project engineer; or national sales manager to vice president of sales and marketing.

Reason #4: More responsibility leads to greater earning power: A promotion is usually accompanied by a salary increase. And since you're being promoted faster, your salary grows at a quicker pace, sort of like compounding the interest you'd earn on a certificate of deposit.

Many people view a job change as a way of promoting themselves to a better position. And in most cases, I would agree. However, you should always be sure your new job offers you the means to satisfy your values. While there's no denying the strategic virtues of selective job changing for the purpose of career leverage, you want to make sure the path you take will lead you where you really want to go.

For instance, there's no reason to change jobs for more money if it'll make you unhappy to the point of distraction. In fact, I've found that money usually has no influence on a career decision unless it materially affects your lifestyle or self-identity.

To me, the "best" job is one in which your values are being satisfied most effectively. If career growth and advancement are your primary goals, and they're represented by how much you earn, then the job that pays the most money is the "better" job.

17. Career Strategy: It Pays to Diversify

Would you dump your life savings—every single dollar—into a single stock? Probably not; it's far too risky to put all your eggs in one investment basket.

And yet, you'd be surprised how many people manage their careers with a single-stock mindset. They toil away, year after year, investing their talents in a narrow field of interest.

Until recently, this approach made a lot of sense. Conventional wisdom dictates that if you do one thing really well, you'll never be out of a job.

But times have changed, and so have strategies. While it's still true that a solid career is built on a foundation of position-specific expertise, it's become increasingly important to maintain a balanced portfolio.

When employers look for talent, they typically settle for people with the proficiency to perform certain tasks. But what they *really* want—especially in today's hyper-competitive market—is an adaptable breed of cat, whose broad-based set of skills crosses over into a variety of disciplines.

Want proof? Poke your head into any meeting room in which star performers are present. You're likely to hear a sales manager exploring the potential of XML technology; or an engineer debating the virtues of a strategic alliance; or a CFO pondering the benefits of a co-branding opportunity.

In other words, as organizations flatten, more is expected from each individual contributor. Which means that versatility is not only fashionable, it's become a key ingredient in modern-day career progression.

Now, I'm not suggesting you spread yourself so thin as to master nothing at all. But in order to reach top-percentile status in today's rugged job market, you'll need an expanded arsenal of skills to deploy.

To round out your resume, look for areas of weakness (or "blind spots"), and try to develop them into strengths. For example, if you're a design engineer and you want to improve your company's product or advance its market position, here are some issues to consider:

By gaining knowledge in areas that were formerly considered the domain of "somebody else," you'll increase your overall market value. The more you can offer a multiple spectrum of knowledge—rather than a single color of skill—the less likely you'll be to paint yourself into a corner.

18. The Proper Way to Resign

Once a new job has been accepted, you need to consider is the timing of your resignation. Since two weeks' notice is considered the norm, make sure your resignation properly coincides with your start date at the new company.

Try to avoid an extended start date. Even if your new job begins in 10 weeks, don't give 10 weeks' notice; wait eight weeks and then give two weeks' notice. This way, you'll protect yourself from disaster, in the unlikely event your new company announces a hiring freeze a month before you come on board. By staying at your old job for only two weeks after you've announced your resignation, you won't be subjected to the envy, scorn, or feelings of professional impotence that may result from your new role as a lame-duck employee.

Some companies will make your exit plans for you. I know a candidate whose employer had the security guard escort him out of the building the moment he announced his intention to go to work for a direct competitor. Fortunately, he was still given two weeks' pay.

Your resignation should be handled in person, preferably on a Friday afternoon. Ask your direct supervisor if you can speak with him privately in his office. When you announce your intention to resign, you should also hand your supervisor a letter which states your last date of employment with the company. Let him know that you've enjoyed working with him, but that an opportunity came along that you couldn't pass up, and that your decision to leave was made carefully, and doesn't reflect any negative feelings you have toward the company or the staff.

You should also add that your decision is final, and that you would prefer not to be made a counteroffer, since you wouldn't want your refusal to accept more money to appear as a personal affront. Let your supervisor know that you appreciate all the company's done for you; and that you'll do everything in your power to make your departure as smooth and painless as possible.

Finally, ask if there's anything you can do during the transition period over the next two weeks, such as help train your successor, tie up loose ends, or delegate tasks.

Keep your resignation letter short, simple, and to the point. There's no need to go into detail about your new job, or what led to your decision to leave. If these issues are important to your old employer, he'll schedule an exit interview for you, at which time you can hash out your differences ad infinitum. Be sure to provide a carbon copy or photocopy of your resignation letter for your company's personnel file. This way, the circumstances surrounding your resignation will be well documented for future reference.

19. How to Leave a Job Gracefully

Imagine a co-worker who trashes his cubicle, plays practical jokes on his replacement and slinks off with the copier on his last day of work. Is this a person you'd recommend to a prospective employer? Or expect your company to rehire? Or want to work with again? Probably not.

We can only hope that the reported antics surrounding the Clintons' White House exodus are untrue, because bad behavior—from a chief executive, no less—degrades the employment experience for the rest of us.

When faced with leaving a job, it's best to exercise decorum, whether the move is voluntary or forced. To make the best of an awkward situation, here are some tips to remember:

- Keep your mouth shut. Leaving a job (like ending a personal relationship) is strictly a private matter; and waving your dirty laundry serves no purpose.
- Stay cool. Even in the context of a “confidential” exit interview, there's nothing to gain from scorching the Earth.
- Keep your distance. Soliciting support (or fomenting dissent) from your co-workers might create the impression of a conspiracy or *coup d'etat*—and unwittingly implicate innocent people.
- Burn bridges at your own peril. The company you left yesterday may need your services tomorrow. If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say it.

Sure, it's easy to be gracious when everything's rosy. But it takes an extra dose of character to act like an adult when the going gets tough. If you're ever caught in a sudden employment shift, try to maintain your composure and consider the consequences of your actions.

Workplace trends like flexible schedules and casual Fridays may come and go—but good manners are forever.

Otherwise, Shakespeare wouldn't have written, “A person is remembered for his entrances and exits.”

20. Your Resignation: Beware the Retaliatory Strike

If your intention to make a job change is sincere, and nothing will change your decision to leave, you should still keep up your guard.

Why? Because unless you know how to diffuse your current employer's retaliation, you may end up psychologically wounded, or right back at the job you wanted to leave.

The best way to shield yourself from the inevitable mixture of emotions surrounding the act of submitting your resignation is to remember that employers follow a predictable, three-stage pattern when faced with a resignation:

Tactic #1: Your boss will express his shock. "You sure picked a fine time to leave! Who's going to finish the work we started?" he might say.

The implication is that you're irreplaceable. The company might as well ask, "How will we ever live without you?" To answer this assertion, you can reply, "If I were run over by a truck on my way to work tomorrow, I feel that somehow, this company would survive."

Tactic #2: Your boss will start to probe. "Who's the new company? What sort of position did you accept? What are they paying you?"

Here you must be careful not to disclose too much information, or appear too enthusiastic. Otherwise, you run the risk of feeding your current employer with ammunition he can use against you later, such as, "I've heard some pretty terrible things about your new company" or, "They'll make everything look great until you actually get there. Then you'll see what a sweat shop that place really is."

Tactic #3: Your boss will make you an offer to try and keep you from leaving. "You know that raise you and I were talking about a few months back? Well, I forgot to tell you: We were just getting it processed yesterday."

To this you can respond, "Gee, today you seem pretty concerned about my happiness and well-being. Where were you yesterday, before I announced my intention to resign?"

It may take several days for the three stages to run their course, but believe me, sooner or later, you'll find yourself engaged in conversations similar to these. More than once, candidates have called me after they've resigned, to tell me that their old company followed the three-stage pattern exactly as I described it. Not only were they better prepared to diffuse a counteroffer attempt, they found the whole sequence to be almost comical in its predictability.