



# Resume Talk

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*An interview with Karen Swim*

Transcript of interview with career marketing professional, Karen Swim of Words For Hire and Get Career Help.

## Resume Talk

Decades ago, candidates could walk into a potential employer and apply for a job. They would have the opportunity to speak with an owner, manager or someone authorized to give them a position. As technology advanced and competition for jobs increased we had to do more than agree on a handshake to a job. Today, our first job is rarely our last, and we no longer source and hire candidates without a great deal of paperwork and background checking. Many people resent the resume process believing that a piece of paper should not hinder you from receiving a job. Yet, we need a system to evaluate buying decisions and for now the resume is that document for hiring authorities.

We use resumes to reflect our professional experience, knowledge and abilities. The utility goes beyond the job search. Resumes are used for board consultancies, publishing opportunities, freelance projects, speaking events and more. A resume can be used to market to a prospective client or employer. A good one will accurately reflect you and be an effective tool in your marketing toolkit.

The resume is by no means a magic bullet but a tool. In this interview, Bill Merrow who has extensive experience in business and executive recruiting sat down to ask me every imaginable question about the resume. While the interview is a couple of years old the information remains relevant to today's market. Reading this will provide you with a deeper understanding of the value, purpose and content of a resume.

It is my hope that your understanding will be enhanced and that you will take away actionable information.

To your success,

*Karen*

## Resume Talk Teleseminar

Bill Merrow:

This is Bill Merrow with Upward Career Mobility. I would like to thank all of our members for joining us for today's Career Acceleration Teleseminar. We have a guest today who can really provide some rocket fuel for your career. She's the owner of a career services firm called Words for Hire. She's also the leader of our resume services here at Upward Career Mobility where she's helped many of our members develop their very own killer resume. So without further ado let's welcome Mrs. Karen Swim to our call. Thanks for joining us Karen.

Karen Swim:

Why thank you Bill. It's so great to be here with you this morning.

Bill Merrow:

Now Karen tell us a little bit about your journey to Words for Hire and to working on resumes. What's the story?

Karen Swim:

I've worked so many things in my life the journey was definitely not a straight path but one with lots of interesting curves and turns. I actually got into resume writing and career marketing quite by accident. I started probably a little over two decades ago and I hate to admit that because then I have to admit that I'm older than twenty. I started doing them just for my own personal career marketing services. So I did a little reading and wanted to put together the best resume for myself and I did such a great job that colleagues, friends and family members began coming to me to ask for assistance with their resumes. So it started as something that I did as a hobby while working in corporate America. A couple of years ago when I was making the transformation from corporate into becoming an entrepreneur and started to investigate different avenues to be able to pursue my passion of writing. I stumbled across resume development and career marketing and it definitely piqued my interest because it was something that I had enjoyed doing. But I had no idea there was this whole scientific, technical side to it. I had the opportunity to study with one of the gurus of the industry and learn the technical side and jumped right into it and started helping people achieve their career dreams.

Bill Merrow:

Well it sure helps to start building all that experience when you start your career when you are nine, right?

Karen Swim:

It sure does. I was a very goal oriented youngster.

Bill Merrow:

So tell us more about the business today. What exactly do you do? And why are you special?

Karen Swim:

Well, what I do is, I assist clients with their career marketing needs. I do that by helping them to develop their key marketing document which is the resume. Then I also help them with all types of career marketing communications which would include cover letters, post interview communications, I help them with their job search strategies. And obviously through relationships with other professionals such as Upward Career Mobility we are able to offer them full services. Job coaching, placement, and anything around really managing their career. In helping clients to develop their resume I am fortunate to really be able to also help them to clarify their goals. And I believe that what I bring to the table that may be a little different, my unique experience is I come from a sales and marketing background. So I immediately saw the resume for what it truly is a marketing document. And understanding the elements of marketing and being able to apply that to personal marketing has really helped me to be a greater help to my clients.

*I immediately saw the resume for what it truly is a marketing document.*

Bill Merrow:

Certainly anybody who is pursuing any kind of professional career that they have a resume and resumes have been part of managing and accelerating your career for a long time. It just seems like recently the quality of the resume and the strategy for the resume has become so much more important. Why has that happened that there is so much more attention on getting your resume right?

Karen Swim:

I absolutely believe that's because the competition has so significantly increased for every open position. And obviously with the global market place you now are not only competing with people in your area but people who are willing to relocate for positions. So whenever there is an opening or a potential opening a hiring manager or an HR professional may be looking at receiving in excess of three hundred resumes for each opening. So with that competition it's impossible to interview all those people to determine whether or not they are the right fit so the resume becomes critical because it's your introduction to the employer. And that is exactly what the employer uses to determine whether or not it's worth it to bring you in for an interview or whether you simply go into the do not call pile.

Bill Merrow:

I know for a hiring manager getting those three hundred resumes must be absolutely overwhelming but you probably see a lot more than that, some really good ones and some that are even on the entertaining side. So what do you see as the greatest challenge or problem with the resumes that come across your desk?

Karen Swim:

I will say that one of the greatest problems is that people under value the importance of a resume. So there seems to be that belief out there that simply presenting your experience is okay. And the documents don't ever seem to have said what their objectives are. For instance what people will do typically is pull out their job descriptions and they may look at their 360's from the past couple of years and they will insert big fact wording on their resume and that's great to look back on the things that you have done but that doesn't tell a potential employer why you are a fit for their organization and what you can do for them. So the greatest problem that I see is that people just don't understand what this document is truly supposed to do.

*One of the greatest problems is that people under value the importance of a resume.*

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Bill Merrow:

The thing that's interesting is it's almost like somebody selling a product and they just give you the technical brochure and says here is what our product does and here are the features so please buy it.

Karen Swim:

Exactly. And it all goes back to marketing. You don't simply want to spend your time presenting the features; you really have to translate for your audience what this product can do for them and present them with a compelling reason *why* they should buy. And even with the well written resumes that is the most common problem is that there don't seem to be any statements that will translate for the employer. And remember again, these people are busy they are getting lots and lots of resumes they really are not going to read every single sentence so you have to translate it. They have to be able to see it immediately that you are a fit for their organization. And if you are not doing a good job of aligning your skill set with what the organization is needing at that time then you are simply not going to get called in for an interview.

Bill Merrow:

So you are getting your resume very quickly sorted but into the wrong stack.

Karen Swim:

Exactly. And you may be very well qualified. You could be the best qualified candidate. But if you don't make that clear to that potential employer they will never have the opportunity to see what you can do.

Bill Merrow:

Now a few minutes ago you used an industry buzz word or acronym could you tell people what 360's are?

Karen Swim:

Yes I can. 360 is the assessment process that happens for most people at most corporations annually. And so it's your review process where you and the employer are looking at your performance they are looking at the objectives that were set out the prior year, how you achieved those objectives and it typically involves yourself, any team members that you may manage, and other people in the organization so it really gives a well rounded picture of your overall performance within the organization not like the old days where the performance review was simply looking at here are your job duties and did you meet or exceed the expectations. The 360 is a little deeper than that because it looks at again not only your direct reports and not only feedback from your direct managers but also from people around you in the organization. It's a great tool to really determine what areas you can further develop it also gives you the opportunity to truly interact in a meaningful way with other departments. And to look at ways that you could be an asset in the organization and helps you with your career planning goals because you are getting feedback from again not just the people that are managing you but really get to see your performance as a whole and how it fits in the organization.

Bill Merrow:

So again if we translate that 360 process, that feedback process, that people get from their superiors and their peers and their subordinates. I guess an opportunity there is to look for those gold nuggets those testimonials and pull that out and say; well here is what a peer says about me or here is what a boss says about me, if people were focused there as opposed to well I'll just regurgitate this whole thing.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. I believe that one of the greatest things that comes out of the 360 is really giving a realistic view point of what it is that you can bring to an organization and truly listening to what areas you can develop and that helps you in your career planning to determine the right fit. One of my favorite things to tell clients is that I'm not interested in helping them find a new job, but I am interested in helping them to get the *right* job and that is so important to me to put people in an organization where they will thrive and really be able to not only deliver results to the organization but derive some personal satisfaction and grow from that organization as well. Which means it goes beyond simply a job and a job description and your day to day duties, but it goes to the culture of the organization and how you will fit into that culture. A lot of what I do in advance of preparing the resume is really asking those types of questions; what type of environment does the person like to work in? And the 360 will tell you that. There will be patterns that will emerge and that you will begin to see that maybe you weren't even aware of, perhaps you thrive best in a fast paced environment and that may come out of the 360. Perhaps you are one of those people that are very tactical and you like to have a plan and execute and move on. Those things will come out, how you interact with other departments, where you really have shined. So I would definitely pay attention to that because again it not only helps you pull out nuggets that you can then translate into your resume but it really helps you to determine the next step in your career.



*One of my favorite things to tell clients is that I'm not interested in helping them find a new job, but I am interested in helping them to get the right job.*

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Bill Merrow:

Those are great insights Karen. Thanks. Let's talk a little bit about, there are different kinds of resumes, what are they and when is the right time to use each one?

Karen Swim:

Okay. That's a great question Bill. People are probably most familiar with kind of what we call the two base formats and that's chronological and functional and the chronological resume is really the traditional resume and it works for just about everybody and every situation. It provides a historical timeline of your professional experience. It's the one that you are probably most familiar with. The functional format, rather than presenting your professional experience in a historical timeline, what it does is it separates your experience into categories or skill based sections. And that demonstrates your fit for a particular job. The functional resumes are sometimes used when people for instance may have gaps in employment or maybe they have had a colorful career path where they have worked in lots of different sectors or had lots of different job titles where they don't want to present all of that but they want to present more of a solidified base to align them with a particular job. Then of course today there are so many different variations of both formats. You could have a combination of chronological, functional. You can have an accomplishments based resume. Then of course there are the CV's which are used in the scientific, medical, and academic communities. There are a lot of different ways to go with it and what we see more often today rather than just chronological and functional is what has been deemed as the creative resume and that's really where I specialize as well.

Bill Merrow:

So let's talk about the structure of a creative resume. What are the major sections?

Karen Swim:

The difference in a creative resume is really anything goes. And so the way that I approach my resume writing is rather than using a template I review the clients history I have them send me actual position postings that they are interested in or have them write me an ad of what their ideal job would be. Then we develop the resume to truly target their goals and sometimes that means that they may have a couple of different versions if they have a dual career track. So the resume is really perfectly aligned to achieve their very specific objectives. So that sometimes means that it may end up being chronological it may have different twists in there it may be functional it could be a combination of the two. It's really derived based on that individual's goals so it does not follow a very specific format. Down to the font, the wording, the way that it's structured and even the colors all of that is really individual and designed to really fit their goals. What I attempt to do in the resume is not only align the person's experience with their targeted jobs but also to align it with the target industries culture and at the same time

give each individual resume a little personality to reflect that person. So if that person is very analytical and detail oriented that is reflected in every aspect of their resume and if it's a little more creative then a little more personality will shine through in terms of the fonts and the colors and some of the words that are used so that an organization can truly see the whole person.

*The resume reflects not only experience and abilities but the whole person.*

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Bill Merrow:

Then what you are doing with the creative approach is really helping people stand out so they are not sorted out into that recycle pile?

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. You know I think that one misconception about resumes is that they are just these boring dissertations of work experience. They really should be personalized and you're right that is what helps you stand out from the crowd and again it's marketing. So you want to have a compelling message and you want to find ways to really stand out from everyone else that e has the same set of skills and the same education. So how do you stand apart? By being yourself and by highlighting what is really unique and what your special skill set is. What makes you so different that this employer should hire you?

Bill Merrow:

Let's get into the details. We are going to start at the top. Most people have name, address, birth place, birth marks and all that. What should really be in the header? What is necessary and what is unnecessary at the top of the resume?

Karen Swim:

At the top of the resume you want to have clear contact information. You want to have your name very clear you want to have your address information a phone number preferably two points of contact so most people will list a home number and a mobile number or perhaps work and home but there should at least be two ways that employer can reach you and most importantly an email address. I'm always surprised by people who don't include this. In this day in age this is the primary way we communicate with each other. So not having an email address forces the employer into the only mode of contact - the phone. And sometimes that's difficult again you think about somebody with a stack of resumes and they just want to shoot you off an email and say; we're interested we want to call you in for an interview, not having an email address can really hinder that process. One word about the email address is that people should stay away from extremely personal emails with cute names. So you don't want to be teddy bear at yahoo .com. There is free email all over the place. You can go to yahoo, gmail, any server today. A simple name, your name at yahoo .com is perfect.



Bill Merrow:

So teddy bear at yahoo .com doesn't exactly convey the leadership image?

Karen Swim:

It completely does not. I mean that's fine if you want to go work for a teddy bear company but I see a lot of that so I always advise clients if that's the only email address you have let's set up one that is a little more professional and it's easy. Most employers expect it to be your name at whatever .com. You want to make it as easy as possible and you do want to present that professional image.

Bill Merrow:

Back to the point you made earlier about how busy somebody is receiving three hundred resumes and now they have sorted that stack into the ones that they might consider and the ones that are out. You might sorted again just on the ease of contact, is that true?

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. If they have to take that extra step then it's going to get moved into a different pile. So at every point you want to think like a marketer as you are developing it and it's all about customer experience. Translate it make everything easy for them at every step of the process. Don't use font that is too small so that somebody has to strain. Everything needs to be geared towards the greatest ease while presenting yourself to stand out from the crowd.

*At every point you want to think like a marketer as you are developing your resume and it's all about customer experience.*

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Bill Merrow:

I'm not sure in the creative resume if this is the appropriate heading or not but I'm sure the substance of it is true. Is it fair to say that people struggle with stating their objective and what have you seen that really separates an effective objective statement from an ineffective one?

Karen Swim:

People are very confused about, in the old days we used to have something called objective. And that is a statement of what you wanted from the employer. Well now in this century we no longer do that because nobody cares what you want, employers are looking to see what is it you can do for me. What we call that section at the top of the resume is called the headline section. That can be presented a number of different ways. What it is, is your unique selling proposition so your statement, why you are the best bet. It can be a summary of all of your core competencies it can be bullet pointed. So there are a number of different ways to present it but that headline section is where

resume writers spend the greatest deal of time on your resume because it's you in thirty seconds. Those headline statements are critical to getting an employer to call you in for an interview. Time and time again I have had clients come back to me and tell me; wow, they read my resume and said that they could not believe that I was a perfect fit for that position. That's what they should say they should look at it and say that position was tailor made for you. The same way you read a job description and say wow this is the perfect job you want that same reaction when an employer looks at your resume and that is what that headline section does. It sets you up as the ideal candidate.

Bill Merrow:

You make a great point about the importance of that headline. I know in our marketing work we are writing ad copy or direct mail copy we may write twenty, thirty, forty, fifty headlines to pick the top two or three and then test those headlines to see what gets the most impact. What we are trying to do is get that hiring authority to see the headline that causes them to stop to be interrupted to say; hey there is something more to read here. Quite similar to the marketing world.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. Again you will see it's all very basic marketing principals which were missing in the past from the resume world. Now things have changed so we truly understand that this is a marketing document and you are right, the headline is where your eyes want to go first. It needs to capture the attention and it needs to do it in a matter of seconds. Resume writers do the same thing we may spend an hour writing a headline section or more because you are going through various versions you are comparing it against your client's goals you are making sure it contains the key words that are going to capture the attention of your potential market. Remember it is targeted to a very specific job and industry. It needs to have all the correct buzz words it needs to have the skills that employers are looking for. And it also needs to accurately reflect the candidate. It's a lot of work. The rest of the resume with the job accomplishments it takes 1/3rd of the time that it takes to write the headline section.

***Your headline section needs to capture attention and it needs to do it in a matter of seconds.***

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Bill Merrow:

What strikes me as so powerful is I'm assuming that most people are still in the old functional resume and doing their objective statement. And here you are helping your clients with their killer resume. Just the fact of the structure of it you are making them stand out.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. And that is the goal. I get resumes all the time that says; objective, looking for progressive opportunity in multi-level corporation or something so generic. Then I have to explain to them we don't do that anymore because they don't care they just

want to know that you are an awesome candidate that is going to come to work every day and lead their organization' they what to know what results you can deliver. We need to capture that in a couple of paragraphs.

Bill Merrow:

So the objective statement of I will not except a position where I'm paid everything that I'm worth because I'm already getting paid more where I'm at now. That's probably not going to fly?

Karen Swim:

No. That no longer flies, not in today's market.

Bill Merrow:

Let's talk about this experience section. You have a compelling headline you have communicated what is unique about you, you got that hiring authority to stop and want to learn more. How do you distinguish yourself in the experience section as apposed to having this well I was here from this period to this period?

Karen Swim:

That's a good question. Under the professional experience section your goal is not to list every thing you have ever done but it needs to be very results based. You will have maybe a sentence that describes the company and that will describe what industry the company is in because it is not always clear from just the employer name. Perhaps the size of the company and the profits and that's important. Then what you want to do is focus on three to five top accomplishments per job and so again those accomplishments should be targeted to match your goals. Rather than saying that you managed a team of fifty people, what were the results. What we ask people to do is to look at problems that existed within the organization during your time there, what action did you take to solve that problem and what was the result of it because that is what is going to speak to an employer. If you took a division from zero to One Hundred million in two years by creating some innovative marketing technique, then an employer can say; we need someone like that to take our division to the same levels. It really needs to show results as opposed to just saying you were the marketing manager. That doesn't really give a hint as to what you will be able to do for the next company.

Bill Merrow:

I would imagine that for some of our younger members that maybe there is some fear with that. They haven't been in the position yet where they feel that they were responsible for the results. They were part of a team and had some influence, but maybe they are just not confident enough or don't realize the impact they have. How do they get over that?

Karen Swim:

It's interesting you said that because just in the last week I have worked with several college grads that are starting their careers out and it's a scary time for them. And I heard over and over again; well I haven't done anything. I said sure you have. What you

can do is remember even if this is going to be your first job, perhaps you solved a problem in college, through an internship, in a volunteer organization. Your accomplishments do not have to be confined to your job. To a paid job I should say. You can think about aspects of your life. What was a challenge that you faced and what action did you take and what was the result. When you start to get people to think beyond just employment they are able to come up with a lot of examples. And even if they were not in a leadership position in an organization, there are still things that people do in their day to day work that they forget about. It could be as simple as you saw that the stock room was disorganized and people were spending a lot of time when they had to go in there and retrieve materials. And you took the initiative to create an organization system. Somebody might say; that's not really important because it didn't have a bottom line impact or it's not something big like a CEO would do. That's okay it's still a problem, an action, and a resolution. We help people to work through that and people then begin to think; I did create this computer system to make something more effective or I reorganized this or even participation on a team you still contributed and again problem, action, result. So we get people thinking like that and you would be surprised everyone has contributed something to their job. If they haven't then it's probably not someone that we would be working with anyway.

Bill Merrow:

What's interesting, you used cleaning up the closet example, if somebody can convey that they demonstrated the initiative to make change happen I think people would be surprised just how much employers value that type of quality in people.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. You know every employer is basically looking for a leader. It does not matter if you are going to be answering the phones or sweeping the floors. Leadership should be evident in every position so employers love seeing that. They want people to come to work, love being there and take the initiative if they see a problem to take action and to resolve it. Everyone that goes into a job every day does that in some way even if they don't realize it. So we help them to really begin to think of their job in a different way and all of the little ways that really count. They don't think it counts because it's become something that is so automatic that they don't realize that guess what that is exactly what the employer is looking for.

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Bill Merrow:

I'm not certain that someone should actually do this but what we really want to happen is for those words we use initiative as the example to almost be the words that are in

red on the page that almost jump off and make the employer see those things when they are scanning a resume. What types of things should be those hot words that jump off the page for that employer?

Karen Swim:

I would say more than hot words, as employers are reading through they are quickly scanning for titles and key words that fit their particular requirements. Which is why it's so important as part of developing the resume that you have the necessary research to understand what is hot in that industry. You want to demonstrate the skill sets in action words. You don't need to really say things such as; delivered or initiated but you need to show it. Employers are looking for leadership they are looking for reliability they are looking for passion. They want people that are passionate about the job and the organization. When you are using examples that sort of lend weight to those skills that's what is going to jump out at an employer and you also want to use action words as you are talking about what you have done. Collaborated, contributed, analyzed. Anything that really shows action is going to jump out at an employer. But you have to back it up with actual statements.

Bill Merrow:

So the action words really become the way that people can translate their duties and responsibilities into these results based statements.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. In some organizations or some positions numbers are really important and sometimes we will even go so far as to bold or italicize the numbers to stand out. The perfect example is in sales management all that really matters are the numbers how you led people and what the results of that were so you want to include growth, what percentages, what your profits were, what the margins were, how you increased or how you decreased expenses. All of those numerical examples really jump out at employers. You always want to use those. Numbers are king in a resume because it's something hard and fast that somebody can scan down and see immediately and it translates into exactly what you can do. But then there are many positions that don't live and die based on the numbers and so you want to demonstrate those leadership skills in other ways.

Bill Merrow:

Let's talk a little bit more about those positions where the numbers are part of the evaluation of the resume. What do you say when someone says; I really don't know what those numbers are? How do you get them to get those answers that are so critical to giving them that next opportunity?

Karen Swim:

I would say that does happen quite often and so that means people have to understand in developing your resume, and when you begin your career marketing strategy, there is a lot of work involved. And so we'll go back and look because number one organizations

report and track numbers all the time. You may not have it at your finger tips or recall but it is certainly information that you can retrieve. And if you can't retrieve actual dollar numbers then what we start to look at is I'll ask questions like; what was it before and what percentage did it grow by? You can use percentages those are still numbers. In a lot of times that's a lot easier for people to recall that type of information. Well I increased it by twenty percent. Or you know what it was this amount. So it doesn't actually have to be the dollar amount you can use percentages as well.

Bill Merrow:

Let's take a look at the gaps in employment either from periods of unemployment or jobs they perhaps don't want to remember, that they don't want to bring into the conversation with a new hiring authority. How should someone handle that?

Karen Swim:

There are a couple of different ways around that but the number one thing I would say is first and foremost honesty. What you are seeking to do is minimize the gaps but you don't want to provide false information about it because the resume in effect becomes a legal document and it becomes part of your application package. So everyone these days has had a gap in employment it's just the reality of the world we live in. You can use the functional format because that deemphasizes dates and focuses more on your accomplishments and your job titles. That's one way around it. For people who have had long absences from the work place such as perhaps a woman who has taken time out from her career to be a stay at home mom. What you can do is you can fill in those gaps with other activities and experience that you gain from that could be from volunteer work from fund raising activities. So there are a lot of ways to deemphasize that by emphasizing other strengths and emphasizing other experiences and activities.

Bill Merrow:

Would it be fair to say that if someone is moving towards a killer resume and they got a compelling headline and they are describing themselves in results based ways, I'm going to call it auditable, you were here from this date to this date and left at this minute becomes a little less important?

Karen Swim:

It actually does. Of course employers like to see the history presented and they kind of want to know a time line for it. But there are lots of ways to cover that. Rather than putting the month and the year or the to and the from dates you can just use years and a lot of times that sort of smoothes over gaps by using years because it's not readily apparent that you were not working for a six month time period because it is within the same year. That's one way. You can eliminate what you would prefer not to present on your resume by calling it relevant professional experience and only listing those jobs that are relevant to your objective, that's another way around it. So there are lots of things you can do and again if the emphasis is on the strong skill set and you have done a good job selling yourself and selling your story, then the dates don't become as important.



Bill Merrow:

I guess for some of our listeners it could become an ethical issue; well don't I have to tell everybody everything? You certainly would not do that in an ad or in a direct mail letter, you are going to tell people again the relevant information is what is important to get you to that next step.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. You'll fill out a job application and that's your time to put down your entire job history as requested. They may ask you to list the past three jobs and that's when you will list it in that order. And again the resume is not a job application it is a marketing document and it's perfectly acceptable to put only the experience that is relevant to that position. Many people do that, for example someone started out in finance and switched over to marketing and now they are going for marketing jobs and the finance experience doesn't matter. They don't have to list that and you don't have to list every single job you have ever held. In the same way you are not listing every single thing you have done for an employer you are only including the information that is really relevant. That really supports your objective.

***Your resume is not a job application but a marketing document.***

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Bill Merrow:

Just getting people to reframe more or think about their resume as a marketing document is a huge step for people to take.

Karen Swim:

It truly is. What people need to understand though, is just as the individual needs to look at this as marketing, employers have now caught on to that as well. So you'll notice that employers target their market as well and their ideal employee and the word choices that they use and where they publish their postings. How they talk about their company so they are doing the same thing. That's why it's really important that you spend the time and understand that this is a marketing document and it needs to be specifically targeted to a specific group of people. Your target is not every employer that has a job opening, that's definitely the wrong approach.

Bill Merrow:

It's interesting again you bring up the point of the hiring authorities prospective. Everyone is on their own radio station; what's in it for me? And I know that employers would much rather get thirty really quality resumes, than three hundred where they have to throw two hundred ninety away.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely.

Bill Merrow:

So let's talk about education on the resume. How much information is really necessary? Should we provide transcripts? What do we need to do in the education area Karen?

Karen Swim:

Again, here some people get into overkill and I'll tell you the amount of information depends on how relevant it is to the position you are seeking. For example if you have a BA in communications and you are looking for a media job then by all means you want to list the name of the school, the state, and you want to list what your degree is in. However if you have a BA in communications and you are going for a position that is totally outside of that area you can simply list the school the city the state and simply the fact that you have the degree so you would just put BA. You don't have to put your major down you don't have to put the year you graduated you don't have to list every school you ever attended. I have gotten a couple of resumes lately that went all the way back to elementary school. And I thought; you know, I'm kind of thinking this is not relevant, nobody really cares. If you went to college list your degree if you have a post graduate degree go ahead and list that but anything earlier, such as high school, you don't need to put that down. The amount of detail is going to depend on what's relevant. If you have an MBA from Harvard we want you to put that down because just about any position that you will apply for that will lend weight and it will help you to achieve your objective.

Bill Merrow:

So how does the person who has had a monstrously successful educational career, they have been going to school for a long time and have been to a lot of schools but haven't quite taken that last piece of paper that degree away. How should they convey their educational journey?

Karen Swim:

There are quite a few people like that, that maybe have done some course work and that's fine you can list it if it's relevant to the position otherwise you can leave it off. The way that you want to think about your resume is it is prime real estate and so in looking at that prime real estate you really want to only include high value high impact information that really specifically helps you to achieve your objective. If you have gone to five different colleges and taken course work in everything from Latin to business finance you don't have to list it. However, if you have taken course work that specifically strengthens your ability to do the targeted job, then yeah, you can list that. You can say; course work in... You can put down the name of the college that you attended and what the course work was in without listing that you don't have a degree.

Bill Merrow:

Well it's pretty clear at this point Karen, that relevance is the key test here. So in things that are like technical education or specific courses that aren't college per se, is it fair to say the same rules apply?

*Relevance is the key test for what is included and what is left off of your resume.*

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Karen Swim:

Again it depends on the objective. I have had resumes that have had half a page of technical course work because it was extremely relevant. For instance, I have worked with scientists where research is very important and technical courses and certifications are very important. So yes, again that really helps them to achieve their objectives. It's what employers are looking for from that specific position so you want to list it. The same way a sales manager, if you have taken sales courses then you do want to list those because it shows the employer that you are invested in your own career by doing continuing education. But for other professions it's not so important so again it's very individual and it really depends on what your objective is and what that employer is looking for.

Bill Merrow:

On some resumes I'm sure you have seen many where people for whatever reason want to tell you about their other interests. What impact does that have?

Karen Swim:

Think of your resume as prime real estate do you really want to use up the space that you have to list that you are an avid mountain biker? While that's very interesting, does it really help you to achieve your objective? I think with the personal interests, that's best left off. For a couple of reasons, number one it could prove to be isolating to employers so you don't want to do that. And sometimes that resume is read by so many different people, five to six different people that you don't want to have someone look at that and judge you on what your interests are. You want them to judge you based upon the qualifications. In the interview you get to showcase your personality, your interests, and you can do that in interview presentations. But your resume, it's best to just leave that information out. Unless, of course, it's tied into volunteer experience. If you are volunteering for the Leukemia society it would say that you have personal interests, but you may list that if it added some weight to what you were bringing to that employer. So maybe as part of your volunteer experience you organized a fund raiser that brought in X amount of dollars and that's something that you want to demonstrate that you are able to do. And that's the only time the interests would come in. Listing them separately is not the best idea.

Bill Merrow:

Your example of the non-profit, the volunteer work is really another way of demonstrating results and initiative and things like that.

Karen Swim:

Yes, and for people that either don't have a very long job history people or that are new to the job market or are transitioning into a different area of their career and maybe they

have obtained some skills through volunteer work that's a great way to strengthen your outlook to an employer by bringing that experience in as well.

Bill Merrow:

Here is something that I suggest Karen with all the sarcasm I can put into it, I know employers really value at the bottom at every resume where it says; references available upon request because how would they know that they were available if they didn't put that on there? Why do people do that?

Karen Swim:

I think it dates back to, a lot of people don't do their resumes and keep them updated regularly. So they are thinking back fifteen years ago when references were a nice thing it's optional and you were showing that you were cooperative and your life is an open book and you have people that will vouch for you. The job climate has changed and references are no longer an optional thing employers are going to check references so you don't need to put that down because it's required. It's not a nice to have it's not optional it's not something that you are offering up to show what a great person you are. So why would you waste the space on your resume to put something that is required in order for you to be hired?

Bill Merrow:

This maybe the most important question for people on the call. Is there a magic answer to how long the resume should be?

Karen Swim:

It really depends on the position. You don't want to limit yourself. I know people sometimes feel like it has to be one or two pages and while that is a nice length there are reasons why you might want to go three pages or even longer. For example, a physician that was applying for a CEO position in a hospital and had done a lot of research and publications would probably have a resume that's much longer than three pages. CV's can be up to twenty pages long because you have the addenda with all the publications and the research activities. However, if you are applying for customer service positions, one or two pages is going to be enough to gain interest from the employer. So it's again relevance and really determining what really needs to be on that resume that is going to achieve your objective. I would say for most people keeping it at two to three pages is perfect.

*The right length for the resume is the number of pages it succinctly takes to represent what is relevant to the hiring authority.*

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Bill Merrow:

Just to kind of wrap up the resume before we move on and talk about the cover letters. What would be the summary the key words that you would say; here are the marching orders for thinking about resumes in today's market?

Karen Swim:

I would say very specifically target your objectives. Clearly think through what is it you are trying to achieve. I would say that you need to really have a clear understanding of your value to your targeted market. And sit down and take the time to write out, what is unique about you, what do you bring to the table that other people with the same experience and the same education can not deliver. So truly thinking about your unique experience and how it combines and how that would have immediate impact for the next employer. Those are really the keys and I would say be prepared to work. It's a lot of work in developing that career marketing strategy and then executing it so be prepared for that. Don't expect this to be a one hour process it's your career it's your life and it takes a lot more time than that to do it effectively.

Bill Merrow:

What showed up for me in this call is that if you are going to be thinking about resumes you better be thinking about results and you better be thinking about relevance if you want the rewards. So many great insights regarding a resume. Thank you.

Karen Swim:

Well thank you.

Bill Merrow:

So let's move on to the idea of a cover letter. Is it necessary and what's in a cover letter?

Karen Swim:

A cover letter is necessary. It helps you to stand out. It's surprising that people do not go the extra mile to do a cover letter just as they don't go the extra mile following a job interview to send out a thank you for the interviewer's time. The cover letter gives you, it's another element of your presentation and it gives you another opportunity to stand out. The cover letter is another selling opportunity and well written cover letters are going to entice the employer to read your resume. It gives you the ability to maybe provide a different synopsis you can add in different accomplishment bullet points that were not included in your resume you do not want it to be verbatim from the resume because they will read that. So the cover letter gives you another opportunity to communicate your value to the organization.

Bill Merrow:

What is included then, if it isn't cut and paste from the resume? What is included? What would you say are some must do's that somebody needs to do in their cover letter?

## *Use your cover letter to demonstrate your fit for a position.*

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Karen Swim:

I would say take every avenue that you can to ensure that you are addressing it to a person. Don't use "to whom it may concern." If you can not get the name then you can say something such as: dear hiring manager. Which is more acceptable than: dear sir/madam? But don't say: to whom it may concern. Go the extra mile and try to get a name and include that. The next thing you want to do is just like the resume your cover letter should have a headline. Rather than opening with a statement; I'd like an interview or I hope you read this. You want to use your first couple of sentences to make a strong statement about yourself. I have exceeded expectations in every sales position I have ever held; I've been the top ten sales person for the past five years. Really include high impact statements in the first two sentences. Then you want to use the body of the cover letter and the cover letter should be brief. No longer than one page, half a page is ideal. You want to include a couple of accomplishments that really line up with what the employer is looking for. This takes a little work but you want to read, if it's a job posting that you are responding to, read what they are looking for. Focus on what skills are a value to that organization then demonstrate your fit in that cover letter. If they are looking for someone who is very strategic and able to develop strategic marketing plans and then execute them, give them two examples on how you have done that. And present that in a bullet pointed format in that cover letter. Finally the ending, after you have taken the time to write a great opening and a strong presentation of your skills you don't want to end by saying; I hope you will give me a call or I hope to hear from you soon. You want to take initiative, summarize it and wrap it up. I would be a great fit to your organization because...; I will follow up within the next three to five days for next steps. Strong opening, strong closing and strong bullet pointed objectives that align with what they are looking for. Really those are the keys to a cover letter.

Bill Merrow:

That's a lot of great stuff. Let's go back to this how to address the cover letter to. When somebody has done the homework and they have now, not only found out who the human resources executive is but who the hiring manager is. What does that say to the employer when they are sorting that cover letter with all the people who are dear sir/madam or to whom it may concern?

Karen Swim:

It really speaks to that person taking the time and care to really go the extra mile to find the information. Let's say you just posted an ad and within the first couple of hours you get twenty five responses and twenty of them come in without any cover letter simply their resume, five come in with cover letters and one comes in with not only a cover letter but a great cover letter that shows that number one the person actually read your posting and understood what skill set you were looking for and then they took the time to find out who they should address it to. They are really going to pay attention and they are going to say; wow they really went the extra mile. What that does is not only will



they read the cover letter but now they are going to read your resume. That is really the key of all of this is to get noticed to get to the next step to get separated from that big huge pile of resumes that land on anyone's desk.

Bill Merrow:

These first couple of sentences in the cover letter or first couple of paragraphs are really taking everything from the persons experience and conveying it with the greatest impact possible why they are special.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. And again a strong opening is appropriate for leadership positions and non-leadership positions because I don't care what you do in an organization leadership is one of the number one attributes that an employer is looking for. So you don't want to open it from a begging position; would you please give me a call, I really need a job, I saw your posting. Don't waste the space tell them why you are good and tell them what you are going to do for their organization. Make it very clear, very targeted and again show them that you have read and you match up. I sometimes do cover letters that will show in a column format what the employer is looking for and then on the other side of the column how you match that skill set.

***Don't blow your cover letter with a weak close, be confident and present the next steps.***

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Bill Merrow:

So in the closing of the cover letter this last sentence or so is really a call to action it's the final offer, if you will, from a marketing prospective. How powerful can somebody be with that? What are some of the best you have seen?

Karen Swim:

I have seen people really take action that I look forward to meeting with you in the next week or people saying I will call your office with in three to five days to schedule an interview. I try to tailor it to the comfort level of the client while not weakening that closing at all. I advise against leaving it up in the air but you want to say that you are taking the action step I will follow up with you. Now you really are asking for the order and you are saying I am going to take the next step and I'm going to call you because I'm expecting to be interviewed because I'm right for this position.

Bill Merrow:

We haven't talked about this before Karen but one of the most powerful things in a direct mail piece is to always include a P.S. because people can't avoid reading a P.S. Is that something that you suggested to people in cover letters? How do they use that?

Karen Swim:

I'm so glad that you brought that up. For executive level resumes I always include a P.S. And it's that direct marketing technique for whatever reason statistics have shown that it increases the attention that your letter receives when there is a P.S. So on executive letters I always include a P.S. And it can be a statement that again is a closing statement. A statement on your fit, so definitely include it. It's a great idea and people do not use it enough in their cover letters. It's something you can sometimes skip in other cover letters but in executive cover letters I always make that a must have.

Bill Merrow:

You started to answer this already Karen we'll just take it a little deeper. So you have prepared a great cover letter great resume you have done all your homework you got it to the right person. We close now with a call to action that we are going to be following up. So what do you do now? Do you call, do you write, do you email, and do you stop by? Do you stalk the hiring authority? How far do you take this?

Karen Swim:

You do not want to stalk them but follow up. I am so amazed that people take so much time and attention and then fall apart at the end. Now you put together all these great marketing documents and you have said all the right things and you have done everything right. Then you simply sit down from your computer and send out two hundred resumes and never call anyone that is a mistake. I think calling is extremely effective. However if you only have email contact and that seems to be the preferred communication for the organization, by all means send an email and say that you are following up and you would like to schedule an appointment and wanted to compare dates and times to get that done. Call them on the phone. One thing we do advise is if you are following up by telephone please do not leave twenty voicemail messages because that really is stalking. You want to call and if you get voicemail don't leave a message. I would say leave no more than one to two messages. That's the maximum so you don't become an irritant. You absolutely want to take the next step and do follow up. That is so important.

Bill Merrow:

And somebody in a sales position demonstrating that follow up can win you points but if you over do it people are going to say; you are not representing us the way we want to be represented. You could, by over doing it push yourself out when you might have been the best candidate.

Karen Swim:

Absolutely. You know with some people it's interesting you bring that up. They have a little more leeway in being extremely creative and they can do some really fun things. I have used ideas from people I have worked with over the years. For example I had one client who just could not get somebody to call her back and she really did want to work there and knew that she would do an excellent job. So she took a pair of old shoes and she took one of the shoes and put it in a nice box and sent it with a cute letter that said; now that I have got one foot in the door, how about us meeting? The employer laughed

hysterically. Loved it, it was brilliant. And you know what she got the job. Because they thought not only does this girl have a great sense of humor but she really will go the extra mile to get a client's attention. They loved it they loved her and she went on to have a great career with them. So you don't have to follow just the tried and true. Be creative. I had someone else use fortune cookies and they typed up little messages that said hire me and she put her name in it and then stuffed them into the fortune cookies and sent them to the employer. And again it came off as a great gag. They loved it they loved her initiative loved her sense of humor and they hired her. So there are all sorts of fun things that you can do too.

*Don't be afraid to show the same initiative in your search that you would show if you are awarded the position.*

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Bill Merrow:

What's exciting about those couple of stories Karen is with so many people just doing the same old same old; it really doesn't take much to stand out from everybody else.

Karen Swim:

You are absolutely right. Because sadly the great majority of people really aren't going to take the steps needed to stand out. So just by working with professionals and just going a couple of extra steps you are already standing heads and shoulders above most of your competition.

Bill Merrow:

This has all just been tremendous information Karen, we really appreciate it. If someone, they really understood everything that we have covered here. Why might they still need your services?

Karen Swim:

Well you know your resume again represents your life and your career on paper. Even a document that is slightly more effective than what you currently have can truly help you achieve your goals a lot faster. A professional resume writer has specialized knowledge and as we all know when you hire specialized knowledge you really achieve your target more efficiently. You might be writing a resume once every two to five years whereas a professional is writing two to five per day. So when you hire that special knowledge as in any profession it gives you the shortest and the most cost efficient path to success. In addition a professional is going to understand exactly what employers are looking for because that is what they live and breathe day in and day out. They are in contact with employers they are in touch with the market so they know what the latest techniques and strategies are. And they are able to give you a very objective perspective. You writing your own career marketing statement may miss some key things that someone standing outside can say; you know I don't really think that represents you to your best

self, I don't think that you are really targeting the right type of positions. I always like to say to people that surgeons are competent trained professionals but chances are they are not going to operate on themselves. You should really think of your career in the same way. It's important enough to really bring in a professional to help you to achieve your goals.

Bill Merrow:

It's the old don't try this at home professionals working on a closed track?

Karen Swim:

Absolutely.

Bill Merrow:

Great insights Karen. How can our listeners contact you?

Karen Swim:

They can reach me via the Words For Hire career website, <http://getcareerhelp.com> the marketing site <http://wordsforhirellc.com> or if they would like to call the toll free number is 800-648-5158. But when they call just remember to say that they heard about me at Upward Career Mobility.

Bill Merrow:

Okay Karen. Thanks so much for your time today we will be talking to you again soon.

Karen Swim:

Well great. Thank you so much Bill. I hope you have a fantastic day. It was great being on with you. I truly hope that listeners derive a lot of value from our talk today.

Bill Merrow:

Thanks again Karen.

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Now that you have read the interview it's time to take the next step and write your own resume. Everyone should have an up to date professional resume even if you are currently in a job that you love. Go to Get Career Help and buy the instant download resume writing e-guide <http://bit.ly/kPInd> that will provide you with step by step information on writing your own resume.