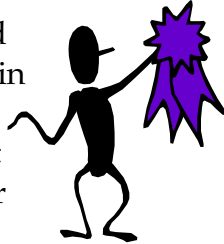


Chapter 5: Accomplishments

Accomplishments: Your Past Contributions

You have accomplished many things in your career that were important to the companies for which you worked.



Perhaps some of these accomplishments were noted only briefly as your career progressed. Many times their value or benefit to the company was not recognized, and you failed to note how well an accomplishment illustrated your skills and your future potential for

solving problems. These accomplishments are the best tangible evidence that you can work effectively, that you are “successful”, and that you can and do use your skills to good advantage. It is critical that you prepare an extensive list of accomplishments that illustrate the contributions you have made to your employers. The more complete and comprehensive your list, the easier, more focused, and more successful your job search will be. This chapter will help you to come up with that list.

A list of accomplishments will:

- Enable you to perceive the results of your work efforts in terms of specific contributions that are not evident from your job titles or job descriptions.
- Help you to identify the skills and traits that make you valuable and attractive as an employee.
- Guide you in developing a 30-second commercial.
- Become a resource for hard to write cover letters.
- Become the foundation of a strong resume.
- Become the core of how you position yourself in interviews.
- Give you a tangible confidence boost when you are feeling discouraged.

What is an Accomplishment?

Think of some of your things you did in your previous jobs. Try giving these things the activity test.

Did the activity:

- Achieve more with the same resources?
- Achieve the same results with fewer resources?
- Improve operations or make things easier and better? (quantify whenever possible)

- Resolve a critical problem or situation with little or no increase in time, energy, dollars, people, etc?
- Involve a new undertaking, such as computerizing inventory?
- Surpass accepted standards for quality and/or quantity of performance?

And you can probe even more deeply by examining these questions:

- Did you take the initiative in confronting any problems, opportunities, or challenges?
- Did you develop something?
- Did you create or design a program, procedure, or plan?
- Did you identify a need for a plan, program, product, service, etc?
- Did you prepare any original reports, papers or documents?
- Did you participate in any technical contributions?
- Did you implement (directly or indirectly) any administrative or procedural recommendations?
- Did you implement or participate in any sales, profit, and/or cost saving recommendations?
- Did you receive any award or letter of commendation?

Guidelines for Writing Accomplishment Statements

Effective accomplishment statements have five things in common:

1. They state what action you took to improve a situation.
2. They express how you helped the company in one of three ways:
 - (a) Cost Savings: Actual dollars, or percentage of dollars saved.
 - (b) Improved Efficiencies: Time saved, better procedures, reduction in staff.
 - (c) Increased Revenues: New business generated, increased sales or profits.
3. They attempt to quantify the result of your action in numerical or percentage terms.
4. They contain an action verb.
5. They are limited in length.

You may need to approximate or estimate a result. You want to illustrate the point that you made a difference; if necessary, use a truthful ballpark estimate. For example: "I computerized manual reports for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which cut preparation time by six months and cut clerical support to 20% of that previously required." Also, employers know that people work in teams. Saying, "As a team member..." is a good way to take the credit yet share the credit.

The kind of general results most frequently expressed in accomplishments are listed below. Remember, these values (benefits to employers) will have more impact if a quantitative measurement is included to substantiate them:

- Improved quality: Improved productivity and teamwork
- Increased sales: Reduced time of operation
- Reduced costs: Achieved a technological breakthrough
- Increased profits: Established an administrative process
- Improved employee relations: Planned a program from inception
- Surpassed established standards: Met or exceeded quota, previous record

The CAR/PAR Model of Accomplishments

One way to come up with accomplishment statements is to use the CAR/PAR model. The CAR/PAR model gives you a formula to use for identifying and describing your accomplishments. It is useful for the employer to know what type of problems you have solved in the past. The more CAR/PAR statements you can develop the better, since they can be used in cover letters and are very helpful as you prepare for interviews. The goal is to develop concrete, factual and impressive statements. Here are the guidelines for each statement:



1. **C is for Challenge/P is for Problem.** Describe the work-related challenge. Identify the problem you solved. (Also, it could have been an undiscovered opportunity.)
2. **A is for Action.** List all the specific actions that you took to meet the challenge, solve the problem, or grasp the opportunity. It could include a description of how you analyzed the problem and prepared to tackle the job as well as what resources you mustered for the undertaking. Use action verbs to begin your sentences.
3. **R is for Results.** Describe the results of your efforts. Quantify them, if possible in numerical terms, such as dollars, percentages, days, head count, savings, sales volume, etc.

Samples

Here are four sample accomplishments, as first drafted by other job seekers. As you read each one, see if you can identify the C/P, A, and R. Note: at this length, these make very good short stories to use as examples when you interview and are asked about a particular strength or experience.



Challenge: Our field sales people were never able to keep up with the stream of new products from Product Development; new products hardly got sold at all.

Action: I conceived and wrote a modular training manual and a series of quarterly workshops for salespeople.

Results: Because of this, our sales of new products rose from 2.2% in 1991 to 9.8% last year.

Problem: Our crude oil separators were corroding around the bottom at a high rate, resulting in frequent spills of contaminated brine and loss of crude.

Action: I devised a way to apply an epoxy coating in the bottom half of the existing separator tanks.

Results: Because of this, we avoided having to replace 47 separators (worth \$65,000 each) and cut our EPA complaints to zero that year.

Challenge: At Acme our absenteeism on the midnight shift got up to 27% in 1991, so that we could scarcely operate.

Action: I initiated an attitude survey that revealed the main cause: poor supervision and low morale as a result.

Results: Line management replaced some employees, and we retrained others. As a result, we cut absenteeism to 11% in 1992, better than the day shift with a \$207,000 per year gain to our firm.

Challenge: In 1978 our company had an opportunity to bid on some very complex new telemetry systems for the government, but we didn't feel we could meet the penalty deadlines because of our ponderous internal procedures.

Action: I proposed and initiated the concept of a Business Team and got needed experts assigned from each functional department.

Results: Because of this we built this military business to \$94 million per year by 1982 and became the preferred supplier.

Note that although each description contains all three C/P, A, and R elements, none is over eight lines. Once you have identified the three elements, you need to extract the essential ingredients of your accomplishment, and rewrite them in a condensed version starting with an action verb. Be sure that your sentence meets the five criteria mentioned earlier in this section.

In Appendix 5a we have provided sample accomplishment statements for your reference.



Concise results oriented accomplishment statements are essential for your job search campaign. Effective accomplishments will distinguish you from other job seekers in both resume and interview situations.

Writing Your Own Accomplishment Statements:

Use the Significant Accomplishment Worksheets (**Appendix 5b**) to do the following: For each job that you have done, describe the challenge/problem you faced (C/P), the action you took (A), and the result of the action (R) in numerical or percentage terms, including the benefit to the organization. Continue to describe as many accomplishments as you can recall. Concentrate on telling the story, not the exact wording. You can edit and refine later.

In **Appendix 5c** we have provided a variety of verbs that will be useful in describing the action you took, for inclusion in your own accomplishment statements. You may want to review them as you are thinking through and creating your specific statements.

In **Appendix 5d** you can list the accomplishments you have derived from the previous exercises. Try to write at least ten or fifteen before selecting the ones that most effectively represent what you have to offer the marketplace. These will be incorporated into your resume.

Note: Don't feel obliged to identify only major accomplishments. Quiet ones may be equally useful in identifying your true talents and skills. In fact, you may find key accomplishments performed off the job. For example, you may have accomplished significant things through community activities. Definitely include these accomplishments. Moreover, although recent accomplishments will be more useful in selling yourself to an employer, some of your previous achievements, even reaching back to your school days, could be excellent indicators of what you have to sell. And remember the keynote for an accomplishment is not the public recognition you received, but your own sense of satisfaction for having made a difference.