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How to write an achievement on your CV

Introduction

In our article **writing the killer CV** we discussed the structure and content of a high impact targeted CV. We have also discussed the **common mistakes when writing a cv** including the reason **why a generalised CV does not work**, and shown **how to target your CV** for a particular position. This article illustrates the technique of how to develop the achievements section of the CV.

Keeping It Real

First, a story regarding achievements: One of the things Jack is most proud of is that years ago he built his own garden pond. He became an expert on pond siting, depth, liners, pumps, filtration, waterfalls, rocks, tubing and electrics and could talk for hours about the subject when breaking the ice at parties!

Whilst from his viewpoint this is an impressive achievement it does not impress a potential employer if they are looking for a developer, engineer, or helpdesk operator. The only person it might impress is an employer looking for a pond guru!

The moral of the story: Only blow your trumpet and play tunes that the employer is interested in.

Motivation Behind an Achievement

So, how do we go about developing an achievement that will impress our next employer? Let's look at what companies are in business for and find some clues.

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> **Only blow your trumpet and play tunes that the employer is interested in**
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Companies often want to do some of the following:

Make more profits

Sell more widgets

Become more efficient

Get more customers

Beat competition

Improve customer satisfaction

Enter new markets

Drive higher quality

We need to develop an achievement which generally supports the above objectives.

Let's look at this further by focusing specifically on IT. Some typical objectives within an IT department might be:

Solve business problems. Meet goals.

Save the business money.

Make business processes more efficient.

Complete projects faster and cheaper

Implement changes faster

Reduce maintenance costs

Use less staff

Improve software quality

Improve capability

Assuming that the above are the results required, we need to build an achievement that supports them. Let's look at the structure of writing an achievement.

Structure of an Achievement

An achievement consists of the sum of two or three components:

Using a particular technical skill or personal attribute.

Carrying out a particular activity.

Getting a measurable / quantifiable result / benefit.

An example:

Used pond building experience to remove leakages and enhance water filtration. This increased the average lifespan of the fish and reduced the yearly fish expenditure by 3000%.

The 'So What' Test

To gauge if we are getting this right we can apply the 'so what' test as follows:

Read the achievement in the context of the job.

Are you a) Impressed, b) Mildly impressed, c) So What!!

Example 1 – So What!

Achievement: "Mentored other team members"
Response: So what!

You trained some staff, and then what?! The client spent money for you to train staff and what benefit did it achieve for them? So what!

Example 2 – So What!

Achievement: "Made document retrieval faster"
Response: So what!

How much faster? How much did you spend, and how much did you save? What was the measurable benefit to the business?

Example 3 – Slightly better

Achievement: "Mentored team members which improved skills"
Response: Better than so what, but this does not rip me up the seams!

So, you used your training skills to train some people, which resulted in them getting improved skills, and then what? How did they apply those new skills and what was the result?

Example 4 – On The Nose

Achievement: "Used expert knowledge of project management to deliver application ahead of schedule and under budget. This resulted in obtaining a first mover advantage over competitors and subsequent capture of 70% of market share".

Response: Very impressed. Can you come and do this for me!

Closing Comments

Successfully writing the achievements section of your CV is perhaps the most challenging part of the CV exercise. However, it can give you that competitive edge over other candidates and get you to that all important interview and eventually get you hired.

Good luck with you job search.

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