

How To Strengthen Your Cv

Most Executive CVs could be better set out and presented, and in some cases, significantly so. Although there is no unique method of creating and presenting your CV that propels the candidate to the top of the "must interview heap", there are several ways that most CVs could be strengthened.

This article highlights three key areas of the Executive CV which from experience could be improved significantly. We also suggest steps you can take towards creating a powerful and interview winning CV.

LIGHTWEIGHT ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Most professional recruiters have developed a reasonable understanding of Executive job responsibilities. For example, we understand that a Finance Director will direct Finance and whilst there may be differences at the margin, e.g. some FDs are responsible for HR and/or IT, the role of a Finance Director has very similar responsibilities no matter which industry sector is involved. Therefore you should not be excessive in listing your responsibilities on your CV and more importantly, the reader will be much more interested to learn what you have delivered during your tenure as FD.

If we are looking to recruit a Finance Director and we receive say, 100 CVs, we are looking to interview between 10 and 15 candidates. The question arises as to how we select the 15 to interview, and by definition, the 85 regrets. The answer has a lot to do with understanding what has been achieved i.e. what positive differences and financial improvements have been achieved whilst that individual has been leading the Finance function.

It is achievements, not responsibilities, that will raise eyebrows, get you noticed positively and be the "wow" factors. The message is therefore clear. Review your CV and ensure that whilst presenting your primary responsibilities you must identify several achievements for each role listed.

LONG WINDED

It is often easier to develop a 7 page CV than present a 2 sided document. Indeed, for many of us, we have to first work with the 7 sided CV to edit it down to 2 sides. In general recruiters are looking for an Executive CV that is no longer than 2 or 3 sides of A4. Being concise is a management skill and you should take the opportunity of demonstrating it when presenting your CV.

Striking the balance between brevity and comprehensiveness is a difficult challenge, but from experience, most Executive CVs contain information which is at best only interesting, and at worst unnecessary. For example, your CV should not include the contact details of referees, details of your remuneration package, or personal hobbies and interests (unless they are relevant to the job you are applying for or illustrate that beyond the world of work you have attained a position of responsibility e.g. Parent Governor of local school). The fact that you support Manchester City may be important to you, but carries little weight on the CV especially if the reader is a "red".

On the other side of the coin, most Executive CVs fail to include relevant information about the companies for which they have worked. Just because ABC Widgets was a key part of your life for 7 years does not mean that every reader will know what ABC Widgets made, to whom the widgets were marketed, or the size of the company. This is very relevant information and should be (briefly) summarised and immediately obvious on your CV.

USE POWERFUL LANGUAGE

Many Executive CVs contain relatively weak or passive verbs. If we receive a junior secretary's CV we would expect to read "liaised with", "co-ordinated", "arranged" and "organised". However, on an Executive CV we would not expect to read such verbs and we strongly advocate the use of more powerful language, particularly when describing your achievements.

So we challenge you to take a look at your current CV and replace some of the weaker verbs with more powerful language such as “directed,”, “led”, “championed”, “pioneered”, etc. A few small changes can make a big difference to the perceived seniority and calibre of the candidate behind the CV.

The above observations should help you strengthen your CV. However, if you wish to take the exercise further we recommend the purchase of our Creating a Professional CV tool, which can be found under Downloads on our website [www\(dot\)executive-career-coaching\(dot\)co\(dot\)uk](http://www(dot)executive-career-coaching(dot)co(dot)uk) This tool also includes recommended examples of professional CVs.