

No Job Offer? Re-Write Your Invisible Resume and Get Results

You're tackling the job market and so far you've made all the right moves. Not sure how to secure job interviews, you receive counsel on how to do it. Wanting to have a resume that stands out from the pack, you hire a professional to write yours. Needing to know proper interview etiquette, you are coached on how to dress and shake hands, as well as the importance of eye contact.

Then you hear about your dream job. Your credentials, skills and experience are a perfect match for the job and so you set up the interview. You practice the right questions to ask, and the right answers questions you anticipate will be asked of you. When the interview day arrives, you go in and execute your strategy perfectly. Congratulations are in order.

But not to you. Because you've learned that they've offered the job to another candidate. How did this happen? You were so prepared. You had everything going for you.

The answer to these questions might come as a surprise. Especially if you think that landing a job comes down to a matter of where you've worked, what you've done, your tenure, credentials and accomplishments. If you've been told that offers are based on this information, it makes sense that you believe that the facts you communicate will get you the offer. There's just one problem with your belief that the prize is awarded solely based on qualifications; it's not true.

Your resume *does* provide important information, but during an interview there's a different type of information that the interviewer is collecting. This information is often more important than any found on your resume. However, unlike the well-crafted resume, this information is presented to the interviewer without you even realizing it. This is your "*Invisible Resume*." These two words explain why someone else landed your dream job.

What exactly is an *Invisible Resume*? Think of it this way: if your resume is the written document that tells *what* work you've done, then your *Invisible Resume* is the *non*-written document that tells *who* you are. It's all those intangibles that, when put together, make you *more* than the sum of your experiences.

Intangibles: The Difference Between “Sorry” and “Welcome Aboard.”

For 30 years, my work has brought me in contact with thousands of job seekers, giving me an up-close view of what it takes to get a job offer. I’ve seen candidates who met every requirement compete with candidates who lacked those same requirements but who connected well with the interviewer. Guess who got the job? The people who made the connection. Why? Because they were perceived as “likable.” Their *Invisible Resume* was working for them.

I also saw the influence of the *invisible resume* at work when I was coaching hard-core drug addicts who were in recovery, on how to land job offers. During the same period I was also coaching executive level clients who had been impacted by downsizing and were seeking new opportunities. Though you’d think the odds were stacked against them, the addicts in recovery were actually more effective at getting job offers than the executives. Why? Because being in recovery had made them self-aware; they could see themselves clearly and they were prepared to address their strengths and their areas of vulnerability. They came to the table prepared to talk about how adversity helped them become stronger, more responsible, and more accountable. Not so with the executives. They saw themselves as being pushed out by downsizing and they responded to the situation like victims. They felt ashamed and spent a great deal of time in their interviews trying to cover up their shame.

These experiences led me to analyze interview intangibles: All those things that have an impact on you getting the offer. What did the candidate who did *not* meet the job requirements do to get the offer? What did the addict in recovery have that the executive didn’t? It’s simple. The successful candidates were aware of how they were perceived. They were able to see themselves as the interviewers saw them. Not only that, they knew how to manage those perceptions and they knew how to do it from the get-go.

Perception and the First 60 Seconds

That very first minute of your interview is critical. There is considerable psychological research about the importance of first impressions. Right from the start something powerful and long lasting is occurring - interviewers are conjuring up all of the perceptions about you. You know exactly what I’m talking about because you do it yourself when you first meet someone. You reach all kinds of conclusions about someone you’ve just met very quickly.

You just forget that others are doing the same thing with you! These initial perceptions are what interviewers use to develop their assumptions about you. When they work in your favor, it's great, but when they don't, it means you've lost the job. And often you've lost it before you've even answered one question. The interview is your primary (and sometimes only) chance to show the hiring firm that you will fit in with their organization and deserve the position. Often, the verbal and nonverbal cues that you send will disqualify you before you've even answered one question. And I'm not talking solely, or even primarily, about personal appearance either, although these considerations sometimes influence employment decisions even when they legally shouldn't.

Case Studies

My work not only gives me access to the candidates, but to the interviewers as well. And so, I always ask them to tell me why they decided *not* to hire someone. Often their decision is based on their **perceptions** of the candidate, and the negative **assumptions** they've drawn. Sadly, these assumptions are usually false. Sadder still is the fact that they play such an important role in hiring decisions and the candidate had no idea this was the impression he or she was conveying.

Let's look at some examples of the great impact the *Invisible Resume* has on the interview. Then let's take another look on how the interviewee could have shifted the negative assumptions, had he or she been aware of them.

Job Candidate #1: Susan. A very low-key person, Susan is scheduled for a telephone interview. Her resume meets all the qualifications for the job, and Susan is well prepared for the call. When the interviewer's first question is "Tell me about your background," Susan is ready, willing and able and she responds. She talks about her life and her work.

Result: Susan didn't receive a job offer.

Feedback From Interviewer: "Susan talked too much. She spent 15 minutes on the first question and yet she did not sound very interested while she was talking to me. I'm not sure I would feel comfortable with her."

Job Candidate #2: Ryan. Though very bright and capable, Ryan is also shy. The interviewer greets Ryan, asks him to sit down and then proceeds to ask

Ryan the first question, “Tell me about yourself.” Very slowly and in a deliberate manner, Ryan begins talking about his past job.

Result: Ryan didn’t receive a job offer.

Feedback From Interviewer: “It was like pulling teeth to get Ryan to talk. I don’t know if he would like the work and he gave so little information it was hard to assess his qualifications.”

Job Candidate #3: Kate. A seasoned professional with 25 years of experience, Kate is going back for a second interview in a big corporation. This time she’s meeting with the boss. Having made it through the first round, she’s feeling good about her interviewing skills. Kate knows she has the skills and experience for the position and hopes that the boss will like her. Then she reminds herself that that people tend to like working with her and so she assumes the boss will feel the same. The boss greets Kate and launches with the familiar “Tell me about yourself.” Kate tells her story, talking mainly about her career journey.

Result: Kate didn’t receive a job offer.

Feedback From Interviewer: “Kate has been working for a long time and seems very clear and organized, but this is a very fast paced culture and things change rapidly. I don’t think she seems very flexible and I am not sure given where she is in her career she would give this job 100%”

Invisible Resume: Sending the Wrong Impression

Susan, Ryan and Kate were all hurt by their *Invisible Resumes*. These three qualified and competent candidates could have increased the chances of getting offers had they only been able to read and influence the perceptions their interviewers had of them. Not knowing the contents of their *Invisible Resumes*, all three candidates fell victims to them, rather than using them to aid in their success.

What can you do to manage perceptions; thereby assuring the interviewer sees you the way you want?

3 Ways to Send the Right Impression – Remember the three Ds

- 1: Determine – people’s first perception/impression of you.
Self-awareness is vital when it comes to understanding perceptions about you. Ask yourself and ask others: “How do people see me when they first meet me?” Ask people to be open with you. Honest feedback is the only feedback that can help you. Sometimes you may already be aware of how you come across, but you have tried to ignore, avoid, or over compensate for these qualities. This is the time to be honest with yourself.
- 2: Draw – your own negative assumptions.
Once you have collected the perceptions about you, figure out the *negative* assumptions others can make based on them. The following negative assumptions are examples of how perceptions get translated:

Perception	Assumptions
Quiet	Depressed
Overweight	Undisciplined
Energetic	Difficult to manage
Articulate	Overly confident
Relaxed	Lazy
Limited eye contact	Untrustworthy
Organized	Inflexible
Shy	Snobby or cold

- 3: Develop – a short script to explain who you are.
This is where you take charge of others’ perceptions. You don’t wait for them to make assumptions; you acknowledge what they may be thinking and refute it at the outset. This script will address perceptions and therefore influence assumptions in a positive way. Your script is made of just a sentence or two, which acknowledges the perception that the interviewer might have. Here are examples of scripts that address perceptions:

- If people say you come across “very organized,” a negative assumption one could draw is that you are inflexible, your script would say:
“People say I present myself as very organized and, while I am, I am perfectly comfortable working in unstructured, even chaotic environments. I am quite flexible in my approach”

- If your resume shows you have poor tenure on jobs your script would say:
“While it may appear I am a job hopper, the last 3 companies I worked with were acquired and as a result there was a restructuring. While I was asked to stay my job became very different than what I was originally hired to do. I was fortunate to be recruited to a new company in a job that was a better fit.”

Susan, Ryan and Kate: Revisited

If Susan had known that people misperceive her low-key personality and voice for a lack of energy, or that they might assume she is disinterested, or even depressed, she might have considered saying:

“I have a low key style. I love my work and enjoy being a part of a team, but I tend to be the player who keeps her cool.”

If Ryan was aware that his shyness comes across as unfriendly, not a team player or having poor communication skills, he might have opted to say:

“I admit I am on the shy side, but those who work with me know that I enjoy being around people and am quite talkative once I know people.”

If Kate knew that the perception people have of her as a seasoned professional made them assume she had her own distinct way of doing things and may not take direction well, be inflexible or not invested in making a long term commitment. She could have said:

“I’ve had a great career but am very excited about this next step. I have a great deal of energy, work well with everyone, love a fast paced environment and enjoy a flexible ever changing culture.”

When people ask, “Can I really say these things in an interview?”, my answer is “You’d better or else.” It is absolutely necessary to explain who you are. Describing *what* you have done in your job does not address *who* you are and how that plays out on a job.

Additionally, when it comes to describing who you are, you’re not just controlling perceptions; there are two other pluses that can help you, too:

1. You're demonstrating to the interviewer that you have self-awareness and perspective on how you might be experienced. The interviewer knows that this will be beneficial in the work place.
2. You're showing an emotional openness by addressing perceptions. This results in a connection between you and the interviewer; you've created rapport in a situation where it's most needed.

Understanding and using the *Invisible Resume* translates into an advantage in the interview room—you have permission to be yourself and explain what that means. This ability to manage other people's perceptions is a big part of what will allow you come out ahead. And then there's the other thing that the *Invisible Resume* can do...the next time you're up for the job of your dreams, it won't be the other candidate who lands it, it'll be *you*!

About the Author

Betsy Friedlander is managing partner of Willmott & Associates, a leading human resource placement firm. She is a nationally known expert in the field of career management. She has authored a manual "How To Land Job Offers: The Art Of Generating Job Opportunities." Over the past 30 years Betsy has provided human resource consulting services to Fortune 500 Companies throughout the United States. Betsy joined Willmott & Associates 7 years ago. Willmott & Associates has been in the business of human resource search and contract placement for 25 years and coaches candidates on the "invisible resume".