

# POWER

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# Résumés

*Shine up your life — in 500 words or less*

**W**hen Steve Singer, MD decided to leave his general surgery practice after battling tough economic factors for 13 years, he thought he would apply for something in management, but all he had to offer prospective employers was a curriculum vitae, or CV, as it's more commonly known.

“At that point, I had no résumé,” says the Tampa, Florida, surgeon, who now serves as the medical director for Humana.

Lucky for him, his circle of friends included Deborah Shlian, MD, MBA, who, along with her physician-husband Joel, own Shlian and Associates, an executive/physician recruiting firm based in Boca Raton, Florida.

“She knows what employers look for, so she helped me develop my résumé,” Singer says.

Any physician who hopes to jump from clinical practice into an executive position or any job outside the clinical field needs a good résumé to open the door, says Deborah

Shlian. “It’s their ticket to an interview,” she says.

Yet physicians, if they have résumés at all, tend to have bad ones.

“Most physician résumés I’ve seen are too generic,” says Shlian.

Francine Gaillour, MD, MBA, an executive coach and the founder and director of Creative Strategies in Physician Leadership ([www.physicianleadership.com](http://www.physicianleadership.com)) in Bellevue, Washington, would take the criticism of physician résumés a step further. “They’re old, basic, and boring,” she says.

The reasons why, according to physician recruiters like Shlian and Mary Frances Lyons, MD, with the St. Louis-based executive search firm Witt/Keiffer, generally have to do with one or more of the following reasons:

- \* Confusion over the differences between a résumé and CV and which document to use when
- \* Poorly written and presented résumés, and/or
- \* Focus on the wrong elements

Until you’re able to understand and shine in all three categories, you’re unlikely to produce the kind of résumé that will land you an interview, much less a job. And if it’s a fellowship or residency you’re seeking—something in the clinical field—these tips are likely to prove useful, too. At least you’ll know which document to present, and what it



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**Ian Jones, MD successfully made the jump from clinical to administrative work about six years ago, and is now the vice president of clinical performance at Sherman Hospital in Elgin, Illinois. He wants a physician seeking an administrative position to send a résumé. Don't send a CV if you're looking for administrative work, he says. "They don't tell me what I need to know. Frankly, they amuse me, but they're not very helpful."**

should contain.

### **Résumés vs. CVs**

The first thing to understand if you're seeking new work is that a curriculum vita is not a résumé.

"CVs list academic accomplishments," says Lyons.

According to James Tysinger PhD, an associate professor in the department of family and community medicine at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, and the author of *Résumés and Personal Statements for Health Professionals* (Galen Press, 1999), a good CV will include:

- **Educational experience**
- **Training**
- **Fellowships**
- **Presentations at national conferences**
- **Research experience**
- **Published, peer-reviewed books, articles, chapters, abstracts, etc.**
- **Grants acquired (and for how much)**

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- **Leadership positions in national organizations**
- **Committee experience in professional organizations**
- **Any other academic or clinical accomplishments**

Almost all physicians have CVs and are familiar with how they're put together, Tysinger says. Gaillour agrees. "They're cut-and-dried outlines," she says "They don't follow any traditional format."

Curriculum vitae will help you secure a residency, staff privileges, and maybe a first job if you're applying to work for a managed-care company, for example. They're basic tools to deter-



*Francine Gaillour, MD*

mine if a physician is right for an academic or clinical position or, occasionally, for a government committee, such as a state medical board.

"CVs can also be useful backgrounders if you're giving a lecture somewhere," says Ian Jones, MD, who successfully made the jump from obstetrics-gynecology to administrative work about six years ago. He currently serves as the vice president of clinical performance at Sherman Hospital in Elgin, Illinois.

In the world of business, however, managers are more interested in what you've accomplished in a business sense than in what publications you've produced or presentations you've

given.

"Résumés are business tools," says Gaillour. "They're what corporate organizations are familiar with, and it's what they look for when they consider candidates."

Jones, who is in a position to review résumés and hire candidates, says physicians are frequently confused about when to send a CV and when to send a résumé. He says, don't send a CV if you're looking for administrative work. "They don't tell me what I need to know," he says. "Frankly, they amuse me, but they're not very helpful."

Tysinger says whether a physician needs to have a résumé or a curriculum vita—or both—depends on career goals.

"Think about what you're looking for," Tysinger says. If you want a position as department chair, you'll need a CV. If it's a job with an insurance or managed-care company, you'll need a résumé. According to Tysinger, it's not a bad idea for physicians to have one of each available. That way you're covered, no matter how your career changes or grows. "You can always adapt a résumé to a CV and vice versa," he says.

#### **The well-written résumé**

Suppose you're a physician who is ready to write a résumé. Where do you begin?

If you're just starting on a non-clinical, management path, then a good,

basic résumé will help you apply for the kind of job that will give you more business experience.

A basic résumé, says Tysinger, will provide your name, contact information (don't forget to list your e-mail address), your degree, your position in clinical practice, or any administrative roles you've had in practice. It will also include the titles and dates of any business or leadership positions.

"There are three criteria for writing a résumé," says Tysinger. "The information in a résumé needs to be accurate, important, and complete"—and that holds true whether you're preparing a basic résumé or the more advanced executive résumé, which will be discussed later.

These three criteria warrant a closer look:

#### **✓ ACCURACY**

"You need to be honest about everything in your résumé," says Barbara Linney, the vice-president of career development for the American College of Physician Executives. In that role, she has helped scores of physicians craft résumés. "If there's a skeleton in your closet, a recruiter or potential employer will uncover it, so be upfront and tell them what it is," she says.

Accuracy also means not embellishing job titles or areas of responsibility, and accounting for all dates since graduation. "You need entry and completion dates so a recruiter can follow your history," Linney says. If there are gaps, explain them. "Potential employers don't like surprises," she says.

Lyons recalls one job applicant who listed a degree he was scheduled to receive but didn't yet have. When the potential employer asked about it, the applicant looked as though he had de-

## How to Write an Electronic Résumé

Don't think you've mastered the résumé until you can produce a safe and effective electronic résumé.

In today's high-tech business environment, electronic résumés are becoming more and more prevalent. "We love them because they're easy to keep on



Mary Frances Lyons, MD

file," says Mary Frances Lyons, MD, a recruiter with the St. Louis-based executive search firm

Witt/Keiffer. Despite common thought, however, they are not just paper résumés you send digitally. They are distinctly different, says Susan Joyce, the owner and publisher of *Job-Hunt.org*, a *Forbes* "Best of the Web" site, and *U.S. News & World Report's* "Top Site for Finding Jobs."

According to Joyce, "Electronic résumés have made the whole process of applying for jobs so much easier," but they can also leave you open to privacy issues and identity theft

if precautions aren't taken.

"There is a great deal of personal information on a résumé that can be misused, and it is painfully easy to lose control of an electronic résumé," says Joyce.

For safety's sake, be sure to take the following steps with any on-line résumé you create:

- **Remove all contact information from the résumé. The only exceptions would be an unlisted cell phone number and a secondary e-mail address, or a "throw-away" e-mail address you set up for the purpose of receiving responses.**
- **Know where you're submitting your résumé. "Not every job is real, not every employer is genuine, and not every Web site can be trusted," says Joyce.**
- **Don't pay anyone to distribute your résumé to recruiters. "Talk about loss of control," says Joyce. "It doesn't get much worse."**

Joyce also provides these tips for creating more effective e-résumés:

- **Put an "effective date" on the résumé if you're posting on a job Web site. Electronic résumés can stay posted for a long time on**

some Web sites, so an effective date will inform potential employers whether or not you're still likely to be interested.

- **Your first line should be "Résumé of" followed by your name. "You really need to state it's a résumé," says Joyce. Otherwise, employers may wonder why your employment history found its way into their e-mail box.**

- **Use plain ASCII text when you're formatting your résumé because not all e-mail software will receive all fonts.**

- **Add a "skills" section near the top of the résumé where key words can be concentrated. Use as many key words as you can to showcase your skills. Large employers, says Joyce, use applicant tracking systems to sort through résumés, so the more buzz words you use—such as "team player," "highly motivated," "result-producing"—the better. Just remember to use the key terms inconsistently. "Having two versions of a term, like ER and emergency room," says Joyce, "means there's a better chance your résumé will rise out of the**

depths of the database and into the light of human attention."

- **Don't send your résumé as an attachment. "Attachments depend on someone having the time and motivation to open them," says Joyce. It's better (and quicker) to cut and paste the contents of your plain-text résumé into the body of an e-mail message.**

"Remember," says Joyce, "don't blanket Web sites or recruiters with your résumé. Just because it's easy to do so doesn't mean you should. You'll have better success if you take the time to customize your résumé for each job and with electronic résumés, that's easy to do."

Finally, says Francine Gaillour, MD, MBA, an executive coach and the founder of Creative Strategies in Physician Leadership in Bellevue, Washington, follow up each electronic résumé with a phone call. It's a good way to provide your contact information, and it provides the recruiter or potential employer with something your competition may not: a thoughtful—and human—touch. ■

liberately misrepresented himself. "Be honest," says Lyons. "Only put down those degrees or awards you have already received."

### ✓ IMPORTANCE

Gaillour recalls looking over one physician's résumé and learning he had delivered pizzas while in college.

"Don't put that kind of information in

your résumé," she says. "It doesn't qualify you for anything."

Gaillour also advises résumé writers to skip information about grade point averages, references, and personal information such as hobbies and family. "If the employer wants to know anything about this, it will come up during the interview," she says.

Lyons disagrees. She encourages ap-

plicants to add information to their résumé about their spouse, the spouse's career, and the names and ages of their children. "It addresses an applicant's ability to move if that's required," she says. Even if the question about moving is not brought up until the interview, some employers would like that information up front, she says. (Direct questions about marital status are ille-

gal for the employer to ask during an interview, but they are often addressed with a general question such as, “Tell us about yourself.” It is up to the applicant to decide how to reply.)

When you’re deciding what’s important enough to list in your résumé, Tysinger says to consider the position for which you are applying. “A business executive isn’t going to care about your grant-writing experience or where you served your residency. Only put in information that would be relevant to the job you’re applying for,” he says.

Sometimes, Tysinger says, it can be helpful to sit down and inventory what you have to offer. “One of the questions I ask my client is, ‘Do you speak a second language?’ The fact that you can will sometimes give you an edge over another candidate,” he says.

Lyons suggests you write your résumé so that your most important experiences are up front. “They should go right there on page one,” she says.

### ✓ COMPLETENESS

According to Tysinger, it’s not true that résumés have to be one page in length. That’s a myth. Résumés should be as long as you need to list your experience,” he says—but within reason. Up to three pages are acceptable—more is not. A four-, five-, or six-page résumé begins to resemble a CV and should be cut. Linney agrees with trimming lengthy résumés. “Previous experiences can be minimized,” she says. Of course, only include what’s relevant to the job at hand.

Singer, the surgeon-turned-medical director, recalls a near-disastrous result when he tried to format his résumé into a two-page document. “Somehow, all of my board certification was

dropped from the final copy,” he says. When he went to the interview, he was asked about his board-certification. “I wasn’t aware until that moment that none of my board certification information made it into my résumé,” he says. “It was pretty embarrassing.”

One way to ensure that your résumé contains all the relevant information, says Tysinger, is to have someone who is familiar with the position, or, at least a friend, go over it carefully. A second pair of eyes may catch mistakes, like Singer’s, or items the applicant didn’t think to put in.

Once you’ve determined what to include, start thinking about format. Thousands of sample résumés can be found in books and Web sites if you want ideas about how to present your credentials.

There is no “best” format, says Tysinger—although personally, he prefers résumés on beige paper with 20 percent rag. “It photocopies and faxes well,” he says, “and it presents a nice, professional image.”

Keep your résumé visually simple. Use one type font throughout, avoid graphics, and use one-inch margins all around. “Go for readability,” says Tysinger. “A good question to ask is, ‘Can I read it at arm’s length?’”

A cover letter completes the package. “Keep it to one page and address it to a person, not a position or ‘to whom it may concern,’” says Tysinger. The cover letter should include three paragraphs: The first states what position you’re applying for and how you found it; the second, why you’re applying for the job; and the third should tell the recipient that your résumé is attached and how to contact you.

Much of this boilerplate information will be useful no matter what position

you seek, but if you’re a physician looking for an executive position, you’ll want to take your résumé to the next level—and this is the other area where physician résumés often fail: They focus on the wrong things.

A basic résumé is great if you’re looking for an introductory position, but if you have the kind of background and experience needed for a management job, your résumé had better match up, and that means focusing on elements basic résumés don’t.

### The executive résumé

“I call them power résumés,” says recruiter Gaillour. “And they should highlight your accomplishments, not your responsibilities.” In other words, a basic résumé’s laundry list of jobs is no longer as important as what you achieved in that job—and sometimes, that kind of focus takes a little extra thought.

To prepare a “power résumé,” Gaillour suggests asking yourself the following questions:

- **What has challenged me?**
- **What did I do to meet the challenge?**
- **What was gained as a result?**

Use action verbs in your responses, and quantify the results with numbers whenever possible, Gaillour says.

Linney provides some examples: “Your résumé could tell how much money you saved an employer, or how you improved performance,” she says. “Maybe you increased safety or reduced length of stay,” she says. “In the end, all people really care about when they’re reviewing applications is what you’ve done and what kind of success you’ve had.”

A recruiter or professional résumé writer can help you turn a basic résumé into an executive one, but you can also do it yourself by following the advice given by Gaillour and Linney. Highlight your accomplishments and make certain they are the focus of your résumé, but to really stand out, take one step further: Tailor those highlighted accomplishments to the specific job you're seeking.

Shlian agrees. "That's the problem with many of the résumés I see," she says. "They're not telling this particular company why they should be considered for this particular job."

Eliminate objective statements—empty phrases like, "My objective is to find a management level position in a managed-care company."

"Employers don't care about your objectives," Shlian says. "They want to know what you can do for them. That's what you should be telling them."

Jones also warns against vague phrases such as, "I'd make a good administrator." "How do I know you'd make a good administrator unless you tell me what you've done?" he says.

In other words, the more specific you can be about your accomplishments, the more likely you'll be considered. If you can show a potential employer that you've succeeded at exactly the kind of job the organization has to fill, you're all but guaranteed to earn a call or interview.

To ensure that response, you must know your strengths and sell them to a particular employer.

Jones, the former ob/gyn-turned-administrator, says, "If you're looking at three or four different jobs, then you'd best prepare three or four different résumés, each tailored to the job you're applying for."

Shlian says the effort will pay off. "If you haven't worked in business, it's sometimes difficult to see why this extra work is necessary," she says, but it's how businesses work, and it's what's expected of candidates considered "executive material."

"A lot of doctors who practice medicine think they can become administrators just because they want to," says Shlian. That may have been the case five or six years ago, she says, when such opportunities were at their height—but it's not so easy today. Because of mergers, acquisitions, and downsizing, opportunities in medical management have narrowed and become highly competitive.

That's why it's more important than ever to become résumé savvy if you're seeking administrative work.

Lyons says, "Your résumé has a big job to do." It not only has to convince an employer that you can do the job, but do it better than hundreds of other applicants, some of whose résumés may be as persuasive as yours.

That's why Gaillour says, whenever possible, it's best to make some kind of contact, either formal or informal, with the decision-maker before sending off your paperwork.

"Résumés are really marketing collateral," she says. "They should always be preceded by an introduction to a decision-maker or someone close to the decision-maker."

That's the kind of competition you—and your résumé—face in the battle for today's executive office. It's why you should always write your résumé as though it's a champion for yourself. Because, bottom line, that's exactly what it has to be. ■

Karen Edwards is an Ohio-based free-lance writer.

This is her first article for *Unique Opportunities*.