

Assessing Your Skills: What Makes You Different from All the Others?

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Gina had recently been laid off after working as a marketing manager in a high tech company for the past five years. She was distracted as she walked through the aisles of the supermarket. She was thinking about ways to market herself into a new job. She stood in front of the cereal selection, overwhelmed by the number of brands to choose from -- more than 100 varieties.

Suddenly, it dawned on her: This must be what it's like for hiring managers to look at all those resumes received in answer to ads and postings. How do they choose? What do they look for? How does one get selected? How can I make my product stand out?

The Packaging

The packaging on the cereal box is certainly the start. Eye-catching colors and descriptive words will draw attention -- low fat, energy boosting, added vitamins -- all the things consumers are looking for. But what are employers looking for? The words you choose will be key. Using words that will interest the companies will grab their attention.

The Ingredients

The list of ingredients -- the skills you have to offer -- is also important. Gina couldn't wait to get home and write down her skills and what made her unique to the position. She had a new slant to explore.

She remembered reading in a book that skills can be grouped into three categories:

- Skills learned through past experience and education (knowledge-based skills).
- Skills you bring with you to any job (transferable or portable skills).
- Personal traits, the things that make you who you are.

The Assessment Tool

Gina divided a piece of paper into three columns and labeled them with "previous experience," "portable skills" and "personality," the three P's of marketing.

In the "previous experience" column she wrote:

- Marketing knowledge
- Communications skills
- Vendor management
- Press and industry relations
- Web channel marketing
- Product development
- Computer skills

Under "portable skills" she wrote:

- Customer focus
- Communications
- Writing skills
- Very organized
- Good at coordinating
- Team leader
- Problem solving
- Project management
- Excellent follow-through
- Good with budgets and numbers
- Time management

In the "personality column" she wrote:

- Self-starter
- Independent
- Friendly
- Well-organized
- Quick learner
- Good judgment
- Good attitude
- Creative
- Analytical
- Flexible
- Good sense of humor
- Goal-directed

When she was finished, she sat back and checked the list over. She was surprised at how easily the list had come together. By dividing the skills, the task became manageable. Trying to look at everything at once is like looking at those cereal boxes.

Getting words on paper is one of the most difficult steps of putting your "ingredients" list together. This is a good exercise for anyone beginning the search process, or as a periodic check or inventory. Gina can now use the list to put together her resume, write a summary statement or compose a personal statement. The skills will be the foundation of the strategy she will use to sell herself. She still has some work to do before she can take her product to market, but she certainly has made a good start.

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