

Are You Marketing Your Experience Correctly?

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If you are looking to make a career change to a new field, it's easy to miss how much you have to offer prospective employers. Talents that yielded success in previous positions can set candidates up to achieve great things in their new field. The trick is to take a full inventory of those transferrable skills and present them in such a way that hiring managers can easily see the relation.



Identifying Transferrable Skills

Simply put, transferrable skills are abilities that can be applied to different work environments. Some can be readily identified and demonstrated, such as proficiency in a foreign language or knowledge of a computer program. Others, such as **leadership ability** or a knack for problem-solving, may take a little more effort to recognize and prove.

Brainstorming a list of potential qualities to promote can help a candidate realize what he might bring to the table. John Paul Engel is an executive recruiter and president of Knowledge Capital Consulting, a management consulting firm based in Sioux City, Iowa. His advice for students and recent graduates looking to switch fields is to first assess your skills and think of three to five traits about yourself that an employer would value. Next, whether you're in an interview or networking with professionals in the industry you're interested in joining, ask these three questions:

- How did you get in this field?
- What have you learned that has helped you be successful?
- What can I do to prepare myself for a career in this field?

Remember, though, that employers are not interested in every one of your talents, no matter how impressive your diverse experience is. You might be a math whiz, for example, but if your new field doesn't particularly call for numerical aptitude, highlighting this talent won't support your candidacy.

Giving Employers What They Want

Getting hired is about showing that you are the right person for a given position. To determine what to showcase, you first need to know what is wanted. This step involves investigation.

"The most important thing for students and recent college graduates to consider when applying for jobs is what the employer is looking for in the qualified applicant," says Jené Kapela, owner and founder of Jené Kapela Leadership Solutions, a South Florida-based leadership and career-coaching company. "If the job candidate can demonstrate these skills, other factors aren't as important."

Kapela goes on to say, "Job candidates should customize their résumé for each different type of position, specifically highlighting how they meet the job qualifications and demonstrate the skills required of the position. The **cover letter** is also an important piece of the application process, as they can use the cover letter to make a case for how their experiences are tied to the qualifications of the job."

Combing through relevant job ads not only gives an applicant an idea of sought-after traits, the procedure also introduces the person to the language most commonly employed in this new field. Familiarity with these terms can help a candidate describe her talents in ways that are understandable to the hirer. Another good way to get a feel for industry lingo and gain insight about desirable characteristics is to talk to people who work in the profession. Search your network for possible connections, or consider attending professional events where you can meet people of interest.

Connecting the Dots

After comparing your talents to what you've discovered employers want, it is time to blend the two. Career Coach Lavie Margolin, author of "The LinkedIn Butterfly Effect," suggests going through each requirement/responsibility on the list of employer preferences and asking yourself, "Have I done this before?" If the answer is "yes," consider where and when. Then, be sure to demonstrate these things on your résumé and in your cover letter using industry language similar to the job descriptions in order to make a direct connection between A (what you have) and B (what they want).



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An important part of this process is providing solid evidence. Anybody can claim to be an effective communicator or a talented negotiator. Show instead of tell, and let the hirer be the judge.

"Providing concrete examples for each of the most important skills the new job requires and then discussing how these skills are transferable will help connect the dots for potential employers to see what is relevant," says Certified Executive Coach Lisa Quast, founder of Career Woman, Inc. in Seattle, Wash. and author of "Your Career, Your Way!"

Job seekers looking to present transferable skills as a major selling point may opt for a **functional résumé** in which skills are grouped together rather than a traditional list of work history. Putting similar skills together instead of scattering throughout can create a stronger impression and may prove especially useful to candidates trying to transition into a new field. Such a set-up also allows easy inclusion of relevant experiences outside of the workplace such as volunteer projects or professional enrichment.

Taking the time to illustrate the transferrable skills you bring to a new role isn't only helpful to employers; it can be enlightening for you, too. The confidence that comes from seeing what you've accomplished in the past can give you an edge in securing a bright future.

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