

WORDS THAT HURT: 10 OVERUSED TERMS TO REMOVE FROM YOUR RESUME

(Posted on MSN.com March 22, 2013 By Robert Half International)

There are certain résumé words and phrases that have become so ubiquitous they do little more than induce yawns and eye rolls from hiring managers. Employers are so accustomed to hearing from "team players" and "problem solvers," for example, that those descriptions are now essentially meaningless. To distinguish yourself from your competitors, you'll need to cut the clichés – or at least expand upon them with concrete details that back up your claims.

Robert Half recently asked more than 1,300 managers at companies across the United States and Canada to name the most overused résumé phrases. Based on our survey findings, here are 10 terms to retire:

1. Hard worker

Nothing causes a hiring manager's eyes to glaze over faster than seeing this hollow descriptor. Why? Because virtually all applicant, even the least-motivated clock-watchers claim to work hard.

To impress a prospective employer, you'll need to explain exactly how you've gone the extra mile. Do you regularly meet aggressive deadlines, handle a high volume of projects, exceed ambitious targets or volunteer to tackle tasks outside your role?

2. Self-starter

Companies seek astute candidates who can get off to a strong start without excessive managerial direction and handholding. (In another Robert Half survey, managers cited mastering new processes and procedures as the greatest challenge when starting a new job.)

Unfortunately, simply saying you're a "self-starter" won't convince anyone of your initiative, resourcefulness or ability to quickly make meaningful contributions. Instead, illustrate how you've thrived when managing important projects with little or no supervision.

3. Team player

This term is the cliché of clichés. Working well with others is imperative, but get specific. Spell out the ways you've collaborated with colleagues. Did you dive in to help an overwhelmed coworker deliver a high-priority project or lead a key cross-departmental initiative?

4. Highly qualified

When it comes to your qualifications, show, don't tell. Skip this empty expression and describe what you'll bring to the position. Whenever possible, quantify your biggest achievements (think about money you've generated or saved your employers, for instance).

In addition, emphasize your most pertinent skills and certifications. Researching the firm and doing a careful reading of the job posting can help you determine which aspects of your background to focus on.

5. Dynamic

What does this well-worn term really mean? That you're bursting with innovative ideas and positive energy? If true, just say that. Characterizing yourself as "dynamic" is boastful and sounds unnatural. Unless you regularly don a cape as part of a crime-fighting duo, you can safely banish blasé buzzwords such as this.

6. Problem solver

While being a "problem solver" beats being a "problem creator," employers want tangible evidence of your effectiveness. What specific solutions have you devised? How have you overcome hurdles? Have you helped your boss or colleagues out of jams or streamlined workflow inefficiencies?

7. Reliable

Don't waste space touting "strengths" that are basic requirements of any job, such as reliability. It's expected that you – and every other potential hire – will be dependable. Showing up on time and doing your work isn't worth bragging about. After all, anything short of reliable would be unacceptable. Delete it.

8. Familiar with

Many job seekers rely on this ambiguous phrase to obscure a lack of in-depth knowledge in a particular area. For instance, a person can technically claim to be familiar with a software program they've used just once.

This type of wishy-washy wording raises red flags. It won't give employers any sense of your level of expertise, but it will dilute the impact of your more relevant core competencies.

9. Flexible

Change is the only constant today. As such, companies seek versatile professionals who'll adjust easily to new situations. But go a step beyond merely referring to yourself as flexible. Underscore your adaptability by explaining how you successfully responded to a major change at work or deftly dealt with unpredictable aspects of your job.

10. People person

Interpersonal skills are critical for most positions. Employers value professionals who can communicate effectively and build camaraderie with a diverse array of internal and external contacts. Cite examples of how you won over a challenging coworker, client or customer, or helped a group of stakeholders reach a consensus.

The bottom line is that clichés aren't memorable, powerful or persuasive. While there's nothing inherently wrong with the skills and traits listed above, they alone won't deepen an employer's understanding of who you are and what you offer. Stop using generic content as a crutch and embrace clear and specific information instead. As a job seeker, it just might be the most "dynamic" thing you can do.