

# Conquer *Resume* Objections

Triumph Over Barriers:

- Job History
- Career Objectives
- Resume Format

**Robert F. Wilson and  
Erik H. Rambusch**

# CONQUER RESUME OBJECTIONS

Robert F. Wilson  
and  
Erik H. Rambusch

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# CONQUER RESUME OBJECTIONS

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# Introduction

*Conquer Resume Objections* and the companion book *Conquer Interview Objections* are about job search. More specifically, they deal with the job search challenge by recognizing the difficulty of finding and keeping jobs in a time of profound change in the American marketplace. Such change may well have affected you personally, including as it has the permanent loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs (a magnitude unmatched since the Industrial Revolution). Since 1980, nearly 5 million men and women have lost jobs in *Fortune* 500 companies alone. An additional 300,000 military and civilian workers were “excessed” in the dozens of military bases closed around the country in the early 1990s. A cold war of four decades had the last laugh after all.

The challenge for job seekers from now till the end of the century and beyond resembles a game of musical chairs: workers eliminated from the employment “game,” slowly but surely, as the number of job opportunities disappears, slowly but surely. Even when job loss levels off, the challenge will continue to be great because there will be much more competition for the remaining open jobs and new ones being created than there was a decade or more ago.

This is where *Conquer Resume Objections* comes in. Conventional job search methods won’t—by themselves—assure success any more. All job seekers need an edge—strategies or work ways that propel them beyond their competitors—at every stage along the job-search continuum.

Your competition for any given job can be one person or a thousand—or somewhere in between. These two companion books offer a thorough, assertive game plan for making sure your candi-

dacy stands out from that of others after the same job who believe that conventional job search is enough—or who don't know better.

The titles of the two books, *Conquer Resume Objections* and *Conquer Interview Objections*, are organized around two major areas of the job search. But look at the complete tables of contents for both books. You'll see every area of job search covered, from the day you decide to leave a job (or it decides to leave you) to the first weeks and months on your new job strategizing the rest of your professional life—and the best way to negotiate your first raise.

This volume, *Conquer Resume Objections*, is organized to help you:

1. Focus your search by addressing your specific situation, and shoring up weak spots in your candidacy—not only identifying them, but doing something about them
2. Organize your life—both professionally and personally—in the days and months ahead
3. Write the “flexible resume,” a way of matching your resume with any job that comes along—by adjusting emphasis and focus where you need to
4. Develop an effective marketing plan that leaves nothing to chance
5. Overcome resume objections by anticipating what might sabotage your candidacy and taking any corrective action indicated.

If you have problems or questions further into the job search process, such as implementing your marketing plan, mastering the interviewing process, negotiating compensation, or finding the best ways to flourish on your next job, you'll want to take a look at *Conquer Interview Objections*.

## PRONOUN/ADJECTIVE GENDER ALERT

Throughout this book our contribution to controlling the rampant use of “his or her,” “his/her,” “s/he,” and “he/she,” as well as various single subject-plural pronoun combinations, has been to generally characterize *job seekers* as male and *employers* as female. This is neither an ideal nor permanent solution, but the best we could think of. We're open to suggestions for improvement.

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# 1

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## Getting Out From Under

Those of you who have decided to pick up this book are likely to be in one of the following five predicaments:

1. You do not have a job.
2. You're about to lose your job.
3. You hate your job and want another one.
4. You're having a tough time getting your first "real" job.
5. You're returning to the job market after years away from it.

Much of the information on the following pages will be of interest to you regardless of which of these five situations most resembles yours. Even if the symptoms of your professional malady aren't observable today, you'll be able to recognize them when you see them. For this reason you may want to pay particular attention to the section or sections relating most closely to your problem area(s), and just skim those sections that are less relevant.

Your strategy for getting into a new or better job will vary considerably depending on your situation—but yes, there will be similarities. The exception will be for those of you so new to professional life that you haven't been able to develop and refine your own special approach. In this sense Chapter 1 will be a primer of what situations, decisions, and behaviors to avoid as you begin to log some real time in the world of work.

## RECENT JOB LOSS

You may bear the responsibility for losing your job or you may not, depending upon a variety of circumstances. Either way, you'll want to examine what went wrong in order to minimize the chances of it happening again.

### Victims of Downsizing

Why is finding and keeping a job more difficult today than it was a decade ago? Let's label the fallen dominoes one by one: an increasingly spongy national economy; a decline in the number of manufacturing industries, particularly some of those related to defense; shrinking corporate profits; consolidation by acquisition and merger; massive organizational change; frequent business failure.

Since 1980, these overlapping phenomena have brought about the elimination of some 4.3 million jobs in *Fortune* 500 companies alone. Many have been middle-management jobs slashed to control growing business losses by flattening corporate infrastructure. Others have been phased out of existence by the relentless advance of technology—not just until a particular industry rebounds from whatever malaise has paralyzed it, but gone forever.

Older workers have been affected out of proportion to the rest of the workforce, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics. From October 1991 to October 1992, for example, unemployment for workers aged 16 through 54 rose 4.4 percent, while the rate for workers 55 and over increased by 31.4 percent.

So for these and other reasons, more Americans are applying for fewer jobs, while many of the people who get these jobs are performing very different duties than they did 10 years ago—often for less money.

Another sea change during this period is the redefinition of the fundamental relationship between employer and employee. Lifetime company tenure, common a generation ago, is virtually unknown today. Similarly, "company loyalty"—sometimes confused with family loyalty by those employers who have tended to blur the distinction—is in profound obsolescence. More and more frequently, once-faithful employees, some of whom have toiled 20 years or more in expectation of pension-augmented retirement, have been repaid with termination. Corporate "turnaround experts," paid big bucks to staunch the flow of red ink, usually find

the solution in—aha!—bloated payrolls and loss-prone “profit centers.”

Complicating this situation is a growing tendency among larger companies to “reengineer themselves,” according to business behavior guru Peter Drucker. One manifestation of this, says Drucker in *Post-Capitalist Society*, is to rely on outside sources for some cyclical kinds of work, and in so doing eliminate entire layers of management and professional staff. “Most large companies have cut the number of layers by 50%, even in Japan,” he said in a *Harvard Business Review* interview about the book. “Toyota came down from 20-odd to 11. GM has streamlined from 28 to maybe 19, and even that number is decreasing. Organizations will become flatter and flatter.”

All of this will cause many job seekers to adopt a wary demeanor—and justifiably so. Guarding against the repeat of a possible downsizing squeeze, in particular, can approach the odds of a novice in a high stakes card game. Mix equal parts of luck and whimsy with sophisticated economic theory, and your guess will be as authoritative as the most seasoned economists’ well-publicized forecasts.

For specific suggestions on ways to check out target companies later in your search that could lead you into the consequences of another reorganization or downsizing, see Chapter 4. For tips on interviewing with such companies, see Chapter 3 of *Conquer Interview Objections*, the companion to this book.

### Termination “for cause”

Let’s say you were partly, mostly, or wholly at fault for losing your last job. Your first priorities, of course, are to take care of such immediate needs as filing for unemployment compensation, determining your short- and long-term financial needs, and getting organized for the task ahead of you—all covered in Chapter 2.

Beyond this you need to *find out what to change about you or your next job* that may have contributed to the loss of your previous job. There may even be a reason to consider what to change about the way you *choose* jobs that could be getting in the way of professional success.

You may never have been told the real reason you were let go. Few firing authorities have the stomach to confront terminées about their major flaws. Many are just embarrassed to be in this position

in the first place, or don't want to hurt people's feelings. Still others find firing such a painful act that they give the affected employee any reason for termination that will cause the least pain—both to themselves and to the person leaving.

Finally, an employer who discharges you in violation of any one of a number of federal and state statutes protecting workers, or who (in the language of the law) "otherwise discriminates against you," will go to considerable lengths to conceal any incriminating evidence. If you strongly believe that your employer has violated your rights based on any of the groups of laws listed below (adapted from Lewin Joel's comprehensive *Every Employee's Guide to the Law*), you may have cause for retributive action:

- Civil rights laws protecting you from discrimination based on your age, sex, race, religion, ethnic background, or handicap
- Constitutional First Amendment laws granting you freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly (provided your activities did not interfere with your job performance or your working relationship with your employer)
- Laws that protect your right to engage in "concerted activity" (read picketing and strikes) or belong to a union
- Wage and hour laws that guarantee the minimum wage you must be paid (with exceptions for trainees, volunteers, and workers who depend on tips in addition to their paychecks)
- Laws designed to protect your safety and health, chiefly the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (OSHA)
- Equal pay laws (for men and women)
- Laws that protect your personal privacy, and access to personnel records your company kept on you (varies widely by state)
- Laws that prohibit discharge or discipline because your wages have been attached by a creditor<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say that you should go out of your way to lash back at an employer for spite, on the mistaken notion that "getting even" will somehow atone for any wrong that has been done you.

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<sup>1</sup> Joel, *Every Employee's Guide to the Law*.

If your grievance is whimsical and without merit, not only will your efforts fail, but your reputation as a “troublemaker” will precede you and adversely affect your ability to get future jobs.

### *Getting a Second Opinion*

Firsthand information about your previous situation is invaluable. A former co-worker, for example, can provide information you never had or give you a level of detachment and objectivity you are unable to reach on your own—in some instances, both.

Choose your sources carefully. The last thing you want to do is reinforce a misimpression or add tainted new information to the mix. A former colleague at your level or above is more likely to give you an accurate and honest evaluation of your situation than someone at a level or more lower than the job you held. Former direct reports are the least reliable sources of all because they may view themselves on the wrong end of a “blamed messenger” situation, and either equivocate or withhold information accordingly.

Another caveat: Some of your contacts may feel an obligation to say only good things about the company or your ex-boss. After all, they still have their jobs, and you don't. Encourage candor by assuring them that your sole purpose for calling is to learn about yourself and apply what you learn to your next job.

Contact three or four people with whom you worked closely and enjoyed a good professional relationship. Evening calls at home are best, because you'll probably catch your source person at a more relaxed time—and with more privacy—than you will at the office. If you do have to call at work for whatever reason, pick your times carefully. If you know your source is an early arriver, for example, call before 9:00 A.M. If he lunches late, call after noon. If he normally works late, call after 5:00 P.M.

For this person to be of maximum value, you need to encourage complete honesty and candor at the outset. Here is a model you can adapt for your own purposes and style:

“Hello, Rich? This is Bart Nelson. Is this a good time to talk for a few minutes? Good. I wanted to ask you a question that might be difficult for you to answer, but I really need you to level with me.

“I've been doing a lot of thinking since I left Ajax, as you might imagine, and I don't want what happened there to happen at my next job—even if it means a career change.