



**KEYS TO A
WINNING**

CV

**HOW TO CREATE A CV
THAT GETS RESULTS**

Mildred Talabi

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7 Keys to a Winning CV

How to create a CV that gets results



By Mildred Talabi

HARRIMAN HOUSE LTD

3A Penns Road
Petersfield
Hampshire
GU32 2EW
GREAT BRITAIN

Tel: +44 (0)1730 233870
Fax: +44 (0)1730 233880
Email: enquiries@harriman-house.com
Website: www.harriman-house.com

First published in Great Britain in 2011

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ISBN: 978-0-85719-158-8

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book can be obtained from the British Library.

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Printed and bound in the UK by CPI Antony Rowe.

 Harriman House

*I dedicate this book to anyone who desires to have a fulfilling
and enjoyable work life – life is too short to do otherwise.*

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About the author

Mildred Talabi is an award-winning businesswoman, trained journalist and editor. Her venture into CV writing began in 2006 when she left her role as assistant editor of a film magazine to set up her own CV consultancy in response to the market need. Since then, Mildred has carried out numerous CV makeovers and one-to-one review sessions, and delivered CV seminars and workshops to hundreds of people.

Mildred is passionate about helping people attain enjoyable and fulfilling work lives and attributes her own career satisfaction to having always pursued her passion – whatever that may be at the time – and developing the ability to write effective CVs, cover letters and job application forms.

To find out more about Mildred, please visit **www.mildredtalabi.com**.

Seminars and speaking engagements

If you would like to enquire about booking Mildred for a CV seminar or a work-related speaking engagement at your organisation, please email **info@mildredtalabi.com**.

Feedback and testimonials

Please email all feedback and CV success testimonials as a result of using this book to **7keys@mildredtalabi.com**.

Acknowledgements

My first acknowledgement and thanks is to JC – my best friend, chief encourager and the one who enabled me to write this book. I did not know I had it in me until you pulled it out. Thank you for the oil that never runs dry.

To my amazing husband Malachi for your never-ending love, support, motivation and absolute marketing genius. I could not have asked for a better person to share my life with than you.

To Wayne Malcolm for being the first official life coach figure in my life at a time when I thought it was all a gimmick. Hearing you week in and week out for the last eight years enormously helped to awaken the giant within me.

To Len Allen for planting the seed in me that a book can indeed be written in seven days, and then being gracious enough to coach me through it. It was at one of your seminars that I received the profound revelation that writing a book is not just for smart people, it is for anyone who has thoughts to express – and I have plenty so this is the first of many!

To Goretti and the City Business Library team for hosting my very first ‘7 Keys to a Successful CV’ seminar and all the subsequent ones. Thank you for your gracious support.

To all the people that entrusted me with their CVs, cover letters and application forms over the years, allowing me to grow in confidence, experience and expertise in this area. Thank you, I could not have written this book without you.

Foreword

At the time of writing, there are 2.43 million unemployed people in the UK chasing 450,000 jobs. On average, five or more applicants are now competing for each vacancy. How are you going to beat the competition?

When the supply of talent in the labour market outweighs demand, standing out from the crowd is essential. A CV that communicates your unique attributes to an employer is the difference between securing your ideal job or not – it really is that simple. Think you can fill in the gaps and tell recruiters the interesting stuff when you meet face to face? Think again.

Recently, a friend of mine (a Group HR Director of one of the UK's largest retail businesses) ran an advertising campaign to recruit 250 new positions. To her utter dismay her team received 75,000 applications within a fortnight. Ouch. That's a lot of CVs. As you can imagine, it's hard work screening 75,000 job applications (no matter how big you are) which is why her initial short-listing process was based on recruiters spending 30-120 seconds scanning the key points of a CV. Two weeks later, 73,500 people had been told "thanks but no thanks" on the strength of their CV alone. First impressions count.

"Find a job you love, never do another day of work in your life."

Confucius

We all deserve to be happy. Sometimes we've just got to give ourselves a helping hand, especially when it comes to self-promotion. Mildred's book will give you that helping hand. These strategies and tactics will increase your chances of getting that job if you follow the seven keys closely.

Mildred's career saw her spending time on both sides of the recruitment fence and several years on the 'front-line' whilst running CV workshops. The experience she shares in this book provides a

unique insight into what makes recruiters ‘tick’. Despite having spent 20 years helping hundreds of employers recruit tens of thousands of people, when I read the manuscript I even had a couple of “penny dropping” moments myself!

This book will help you work out where you want to go, what you have to offer, and help you stand out from the crowd – even in a competitive recruitment process. Remember, your CV is one of the most important pieces of self-promotion you’ll ever create. It can be a passport to wherever you want to go or the barrier, so give it the thought and attention it deserves.

So read the book, go find the job you deserve, and have some fun. And start now, after all, there’s another four people out there already after your ideal job.

Good luck!

Richard Tyrie

Co-founder of GoodPeople & Jobsgopublic.com, Trustee of social enterprise charity UnLtd.

Preface

Six years ago I applied for a job as an editorial assistant at a small film magazine. I had recently graduated with a creative writing and film studies degree and was keen to get away from the Saturday library assistant job I was currently in and into the media where my real passion was.

I sent in my carefully crafted CV which highlighted my relevant media experience (all of it unpaid) and a well-written cover letter. One week later I handed in my resignation and took up my new role at the magazine. Within three months I was promoted to assistant editor and it was in this role that my journey into CV writing began. As well as the regular duties of a magazine editor (generating content, commissioning writers, liaising with designers, printers and so on), I was given the task of recruiting new staff members and work experience candidates, which meant that I came into contact with a *lot* of CVs.

I literally went through hundreds of CVs over the course of two years and what I found most shocking was the evident lack of preparation that went into this incredibly important document. Tiny font sizes, serial underlining, overuse of italics, too many pages, too little information, bad grammar, spelling mistakes, missing dates, wrong industry...the mistakes were endless! I had no choice but to reject CV after CV after CV. So much potential was lost and so much talent went unseen all because of a failure to accurately communicate on paper.

This got me thinking that despite all the information available on the internet, at job centres, and other career advice places, there were still people struggling to create good CVs. I realised there was a gap in the market for good quality CV writing and advice, so I said goodbye to the magazine and set up as a CV consultant. Since that day I have gone on to help hundreds of people with their CVs through one-to-one sessions, seminars and workshops.

I believe that writing a good CV is a skill that can be learnt. While there are no magic formulas that you can apply or wand that you can wave to automatically get you an interview, there are 7 fundamental keys to a CV that works, and I will be sharing them with you in this book. You will particularly benefit if you are a student or graduate new to the job market, or you are returning to work after a long absence or redundancy. My hope is that reading this book will not only help you create a CV that works, but more importantly it will be the first step towards obtaining a fulfilling work life for yourself.

To your career success.

Mildred

June 2011

Introduction

What is a CV?

‘CV’ is an abbreviation of ‘curriculum vitae’, which is Latin for ‘course of life’. A CV is essentially a document that charts the course of your life – more specifically, your work life – for the purpose of gaining employment.

It is what you, the candidate, present to a potential employer in order to be considered for employment within his or her organisation. As such a CV can be considered your passport to a job interview and just like the real thing, it is important to make sure this document reflects you at your best and that it is always kept up to date for when the need arises.

Your CV gives the employer an insight into who you are as a person so it is crucial that you give yourself the best chance possible by investing time and effort into creating a CV that works.

A sales tool

One important thing to understand about your CV is that it is a sales tool. Your CV is your own personal advert which affords you the opportunity to “sell” yourself to a potential employer. Imagine you are a dress or a suit in a clothes rack full of other dresses and suits – how would you stand out to the buyer? What makes you different from the pack? If you can really grab this concept and run with it, you will find it a whole lot easier to create your CV as the process then becomes all about showcasing your very best side to the employer. You are also competing against other “sales people” so your CV must convince the employer that if they choose you, you will be able to generate a significant return on investment, to borrow a sales term.

What employers look for

A lot of people make the mistake of thinking that their CV is all about them – wrong! It is all about the employer and what you can offer them. Every industry is different as is every employer, but what they all have in common when going through CV applications is that they are all looking for a specific set of skills, experience and personal attributes which they have deemed necessary to perform that particular job. If you can effectively demonstrate these three values in your CV, you are putting yourself in very good stead to be shortlisted for interview.

A typical employer would whittle down the number of applicants by listing each candidate against the essential requirements of the job and shortlisting only those that meet all the essential criteria. Where there are too many potential candidates, the next step is to refine the shortlist even further by matching those who also possess desirable qualities the employer is also looking for. This is why it is very important that you include as much relevant information as possible on your CV as related to your field. We will talk about this in more detail later.

Every word counts

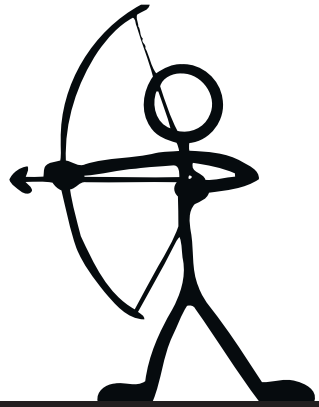
The key to writing a good CV is to make every word count – there should be no word on your CV that does not have a purpose or lend itself towards your overall vision of getting your next job in your chosen field. The best way to use this book is to have your CV open in front of you (or a blank piece of paper or screen if you are starting from scratch) as you go through the book. You might want to do this over a seven-day period, taking one key a day, or blitz straight through it all in one afternoon. Whatever you decide, once you correctly apply all the keys in this book, what you will end up with is a CV that works for you.

The 7 Keys

The following seven keys are based on my own experience of creating successful CVs for many people over the years, as well as broader research on what employers look for in a CV. These keys are the building blocks upon which every effective CV is based.

Key 1.

Know Your Target



Before you even think about writing a CV, you must first know ‘who’ you are targeting, otherwise you are simply playing Russian roulette with your work life. This key is foundational to creating a CV that works; without this key, none of the other six will have meaning or purpose.

Talk the talk

This first key has two important components – the first is about knowing who you are and your own wants and desires in relation to your career; the second is about knowing your potential employer and what they are looking for from a future employee.

Every industry has its own language, merits system and pathway so for your CV to work you need to be able to speak the same language as your chosen industry. What might impress in one field may do the complete opposite in another – a graphic design degree may be just what a marketing director needs to fill the last slot in his team,

but for the customer services manager in a retail shop, it is of no benefit to how many shoes you can sell in one shift!

It is important that you demonstrate early on how relevant you are to the role by speaking the same language. Have a look at this extract from a job advert for a web developer, posted by a digital communications agency:

“We are looking for an exceptional individual to become our Web Developer and work within our enthusiastic team. The successful candidate should possess excellent knowledge of XHTML, CSS, Javascript and PHP. An understanding of HTML5, CSS3, mobile platforms and server administration (Linux/LAMP) will be an advantage.”

Most people outside the IT industry would have no clue where to start in deciphering the meaning of this advert, but clearly XHTML, CSS and the rest are standard vocabulary in this sector. If you are to have a better chance of securing your next job, you need to know the vocabulary of your target market and use it effectively on your CV.

Make it relevant

Employers can be understandably brutal when it comes to filling a vacancy. A busy employer with scores of CVs to sift through does not have the time to go through irrelevant CVs – they are only looking to interview those candidates who most closely match their needs, so applicants who do not meet the basic requirements for the job are quickly eliminated.

Targeting your CV simply means that you tailor everything on your CV to your chosen industry in a way that is clearly visible. The skills, experiences and achievements you highlight on your CV must be relevant to the industry you wish to work in. If you want a job as a visual merchandiser in a retail shop, for example, everything on your CV has to say and demonstrate your love for clothes and fashion. On the other hand, it is no use highlighting your great sales

experience if the position you want is in accounting; rather you should highlight any financial skills, achievements, relevant qualifications, memberships and anything else you have that relates to numbers. This can include experience in bookkeeping, exceptional spreadsheet skills or an ACCA membership – all these must be immediately visible on your CV.

Making sure that your CV is tailored to the position you are applying for shows that you have a good understanding of what the employer is looking for, which will undoubtedly work to your advantage.

Generic CVs do not work!

In case you have heard any different, here is the truth – generic CVs simply do not work! It is incredibly unwise to have a “one CV fits all” approach to your job hunting if you are at all serious about making advancements in your career. Employers can spot generic CVs at a glance – they are usually the ones littered with phrases like, “I am looking for a job in a challenging and rewarding environment” (more on this when we talk about personal statements) – and they do not like it. They think “you don’t want *this* job, you want *a* job” so these CVs tend to be among the first to hit the rejection pile.

You absolutely need to know what industry you want to work for and have an idea of the type of job you would like before you even begin to create a CV. Imagine trying to have a meaningful one-to-one conversation with four people all at the same time; pretty difficult, isn’t it? In the same way, sending out a CV that is not targeted is job-seeking suicide, or at best, a waste of precious time.

People put out generic CVs for two main reasons: laziness or varying job interests. If you create a generic CV out of laziness it simply shows that you are not bothered about the company or their job and evidently have not made any effort for it. If this is the case, can you really expect a reasonable employer to give you an interview, let alone a job? Most employers are spoilt for choice with every vacancy so you really cannot afford to be lazy on your CV.

Multiple interests, multiple CVs

The second category of generic CVs is a lot easier to cure. If you find that you have multiple interests, skills, and experience in various fields, instead of creating a generic CV that does not work, what you need is multiple CVs with each CV tailored to each of your chosen industries.

Remember, once you have created your targeted CV or CVs, you can use it again and again to apply for different jobs within that same industry without having to change your CV each time – a good CV really is for life!



TIP: Create more than one CV if you have more than one interest – each CV must be uniquely tailored to the industry.

Summary

- Generic CVs do not work
- Every industry has its own language and merits system
- Know your industry and tailor your CV to it

Action point



Decide on the job industry you want to apply for. Spend 45 minutes to an hour researching this industry online (**prospects.ac.uk** is a good place to start) and look at the following:

1. The types of roles available;
2. The skills required for the job;
3. The length of necessary experience;

4. Any particular qualifications specified;
5. The vocabulary used in the relevant job adverts.

Jot down some notes on the common factors of your industry and how you can incorporate the requirements and language on your CV.

Young jobseekers



This is the best time of your life job wise because it is the time for you to experiment with different things before deciding on what you like. At this point you may not know what jobs you would like so targeting your CV can be difficult.

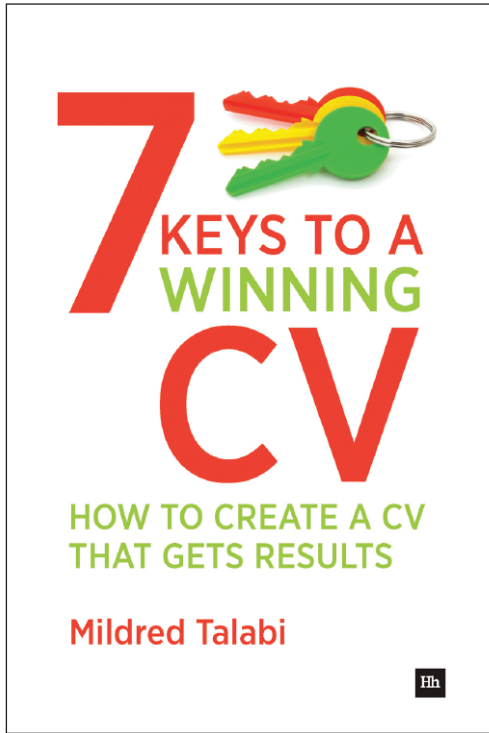
However, there is one way around this: if, for example, you decide you want a Saturday job in a retail shop, think about what kind of items you want to be selling – would it be women’s clothes, men’s, trainers, shoes, accessories, or mobile phones? What you then have to do is demonstrate your interest and any relevant skills you have in this area in your introduction (see Key 2) and in your interests and activities section – what you do in your spare time. So, for example, if you wanted to work in a phone shop you could say, “I enjoy finding out about the latest phone gadgets. I have an iPhone and I often download the latest apps to keep up-to-date with trends.”

If you cannot think of anything that demonstrates your interest in the job you are applying for, chances are this might be the wrong job for you anyway so you are probably better off looking elsewhere.

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Paperback: 9780857191588

eBook: 9780857191694

