

YOUR CV – YET ANOTHER VIEW!

Your CV may just be one of the most important documents you will ever have to write so it needs to be good – very good. You joined the Royal Navy straight from school or maybe university, perhaps a long time ago. If you ever did have to write a CV that may also have been a long time ago.

So here you are, hovering over your keyboard.....wondering how to start! Be in no doubt that you will hear many opinions about CVs and the advice from here is to listen to enough people, to ask enough questions and to seek enough opinions until you understand what is required. Then you can make your own mind up and produce a document that not only really does you justice but is of the highest possible quality. The smallest detail must be correct and true. There is absolutely no excuse for anything else but the very best. A ship's appearance will be let down by just an Irish Pennant and the same goes for your CV.

WHAT?

What is a CV? Well to start with it's a sales document written by you in order to get you an interview. It's you on a few sides of paper and you just have one chance to make sure that it reaches me, your potential employer, and that I then read it from top to bottom. If I give up half way through then you're either going for the wrong job or your CV itself is wide of the mark for some reason.

Interest me, engage my attention, retain my attention and make me want to hear more about you! Sell yourself to me. From your Service life you will have so much to offer the civilian workplace at whatever level and employers do want people like you; this is something you need to believe. You should be confident of all you have to offer. Additionally, depending on the level of job you are going for, you may also have to convince others on the way, such as recruitment agencies and headhunters, so do put yourself in my position and give every statement on your CV the "so what" test.

What should your CV contain? . Everything about you that is relevant to you professionally and as an individual. If it is not relevant then leave it out. You may be very proud of something in your life but will it help you get an interview? Having decided what is relevant you now need to place it all in the right order and ensure that it reads logically. For example it is little use your Outboard Engine maintenance qualifications, your Prince2 or your Cranfield MBA lurking on the second page under your Qualifications section if it's important to the job – I may never reach that far. I may have, say, 40 high quality CVs to trawl through before Stand Easy and I may just, perhaps unconsciously, be looking for an excuse not to place yours in the In Tray – try not to give me that excuse.

Reverse Chronological, Functional, a mixture of both, none of these? There is no absolute answer to the perfect CV which is one reason why there is so much debate on the issue! The majority of CVs are Reverse Chronological or Functional. Both work, so examine both styles and choose your way. Or combine the two; that can also work. Within certain boundaries it's really what you're comfortable with and what you think will work for your particular circumstances that counts. Another good discipline for some is to try the 'front loaded' CV which whilst perhaps three pages long also gets all the key

information on the front page so that it can be removed almost as a one page summary. So if I have to read several hundred CVs for one job, with some ‘front loading’ I can understand your make up quickly and I can then read over the page if interested enough.

HOW?

The suggested content and perhaps the order for the information on your CV goes something like this:

The Sell

Profile – High impact, to the point and get me interested. Tell me what you are. Don’t tell me everything, just enough. Look at these two opening sentences on CVs I have seen recently:

“A Fast Track Senior Executive in the Royal Marines with strong, inspirational leadership and communication skills. Outstanding inter-personal and oratory skills, a fast learner, adaptable, with an open, flexible and sensitive approach”. (Lt Col RM)

“A professional and highly motivated Manager, with a proven track record of success over 12 years in a variety of Senior Leadership and Management positions, within project, operational, training and human resource environments”. (WO1)

Both tell me exactly what I’m looking at within the first few seconds and they now have my attention which can be built on. Write the Profile in the 3rd person present and all the rest in the 3rd person past – it just somehow reads better that way.

Key Skills – Expands on the Profile and tells me precisely what you’re selling me and which, more or less, should match what I’m looking for – add just some detail and colour or they may all look the same as the one I’ve just read. Give me something to really get my teeth into; all too often they just look rather bland. Don’t necessarily list them all, be selective and list them in order of importance. Include both Soft and Hard attributes as appropriate and above all, keep me interested, which can be difficult.

The Proof

Recent Career History and Achievements – ideally in reverse chronological order – tells me not only what you did but, most importantly, your achievements (we all do our jobs in some way shape or form but how big was yours, how difficult was yours and how well did you do it?). Your achievements are crucial to my understanding your potential. Facts, figures, percentages all help me to understand you better and bring the text to life.

Qualifications/Education – Think carefully what you include here. The school you attended 30 or so years ago probably will not be relevant but if, 30 years ago, you achieved a First from Oxford for example or you were Head Girl at the local Grammar School where in fact you are now job seeking, it may be worth mentioning the fact. Is your Motor Transport Supervisor’s course of some 10 years ago worth mentioning? Check for relevance and, if appropriate and important enough, fluent in French perhaps, then maybe put it in your Profile.

Personal – Neatly rounds off your CV and tells me a bit more about you and should serve to reassure me about you as a person. Let’s face it; if I call you for interview I’m really not interested in any

surprises when you walk through the door. So if you do things beyond the day job, personal hobbies and activities, and especially voluntary activities such as coaching mini-rugby, sea cadets, amateur dramatics, charity work, and the like, then do mention it. It says a lot about you and also shows that you still have the time and interest to do something else as well as coping successfully with your mainstream job.

AND FINALLY.....

Translate your CV into civvy speak to the degree required for the role you are going for. If it is BAE Systems or a naval Charity then you will not need to civilianise it a great deal, but if it is Argos or the NHS then you may need to spell some of it out. Avoid jargon and acronyms but don't be afraid of retaining military references or terms if required and, if necessary, very briefly clarify what they are or what they mean. Your military service is very important but you need to make it comprehensible. Equally don't make your naval experience disappear completely as in one CV recently seen: "*Managing Director in a £250M SME working in a challenging multinational environment, cognisant with Lean, Six Sigma and Prince Two...*" (A Type 23 First Lieutenant!)

Tailor each CV to each job application and make sure it has all the necessary information in the right order. For example a CV in pursuit of a Project Manager's job should include those words in the first sentence of your Profile and should probably be top of your Key Skills.

Make life easy for me. Meet me half way and don't force me to dig around for detail that is poorly presented or include irrelevant information. It will take my eye off your message.

Space is really precious and if you have produced a CV of one to three pages (no part pages please) everything has to earn its place and position. The finished product though has to look as attractive as is possible as well as containing the right ingredients. Don't be afraid to improve the presentation to make it pleasing on the eye. Use a little imagination and make use of space where possible to produce a balanced looking document that is attractive as it can be, whilst not detracting from the main effort. Beware of overuse of the bullet for example – they should be used to produce impact, at the right moment along with the likes of paragraphs, indents, bold and italics, in order to have the desired effect.

One of the main problem areas for CVs is that they all tend to be very similar, particularly the Profile and the Key Skills. The trick is to make yours stand out above the parapet. Don't be modest about yourself – others certainly won't be shy about coming forward. In the Services we are used to just cracking on with whatever our profession throws at us and what is often forgotten is how good we are at what we do. Tell me about it – nobody else will.

This all takes time and considerable effort but once you are properly satisfied you have the best possible product then you can really start to sell yourself with confidence. However think very carefully what

you write and please do avoid arrogance, boastful deception or anything that might aggravate or alienate me.

Good luck with your CV, but as I said, don't take my word for it.....