

Q&A Column
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Email Subject Line: Positioning Your Previous Job Effectively

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Headline: Overcoming Negative Perceptions of Your Last Job

Summary:

Question: Back in 2001 I left my job in Advertising (account management). I then fell into high-end car sales for the past 5 years. I am now looking to go back into my career of choice but I have been told that I'm 'tainted' due to the negative view of car sales. How do I get recruiters and Human Resource people to look past my current work history? Thanks, jb

J. B., Toronto, Ontario

[Landing Page copy](#)

Headline: Overcoming Negative Perceptions of Your Last Job

Dear Mark,

Question: Back in 2001 I was offered the opportunity to retain my job in Advertising (account management) at 1/3 less pay and 3x the workload. Needless to say, I declined. I then fell into high-end car sales. I've done very well these past 5 years and have made good money but I don't enjoy it. I am now looking to go back into my career of choice but I have been told that I'm 'tainted' due to the negative view of car sales. How do I get recruiters and Human Resource people to look past my current work history and perhaps see it as an asset. High-end car sales is tough. Tougher than Advertising ever was with very demanding clients, tight quotas and deadlines. Surely there's a light at the end of this tunnel?? Thanks, jb

J. B., Toronto, Ontario

Dear J.,

There certainly is a light – and it's much closer than you think. Three things you can do right away to minimize negative perceptions:

- a) Change your resume to highlight your skills rather than where you've worked
- b) Use networking more, and rely less on applying to posted jobs
- c) Proactively target employers where your experience is genuinely needed

I'll elaborate one at a time. In Part **(a)**, you may want to re-design your resume so that it focuses on your skills and accomplishments. There are several ways to do this. One is to switch from the traditional "reverse chronological" resume – the one where you list your work history in reverse order, starting with your most recent job. If you opted instead for a "functional" resume, you could emphasize abilities and achievements under such headings as sales, customer service, communication, etc.

As an alternative, you might go for a "combined resume" format. In this case, you would still list your work experience in reverse chronological order; only within each job you'd add headings such as the ones suggested above. Then you'd organize your relevant achievements beneath the appropriate header.

(Click here for samples of Chronological, Functional and Combination resumes.)

<note to editor: please use the following link:>

<http://www.careeractivist.com/Resumes/samples-csgjd2006.pdf>

For Part **(b)**, the idea is to get beyond relying on your resume so much. It means tapping into the hidden job market. Your goal is to get face-to-face with hiring managers and HR people so you can explain your unique benefits without getting screened out by resume reviewers. (See my series on this topic, starting with *[the first of three installments](#)*.)

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Part **(c)** is where you turn this whole situation around to your advantage. Instead of worrying about car sales being a negative, why not target employers that urgently require this experience? I know from having worked in a big ad agency that they loved to hire people with car experience of any kind to manage their automotive accounts. Such candidates had a demonstrable edge; because they already spoke the language, knew the competition, and understood the needs of potential buyers. Same goes for working in-house at car companies in their advertising department.

Put these three techniques into practice and that light at the end of the tunnel might just shine like the sun on a glorious Canadian summer day!



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