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## What Employers Want To See On Your Resume



Glenn Kelman is the CEO of [Redfin](#), an online real estate brokerage firm. Prior to joining Redfin, he was a co-founder of Plumtree Software, a publicly traded company that created the enterprise portal software market. Prior to starting Plumtree, Mr. Kelman worked as one of the first employees at Stanford Technology Group, a startup that IBM acquired. Mr. Kelman is a member of the Board of Directors for Naviance, a hosted service for schools and colleges. Mr. Kelman was raised in Seattle and was graduated summa cum laude from the University of California, Berkeley.

“Life,” William James once said, “is in the transitions.” He wasn’t talking about weddings and graduations, but the lonely moments before, when a decision still hangs in the balance, and irrelevant details are so vivid that they’ll stick in your mind for years to come: the melted-plastic smell of a U-Haul cab; the iron sound of a public mailbox swinging shut; a paper hospital cup; a flight of stairs; a metal door-knob; a sealed envelope.

### “What Are You Typing There, Wes?”

Perhaps the most terrifying transition is [the one between jobs](#). It embarrasses us all. I still remember, at twenty-two, printing my resume in Kinko’s after midnight so no one would see me standing by the printer. The resume felt like a letter to Kafka’s Castle: *What is it*, I always wondered, *that these people want?*

The answer, I fervently believed, was parchment-colored stock. While I picked out resume paper that was probably designed for D&D scrolls, my twin brother Wes ñ our mom told him to go with me for moral support — got on a clacky IBM Selectric and filled a page with the sentence “I am the Anti-Christ.”

We were caught out by a lovely, deeply Christian high-school classmate who had once asked me to a dance but was now coming into Kinko’s to get last-minute brunch inserts printed for her

wedding. She learned I was unemployed & living with my parents. Then she changed the subject: “What are you typing there, Wes?”

### **Premature Obituaries**

Now when a friend sends over a resume for proofreading, which happens nearly every week these days, I remember how completely defenseless I felt at that moment.

Resumes are horrible documents, premature and unsentimental obituaries: our lives are rarely reduced to such a small number of facts. And writing a resume is a balancing act between feeling outrageously boastful and unimpressive. Some, [like Seth Godin](#), have questioned whether you should even have a resume. I know many people who take whatever dreadful job happens their way just to avoid writing one.

That’s silly. No one has much experience preparing a resume, but it isn’t that hard: you just have to get out of the way of yourself so your accomplishments can speak for themselves. Having reviewed thousands of resumes, I now have a better idea of what the folks in Kafka’s Castle like to see:

### **Here’s What I Like:**

1. **A direct style:** use blunt, short words. Most resumes are scanned, not read.
2. **Looks:** like a middle-aged man’s apartment. Nice and tidy.
3. **Objective:** be direct; your objective is the job you’re applying for.
4. **Verbs ending in “d”:** shipped, launched, built, sold.
5. **Results:** not responsibilities or experience — but what responsibilities and experience helped you accomplish.
6. **Bullets:** 3 ñ 4 results per job.
7. **Numbers:** increased traffic from Google 230%, decreased ad spending 40%.
8. **Grades:** your GPA, even if it was ten years ago, if it’s over 3.5.
9. **Reviews:** ratings from your last review, especially useful if you worked for a tough grader like Microsoft
10. **Honors:** we’ll interview an employee-of-the-quarter, every time.
11. **Promotions:** if your role changes, highlight that as two jobs.
12. **LinkedIn endorsements:** persuasive, even from your friends; excerpted & linked.
13. **A link to your blog:** a blog gives you online street cred. [For some, it is your resume](#) .
14. **Themes:** whether you care about customer service or agile software, tell a consistent story from job to job.
15. **Hobbies:** I always want to meet people with fun hobbies. And that’s all a resume is: a request for a meeting. At Plumtree, we received a resume from a Playboy model. A colleague forwarded it to me with a note reading, “I’ve never asked you for anything before” I feel the same way about cyclists.
16. **Two pages, max:** if you’re under 30, one page.
17. **Anything** you did that showed initiative or passion. Eagle Scout. Math Olympics.
18. **Email to the CEO:** it takes chutzpah & resourcefulness to go straight to the top. The email address is easy to guess.
19. **Customization:** tailor your resume & especially the cover letter to the job.

20. **Completed degrees:** I've hired plenty of folks a few credits shy of a degree. Some were great; many couldn't finish what they started. If you have time now, finish your degree.
21. **Gmail address:** or your own domain. Nothing says "totally out of it" like an AOL address.

### Here's What I Don't Like:

1. **Churn:** stints at two or more employers of less than two years.
2. **List of generic skills:** just show what you actually accomplished at each job.
3. **Typos or misspellings:** About half the resumes I get are addressed to "RedFin." For the other words, spell-check!
4. **Photos:** my favorite was of a candidate in tennis whites with a racket.
5. **"Proven":** as in "proven leadership." We all still have something to prove.
6. **Printed resumes:** email a Word document, web page or PDF.
7. **Buzzwords:** search bots love it, actual people don't.
8. **Wordiness:** yes, this is the pot calling the kettle black...

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**About the Author.** *Guy Kawasaki is the co-founder of [Alltop.com](http://Alltop.com), an "online magazine rack" of popular topics on the web, and a founding partner at [Garage Technology Ventures](http://Garage Technology Ventures). Previously, he was the chief evangelist of Apple. Kawasaki is the author of ten books including *Enchantment*, *Reality Check*, *The Art of the Start*, *Rules for Revolutionaries*, *How to Drive Your Competition Crazy*, *Selling the Dream*, and *The Macintosh Way*. Kawasaki has a BA from Stanford University and an MBA from UCLA as well as an honorary doctorate from Babson College.*