

Identifying Your Marketable Skills

Getting Started

Most of us tend to think too narrowly about your marketable skills, and thus undersell ourselves when we are looking for a promotion or a new job. This Career Action List will provide you with a step by-step approach to examining your life and work experiences, so that you can assess which of the many skills are the most marketable. As you read this, here are some questions to consider:

- *What are your personal and professional goals?*
- *What educational, work and leisure experiences have you had that will help you reach your goal?*
- *Do you have a realistic picture of the match between your skills and your career goals?*

FAQs

Why is it important to identify my marketable skills?

There are two reasons for doing this. The first, and most pragmatic, is that it will help you to write a more powerful resume. The second is that it will help you to present yourself more professionally to a potential employer. You will feel confident about what you have to offer and will sell yourself better.

What if I don't want to keep on doing what I am skilled at now?

The steps described below are designed to help you identify the skills that will get you the job you want. If you are planning to change careers, it is important to realize that you may have many transferable skills that will be marketable into a new position. Or you may have skills that you haven't used for some time that could be very useful in a new position.

Making it Happen

It takes a lot of time and energy to identify your marketable skills. It is not an easy task, but it is one of the most important you can undertake because it helps you to plan your job campaign to target the best potential employers. It also gives you a strong sense of confidence in what you have to offer.

Begin with the End in Mind

In order to identify the marketable skills that you have, you must know what kind of position you are looking for. This creates the context for thinking about the skills that you want to use in your next job. See the action list on finding your dream job for guidance.

Write a Brief Life/Work Biography

Take the time to sit down and write a 3 to 5 page history of your life that includes: significant events when you were growing up, important educational experiences and a summary of your own work experiences. As you write about each of these experiences, describe what you liked and what you did not like and what you accomplished. What were you most proud of? Also describe what you did during times when you were not working and how you felt about those activities. Make sure that there are at least seven key events in your biography.

What, if anything, did writing your biography tell you about potentially marketable skills that you might have?

Educational Assessment

Whether or not you included much detail about your educational experiences, here is a useful assessment that may help to highlight some of your skills and interests:

- What teachers did you like best and why?
- What teachers did you like least and why?
- Which subjects did you like best and why?
- Which subjects did you like least and why?
- What subjects did you get the best grades in and why?
- What subjects did you get the worst grades in and why?

Based on what you have written, identify five key skills or knowledge areas that you might like to use in your next position.

Work Experience Assessment

Review each of the jobs that you have held and ask yourself the following questions:

- What was my favorite job and why?
- What was my least favorite job and why?
- Which of these jobs would I do even if I didn't get paid? Why?
- Which jobs really challenged me and helped me to develop personally and professionally? Why?

Leisure Activity Assessment

Based on what you have written, identify five key skills or knowledge areas that you might like to use in your next position.

In the times you were not working (whether evenings and weekends or longer periods of time when you have been in between jobs), what do you really enjoy doing with your leisure time? Here are questions to consider:

- What skills have you developed from a hobby that might be marketable?
- What skills have you developed from your travels?
- What skills have you developed from other leisure time activities?
- Is there something you do for fun that you always dreamed of getting paid for?

Again, identify the five most marketable skills you have from leisure activity assessment.

List Achievements

Now go over what you have written and create a list of at least 10 major achievements in your life. Don't worry about whether or not they are work-related. When you have completed the list, rank your achievements in order, with number one being your most important achievement, number two being your second most important achievement, and so on.

Put It All Together

You can now create your final skills inventory by going over all that you have done so far and putting the information about your skills into the following categories. If you need help identifying other potential skills that you might have, visit one of the Websites listed below for ideas.

- Make a list of all your skills that are related to management in any way. Although your current job title may not classify you as a "manager", you may still do some activities that are considered managerial. These can include policy formulation, policy implementation, conducting performance reviews, hiring, firing, project responsibilities, problem solving, budgetary responsibilities, planning, organizing, presenting, and so on.
- Make a list of all your training skills, including any informal training you may have done. Training can be for individuals or for groups. Also list any certifications you may have received for programs you are certified to teach. Include any professional training programs, seminars, and symposiums you have attended.
- Make a list of all your documentation skills where you have prepared reports, manuals, summarized research, conducted studies and so on.
- Make a list of all your technical skills which may include operating machines or computers, any specialized knowledge, any manufacturing, sales, engineering, human resources, or other skills that may not have been mentioned in any of the categories above.
- Make a list of all your interpersonal skills. Although they are harder to define, these skills can make or break an application for a new position. This list could include any of the following skills: communication, facilitation, coaching, conflict resolution, negotiation, team building and many others.
- Create a category of "other skills" for skills that don't fit into the above categories. Often, these skills are something unique you have to offer, making you more attractive than other candidates.

Compare the List With Your Career Goals

By this time, you should have quite a long list of potentially marketable skills. Go back through this list and check or highlight the skills that most closely match your career goals. From this list, choose the ten skills that you think are most marketable. Ask yourself "if I were trying to hire someone for this job, are these skills what I would be looking for? ". If you are lacking any essential skills for the job you desire, you should develop a plan to acquire these skills.

Take each of the top ten skills you have listed and write a sentence describing how you have actively used this skill. For example: "Used Conflict Resolution skills to solve a major problem between production and sales." Or "Conducted quality training in the billing department, leading to a 15% decrease in billing errors."

Reality Testing

Through your networking, identify someone who is doing the job that you would like to have. Ask him or her to review your list of skills and see if they agree that your skills are a match for this kind of position. If they do not think there is a match, ask him or her what skills you need to gain . Or you may wish to ask what kind of a job would be a better match for someone with your skills. Another reality check is to ask those closest to you to review your skills and see if you may have left anything out.

Final Step

Your final step is to turn your list of marketable skills into valuable information in your cover letter and on your resume.

Common Mistakes

You skip this process and jump into writing your resume.

You may think that you already know all of your skills, but this exercise always produces some surprising and creative results that help you market yourself better. Sometimes it even helps you to see that you may have chosen the wrong job objective and you are able to alter your career goals to exploit all you have to offer more fully.

You discount early life experiences.

You think to yourself, "It doesn't matter what I did in high school or in my first job. That was so long ago." But often there are clues to your strongest skills and to your life's purpose in these early experiences.

You are unrealistic about the match between your skills and your career goal.

You may want to change from a job in information systems to a job in human resources, but if you have not had any specialized training or experience in the new area you will not be able to make a move. Make sure that you do the reality testing step of this process before you actually start your job search.

For More Information:

Book:

Bolles, Richard. "What Color is Your Parachute? 2002." Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2001

Website:

Skills Identification: www.mnworkforcecenter.org/cjs/cjs_site/skill.htm