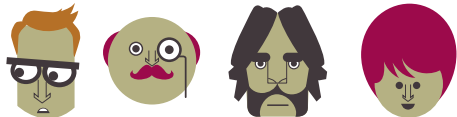


# DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

YOUR RÉSUMÉ MAY REVEAL MORE THAN YOU REALIZE

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Interviewing is an imperfect science, and many of the judgments we make are based on subtle factors that have as much to do with the background of the interviewer as of the applicant. One of the tools we use to streamline the interviewing process is the résumé or curriculum vitae (CV). With an increasingly qualified workforce chasing fewer jobs, the writing of a résumé has become a pressurized process, and the result, some would say, an art form.

Spurred by the belief that they have just seconds to catch the weary eye of the “gatekeeper” at an employer, candidates invest a great deal of effort in standing out from the crowd. They agonize over the length, the layout, even the font used. First impressions are crucial.

For the reviewer of a stack of résumés, the “interests and achievements” section can provide relief from the barrage of A-grades and positive rhetoric, and as such has more influence than perhaps it should. As a reviewer, one must therefore also consider whether the primary criterion is in fact qualifications or character. The irony is that while qualifications and work experience are relatively easy to

verify, hobbies and interests, and all the positive attributes we may ascribe to them, are more difficult to check.

In this most important piece of personal marketing and communication, we must ultimately rely on trust. But that does not necessarily give the candidate an advantage. In providing this personal information, the job seeker can inadvertently reveal more about themselves than they intended. And not all of it appealing.

While we may all be tempted to exaggerate, some candidates actually opt for an entirely different tactic to stand out: the truly bizarre.

A survey among recruiters produced some memorable examples. To have been awarded “third place in the World Stone Skimming Championships” might impress your mother, but is it really relevant? Besides, aren’t we only interested in winners? Similarly, claims to be interested in “bats” or “world cheeses” left headhunters stumped as to what positive attributes they might imply. That said, in both cases they admit to interviewing the candidate out of sheer curiosity. There was even an applicant who, seemingly without a trace of irony, stated: “BMW driver, steely blue eyes.”

So, what should be included on a résumé, and what attributes may be ascribed to these endeavors? There is certainly a happy medium. Listing too many hobbies might suggest a lack of commitment to the serious stuff (or indeed

a fertile imagination). Too few, or no interests at all, might make you appear one-dimensional, or worst of all – just dull.

The experiences chosen can also present risks. The fact that you have become proficient in an activity suggests that you consider it worthwhile, and that you are proud of it. The interviewer, depending on their background, may see your achievements differently.

If you read that a potential recruit had taught sailing and skiing, run for six days across the Sahara desert in the Marathon des Sables and raced in the Extreme Arctic Challenge, what would you think?\* That they had willpower, tenacity and ambition? Probably. But to some interviewers, these achievements might signify a single-minded character who takes unnecessary risks, who is indifferent to pain, and is perhaps even slightly deranged.

So while we must trust that people are honest on their résumés, we must also guard against the temptation to stereotype, and recognize that the qualitative elements of a résumé are by definition subjective, and that the conclusions drawn from a CV will likely say as much about the reviewer as the candidate.

For the job applicant it’s a difficult balance: to engage without alienating or scaring the person you are trying to impress. Once you secure an interview, your ability and enthusiasm to explain, or indeed justify, the unusual things on your résumé will be the true measure of your passion, commitment and drive – and you should get credit for it.

The ability to run a long way on sand has little to do with success in the communications industry. The ability to explain convincingly how it could be fun, however, is a different matter. ☺

\*Notwithstanding these achievements and their inclusion on his résumé, the author was recruited by Brunswick, London in 2009. He still works there.

## WHAT ARE YOUR INTERESTS AND HOBBIES?



## POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION

Drinks too much	Pragmatic	Drowning under weighty illusions	Overactive imagination	! (The word “mysteries” had accidentally been deleted)
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