

Careers

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Overqualified: Should you leave things off your résumé to avoid the label?

By Beth Braccio Hering, Special to CareerBuilder



Doug Hadley of [Mansfield, Texas](#), estimates that he has applied for more than 600 jobs -- with no positive results. "I have been told I am overqualified many, many times. The few times I have been granted interviews, I hear, 'We are afraid this position will not challenge you enough.'"

Moving in on two years of unemployment, Hadley is willing to try different tactics to see what might work. He has begun to leave off some of his [education](#) as well as the fact that he is a published author. "I don't want to have to omit such things, but I feel as though I don't even get considered if they are on my résumé," he laments.

While only time will tell if this strategy works for him, plenty of other job seekers deliberate the same issue. Here, a few perspectives on leaving info off a résumé.

Crafting

Many experts will caution job seekers about even applying for positions for which they are overqualified because of decreased earning potential, boredom and a larger applicant pool (not to mention the bruised ego if one doesn't land that "crummy" job). For applicants who still decide to give it a shot, "crafting" is often the route of choice.

A good application for any position should be created to match the employer's needs as closely as possible. Thus, simple (yet truthful) changes can make you a better candidate.

Duncan Mathison, a [career consultant](#) and co-author of "Unlock the Hidden Job Market: 6 Steps to a Successful Job Search When Times are Tough," recalls a client who felt his master's degree in [psychology](#) might be hindering his chances for a business [sales](#) job. "We dropped the degree and replaced it with an 'Additional professional training' statement that said, 'More than 500 hours of professional training on topics such as buyer motivation, persuasion and organizational behavior.' This allowed him to position the value of his psychology training for a sales position without listing the degree. It was truthful, and it worked."

Similarly, terminology changes such as "[manager](#)" becoming "[project team leader](#)" may be a better match to a particular job ad. Some job seekers tone down [executive](#)-sounding titles, especially if inflated (such as opting for a managerial title rather than showcasing that you were [vice president](#) in a company with only five employees).

"I often tell my more experienced and older clients to omit their dates of graduation (if they graduated on schedule rather than mid-career)," says Roy Cohen, a career coach and author of "The Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide." "This frees them up to leave off as many years of experience as necessary, so the application doesn't feel burdened by the weight of their careers."

Another option is creating a functional résumé instead of a chronological one. By sorting experiences into skill clusters, there becomes less of an emphasis on the length or extensiveness of past positions.

Beyond the résumé

Candidates are free to present themselves in the way they see most fit (outside of lying, of course). But what happens, say, if an employer asks about items like missing dates?

"First, that's a good thing because the applicant was invited in for an interview with the company," Cohen says. "He can always respond, 'I left it off intentionally. I wanted the attention to be focused entirely on my relevant and very valuable experience. Let me tell you about what I've done . . .'"

Some job seekers, however, find it hard to sell themselves.

"I took my [MBA](#) off my résumé and tried to dumb myself down, but in the interviews, it got tricky," says Tiffany Bradshaw of [California](#). "They would ask about certain experience and if I had it, and I felt like I was telling stories/lies to try to cover up the items I had taken off."

Likewise, employers may feel duped if the applicant who shows up is older than his résumé suggests or if the conversation feels disjointed.

"It's dangerous to leave relevant experience off a résumé, especially in the legal field," says Cheryl Heisler, [president](#) and founder of Lawternatives, a career-consulting firm for [lawyers](#). "In much of the law, the devil is in the details. If you are perceived as loose or careless about those 'unimportant little details,' you can send the exact wrong message to a future employer. Better to 'spin' the parts of your background that might make you seem overqualified than to extract them."