“You can have everything in life you want if you will just help other people get what they want.”
Zig Ziglar

“How did I make a difference?”

Your ability to answer that question, first for yourself and then for potential employers, is the key to your professional success.

In today’s competitive workplace, it is not enough to know how to do the job. You must be able to convince a recruiter or hiring manager that you will bring value to your next employer’s company. Until someone can verify that you can walk the walk (known as the probationary period), you had better be able to talk the talk to get a chance to prove yourself. Let me show you what I mean.

The Hardware Store

Several years ago while I was speaking before a large group of people about job search, I could tell they were not grasping the idea of thinking of themselves as a value proposition. It was then that I recalled the first time I used my personal value statement to land the job.
This idea of value came easily to me because I had worked in the family hardware store from the time I was a kid. I learned early that if we didn’t sell something that day, my dad and I might not stop at the market on the way home that evening.

By the time I graduated from high school, we had closed the store and I went out looking for my first “real job.” A new lumber yard was going up nearby and, deciding that’s where I wanted to work, I put on my best suit (probably my only suit) and made my way to the employment office.

What a goof! I stood out like a sore thumb! Every guy in line looked like Marlon Brando in the On The Waterfront movie: jeans and white T-shirts with a pack of cigarettes rolled up in one sleeve. These were working guys. They were darkened by the sun and their hands were calloused. Many of them wore scuffed hardhats and had a pair of well-worn work gloves shoved into their back pockets.

So here I come, 18 years old, in my best suit thinking I’m “all that” and that this was how you applied for a job. (It is, by the way.) I filled out the application and stood in another line for my interview. When my turn came, I could tell from the look on the yard manager’s face that I was a bit overdressed for the job. It was evident he thought I wasn’t “tough enough” for the position. But it was what I said that cocked his eyebrow. I told him that for every dollar he paid me I would give him back ten.

Slowly and without saying a word he reached behind him, grabbed a pair of work gloves along with a hardhat and, tossing them across the desk, told me to report in at 7AM the next morning. I still remember the look of skepticism on Mr. Cordell Dykes’ face. I worked for him for better than a year before moving on.

I told this story to the group and I saw they “got it.” Why tell you this? Because based on that one line, $10 for each $1 paid, Mr. Dykes took a chance on me. Of course, I also had to deliver, which I did.

You already know your own story (or stories) that will land you your next opportunity. You just need to uncover them.

Getting Started with Your Accomplishments Worksheet

Your Accomplishments Worksheet is a formal job search document, as important as your
resume. While your resume’s sole purpose is to initiate an introduction between you and someone interested in hiring you, the Accomplishments Worksheet, offered at the right moment, serves an equally important purpose. The Accomplishments Worksheet more fully depicts you as a complete package in a manner that a resume is not designed to do.

Your goal in crafting a dynamic Accomplishments Worksheet, regardless of your age and experience, is to identify, at minimum, four exceptional professional achievements – each one relevant to what you do in your field of expertise.

If you are the CEO of a multinational corporation, then you should be able to pull your accomplishments from all those articles they wrote about you in Bloomberg Business Week or the Wall Street Journal.

As an admin assistant or a skilled trades professional, your accomplishments will focus on how you added value as a result of your ability to work smarter, faster and more efficiently. I’m pleased when counseling someone to learn that, upon their departure, the company was forced to replace them with more than one person. I actually know of one organization that was required to replace a director with 12 people!

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**Job Search is Sales.**

**So is Dating.**

From time to time, I hear from job seekers that they don’t sell. Well, gang, it’s time to blow that concept out of the water. You want a job? You sell. It’s that simple. You are the product and you are the best model available this season!

Think back to a time when you were trying to woo that someone special. (In its purest form, dating is sales. You are selling you. That first nervous phone call? Consider it the equivalent of the cold call.)

When I was in the online job board business, I compared our employment site to dating sites. “We hope you meet and greet,” I used to say, “kiss on the first date and go on to make babies…but we’re just here to make the introduction.”

The interview is the corporate version of the first date. Everyone is on their best behavior. See where I’m going here? Were you to apply all the energy and creativity that you applied in your efforts to attract that someone special to your job search...just imagine.
Accomplishments Part One: From Memory

Accomplishments come from two places. The first is from you—right out of your memory.

Begin compiling your accomplishments by taking out paper and pen or opening up a computer document and just begin typing away. The best place to start is your work history; get out that resume you need to update for this job search.

Go through each job entry and recall all the things you are proud of, things that made a difference, that added value to the company. Did you increase sales? Find a way to shorten the time to market? Improve an inventory system? Were you involved in crafting a successful marketing plan or developing a piece of software that was actually implemented into the corporate process? Keep writing. It doesn't matter how many accomplishments you have - the more, the better. (Entry-level job seeker accomplishments are discussed in more detail in the last chapter of the book.)

For now, write down the entire story associated with each accomplishment – what you did, how you did it and how the company benefited from your effort. This is rich training for interviewing and it’s a great motivational exercise to build personal confidence. You will be amazed as you find yourself remembering other achievements while jotting down the particulars of another. When you are done, you won’t believe how good you will feel about you.

Cool, huh?

But wait. A lot of job seekers balk at this step. They showed up and did what they were supposed to do which, they say, was nothing spectacular. Oh, yeah? Let me give you an example of someone I counseled who did not realize how much value he brought to his former position as a result of doing little more than what he was supposed to do!

The Payroll Clerk

I’ll call my client David since that is his real name. David came to me and said he had been going crazy trying to come up with even one accomplishment he was proud enough of to list on his Accomplishments Worksheet. He and I sat down and after about 45 minutes of what felt like pulling teeth, I finally asked him (fairly yelling) “David! There MUST be at least one thing you have done on the job that you were proud of!”
David is a payroll clerk and as such he just didn’t feel he had brought that much value to his company (which in this case was a global energy company). David’s problem was that he was only one among the many payroll clerks in the office, just another cog in the machine. Or so he thought.

After a while, David sheepishly mentioned that he was “kind of proud of the fact that I had zero returns on my first payroll of 6,000.”

I nearly fell off my seat! 6,000 paychecks! THIS is what I had been looking for. Think about it: you don’t mess with people’s money. Ever. You don’t mess with their vacation time, withholding, benefits or taxes. David had struck gold. But in his mind (and in reality), he had “just” been doing what he was *supposed* to do.

But which payroll clerk would you hire? The guy who could handle the details associated with preparing a payroll of 6,000 checks and making no mistakes the first time out or the guy who can’t tell you what he can do for your company? The choice is obvious. I want the guy who will save me money by getting it right.

**Accomplishments Part Two: Colleagues’ Memories**

The next step is one of the most important in this process. It will take more time and more effort than part one, but because the accomplishments come from other people, it is even more rewarding.

Reach out to family, fellow students, former co-workers, supervisors, bosses and colleagues. Ask each of them if they can recall a time when they were involved in a work activity with you when you did something that made an impact on them. The responses will work to jog your memory about other things you’ve forgotten. Other times, the answers will surprise you as people recount how you impressed them.

As the stories come in, write them down on your growing list including, as in part one, what you did, how you did it and what the result was for the company. For now don’t worry about how the worksheet looks or reads. You are collecting the inventory you will be working with. Just get down the details. We’ll lay it all out professionally in the next chapter.

**Accomplishments Part Three: Personal Accomplishments**
In my opinion we too often lose sight of job seeking from the recruiter’s point of view. Keep in mind that when you first meet and greet a recruiter, it is not their job to like you. Not because they aren’t good people but because they can’t; they have to say “no” to so many applicants.

These same recruiters also have real lives outside the office. Going a step further than the competition by presenting personal accomplishments from interests beyond the scope of your work, you will find yourself connecting with recruiters on a level that any person not using the Accomplishments Worksheet can’t easily do. This connection is not to be taken lightly. It can make the difference between getting a chance for a second interview and not.

This is not to take away from the fact that you first have to be able to prove that you are qualified for the job. But with the level of competition and the number of talented people interviewing for the same jobs, this part asks what you can do to set yourself apart after you have established your professional bona fides.

In this exercise, add the personal accomplishments you remember and/or feel good about related to your involvement with charities or times you volunteered. Then add accomplishments related to current and past academic, athletic, military or religious organizations you have been involved with.

Then, as with your professional accomplishments, reach out to people you volunteered with, to professors, teachers, religious leaders, coaches and, most importantly, family and friends. Ask each of them if they can recall a time when they were involved in an activity with you in which you made an impact on them. If you have children (regardless of their age), listen closely to them. I promise the stuff they tell you will floor you. Add all these to your growing accomplishments list.

I regularly hear back from candidates I have worked with who tell me things like, “Her son and mine went to the same school” or “Turns out he was very interested in sailing and wanted to know more about my racing team” or “It just so happens that he was involved in a major fund raiser for the American Cancer Society too.” Each of those instances opens the door a little wider to your next job.

**How Many Personal Accomplishments?**

There is no limit to the number of personal accomplishments you will compile while taking your
inventory. You are limited only by life experience. If you are a mature job seeker you have no excuse not to create a minimum of 20. If you are a recent graduate, your list will be shorter but at your age, you can include high school achievements or activities that indicate such factors as leadership. Young people, in my experience, always have more to offer than they think they do and when I work with them, we can generally find eight to 10 genuine, solid accomplishments for their list. (The last chapter of the book is dedicated to Entry-level job seeker issues, content and formatting.)

**He Saved the Company—And Would Never Have Known If He Hadn’t Asked!**

Although it may seem daunting (it’s not) to contact former employers, colleagues, coaches and volunteer leaders along with family and friends, the payoff can be astonishing, as it was with Joe.

At one of my full-day workshops, he came up to me to apologize for texting while I was speaking. Joe said that he had been so taken with the idea of learning what impact he might have made on companies where he had been employed that he had sent a text to ten co-workers including his previous boss. Within minutes he received a text back from his former employer stating that he had saved the company. What?!

At the break, Joe called his former boss and asked him what he meant in his text. It turned out that the company had been in dire straits and on the brink of failure. His boss couldn’t tell anyone for fear they would leave which would mean immediate failure. He went on to tell Joe that the product Joe developed at that moment in time, as well as his implementation, oversight and follow through, had saved the company! The company is still in business and, just FYI, the reason Joe was attending one of my workshops was because he formally retired from this company. After deciding that retirement was not his thing, he determined to hone his job search skills and explore new opportunities.

Had Joe not asked his former employer what difference he had made while on the job, he would have never known about the incident that came to be the first one listed on his Accomplishments Worksheet.

Joe presented his Accomplishments Worksheet at his next interview. As a result he is now a program manager in the corporate division of one of the largest community colleges in the nation.