

Career Changers' Most Powerful Resume and Cover Letter Tool: Transferable Skills

by Maureen Crawford Hentz

The most effective technique career changers can use in their resumes and cover letters is **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS, TRANSFERABLE SKILLS, TRANSFERABLE SKILLS**.

I recently gave a workshop specifically on this topic for career changers at the National Environmental Careers Conference. I was shocked at the number of competent, successful individuals who kept referring to themselves as “totally unqualified for a job in the environment.” These were adults with four to 12 years of experience as managers, editors and engineers.

I recommend that career changers (and only career changers) have an objective on their resume. With my clients, I refer to these objectives as **TRANSITIVE OBJECTIVES**. Transitive objectives are those that help a potential employer understand which skills/experience the applicant thinks are transferable. Transitive objectives usually follow a format similar to these:

To use my _____ years of experience as a _____, _____ and _____ in an environmentally responsible research non-profit.

Seeking a _____ position that will effectively maximize my experience in _____.

For example, an accountant applying for a research position, could say:

“Seeking a biology research position that will effectively maximize my 10 years of experience as a manager with budget and supervisory responsibility.”

OR:

“Seeking a biology research position that will effectively maximize my experience in program and personnel management.”

The second strategy I recommend to career changers is to use a competency-based resume [Editor’s note: Also called a functional resume]. I recommend that career changers try to categorize prior jobs and volunteer positions as competencies so that the resume reviewer or potential employer can clearly see the transferable skills and experience.

Similarly, I recommend that **job seekers** address the career-change issue directly in the cover letter. It’s not necessary to self-disclose your long struggle with a job you hate, but rather briefly describe:

1. what compels you toward the new field and
2. what skills you can offer that are transferable.

I’ve seen very effective resumes in which candidates say directly in the cover letter:

While at first glance I may not seem to fit your typical candidate profile, I am confident that my skills in _____, _____ and _____, as well as my knowledge of _____ would indeed be an excellent match for this position.