

Why Your Legal Resume Doesn't Need an Objective

Some experts believe that attorneys should have an objective statement on their resume. They see the objective as a nice, friendly opener to let the employer or recruiter know immediately what your legal focus is. Particularly, they believe that an objective section at the top of your resume right under your name and contact information will clarify things if you have an assortment of different types of legal experience or general careers, or if you are looking to transition into a practice in which you have no experience.

Some experts think that there is no right or wrong when it comes to deciding whether or not to place an objective on your resume, that it is your choice alone and depends upon what your goals and circumstances are.

Those experts are dead wrong.

The most basic answer is that an objective statement says the same thing no matter how you phrase it or where you send it: "I want to do legal work for you." So, why take up valuable space on your resume to make that statement?

There are two mistakes attorneys commonly made when writing objectives: too general and too selfish.

Too General

Many attorneys approach the objective statement from a one-size-fits-all angle. But it needs to be specific in order to create the desired effect. Writing simply that you are looking for a brand new chance to apply your strong legal skill-set in a demanding legal environment, will not pique the interest of anyone.

Note that objectives can be limiting. If you state that you are interested in a specific type of practice, the employer may not even stop to think that you might be qualified for or be interested in another position within the firm or company. Even if you are an ace attorney all around with more than 20 years of experience in several legal arenas, if you write in your objective that you want to work in a major firm's real estate office, it might get missed that you would or could as expertly work for their commercial practice.

Too Selfish

The employer doesn't want to hear one word from you about anything concerning how the firm will benefit you (i.e.—"A recent graduate from The New York Law School looking to gain real world experience at O'Melveny and Meyers"). Never tell the employer on the resume, in the cover letter, or at the interview that your objective is based on something you want. Ask yourself first what you can bring to the proverbial table. Consider the employer's perspective, not your own.

There are two alternatives to the objective that are important to know: the cover letter and a summary of qualifications (or a profile).

Cover letters are a necessity.

Some employers mention them in their ads and some do not. Those who do not suggest cover letters assume that you know you should send one. Employers require cover letters with the resume because they want some kind of brief establishment as to why you are sending your resume and that you did not do so by accident or for no solid reason. Cover letters are an outstanding opportunity to tell the employer what you cannot on your resume. This includes your objective.

A **Summary of Qualifications** (or a Profile) can be a nice touch and serve the same purpose as an objective statement.

A summary at the top of your resume (below your name and contact information) is ideal for experienced attorneys because it offers a snapshot of all your skills and expertise and will better entice the employer to read the details throughout the rest of your resume. The summary states who you are (i.e.—A dynamic, versatile legal professional with expertise in real estate and corporate transactions), what your skills and previous experiences are (i.e.—Demonstrated proficiency in contract negotiations. Experienced in securities litigation and commercial transactions), and any licenses or professional affiliations that may apply. Summaries can be between 1–5 sentences, but should be no more than six lines long.

You can incorporate your objective into your summary: “An accomplished, motivated litigation attorney looking to contribute wage/hour and insurance expertise to (a reputable employment firm).”

But the objective is best mentioned in the cover letter.

Tips on including your objective in your cover letter or a summary

- Establish what kind of legal professional you are and what expertise you offer
- Inform the potential employer what your career goal is and/or what specific position you seek
- Call the position by its official name and state the firm or company name as well
- Demonstrate how your qualifications will meet their needs
- Be specific with all information and make sure it's all relevant

Finally, if you still feel you have to use an objective on your resume, just make it quick and to the point regarding the specific job to which you are applying.

If nothing else, objectives are just another chore during the drafting process, and it's just another chance for you to get it wrong and get your resume tossed aside before your education and experience gets a chance to be read.