

## Preparing a Splendid Attorney Resume With a Not-So-Splendid Work History

By Emily Sanderson

*A functional resume format can draw attention to those areas of an individual's legal experience that he or she seeks to emphasize in a job search, even if those areas are not the former mainstay of the individual's career to date. This approach is particularly helpful when a career shift is required.*



Former White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan recently wrote a book about his occupational misfortunes, and he's now making a lot of money off of it. Most other professionals, however, might not recover so easily from the effects of nasty political struggles at their former places of employment.

I volunteered at the YWCA a few years ago, and one of the women residents I worked with there seemed to have a fantastic work history; she was a technical engineer of sorts. But there she was, living in the YWCA with none of her family around her and with very few belongings. She didn't tell me everything that had happened to cause her change of venue, but I could see that she had been a dedicated employee who once felt secure, perhaps too secure.

What happens when our cash cow fails or our brainchild flops? And how do we compensate for that in a resume?

"People have been trying to figure out the differences between the Scott McClellans and the YWCA woman for years," says Scerinda Johnson, a behavioral therapist in West Valley City, UT.

For her master's thesis, Johnson researched a psychological study that was performed on telecommunications executives affected by the Bell Telephone crash in the 1970s, when the one telephone company in the United States was identified by the federal government as a monopoly and was forced to break into smaller regional units. Executives were laid off in large numbers, and many saw the layoffs coming way in advance. Despite this, some of the executives maintained a positive outlook and were able to cope with the stress, while others floundered.

In S.R. Maddi and S.C. Kobasa's study, they determined that there were three factors that hardy executives had in common which allowed them to cope with severe levels of stress.

1. **Commitment** — A wholehearted interest in whatever one is doing coupled with a sense of involvement in life.
2. **Control** — The belief that one can change the events happening outside of oneself.
3. **Challenge** — The attitude that changes in life bring increased opportunity or growth.

The first step to dealing with such a challenge is for an individual to adjust his or her attitude and to adopt the qualities of a hardy individual. With that perspective, an individual can approach a job search more objectively and wholeheartedly.

A resume can be strategically adjusted to emphasize other, more positive work experience besides a fateful scar. Colleagues from earlier places of employment or from an attorney's academic experience can provide adequate work references.

Using a functional resume format, you can emphasize those transferable skills which are more relevant to your current job search and, in turn, de-emphasize work experience that is less relevant or less appealing. A functional resume, separates the bullets that describe your work experience from the places of employment where the experience was gained. The bullets stand on their own and give you more ownership of them, which demonstrates your self-confidence to potential employers.

Attorneys who have spent a significant portion of their careers in one practice area often find that if they need to make a career shift related to a difficult employer, they can rely on a functional resume to bring life back those other areas of law which they have practiced, although it is not used exclusively for such purpose,

"A resume can be mended, and so can an individual. Hardiness is the learned ability to cope optimistically with stressors," Johnson says. "Hardy people respond to stressors as challenges or opportunities rather than as insurmountable roadblocks. If a stressor cannot be realistically seen as an opportunity, a hardy person finds a workable solution to eliminate it. Hardy individuals are less vulnerable to the ill effects of stress than people who are not hardy."

Johnson mentions Victor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, who survived the Nazi concentration camps. "He determined that he was going to have control over his attitude, and that kept his sanity."

"If we foster the growth of hardiness, we can deal with stressors that come in our lives so that we will not be seriously harmed by them," Johnson says. "An individual who wants to overcome workplace challenges should look to increase their sense of commitment, control, and challenge, and then no matter what happens, they can maintain their identity and can move forward with a greater likelihood of success."