

Re-entering the job market: self-marketing and résumé writing

 By [Tiffany Markman](#)

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Suffering from a recession-era retrenchment? Been unceremoniously ousted from your job? Latest casualty of 'Last In, First Out' syndrome? Massive dent to your ego notwithstanding, a retrenchment can mean huge stress and even family trauma, *on top* of the urgent need to find yourself another job. A nicer job. A better-paying job. And hopefully, a more 'you' job.

This article is dedicated to helping you to pick yourself up, dust yourself off and follow a set of simple steps to re-entering the job market, including self-marketing and résumé-writing. The former should, ideally, happen before the latter - so that you approach updating your CV with more self-knowledge, greater inspiration and better words than you had before.

[**Note:** if you still have your job but you have to oust others from theirs, or you're spending time around the-tragic-and-recently-retrenched at present, this article is a must-read for you.]

1. Find your niche

Too many people believe that a brand starts and ends with a pretty logo and a nice business card. Not true. As a job-seeker, your brand is *you*. And you can't find your dream job without putting yourself out there. After all, *it's your skills and abilities that people will be paying for*.

So, as a person re-entering the job market, you need to create your brand. There are five elements to consider when deciding on how best to express 'Brand You', and here they are:

- What are your **core strengths**?
- What are your **own goals**?
- What are your **passions**?
- Does your brand fit **your personality**?
- What makes you **uncomfortable**?

2. Establish your true value

When you've been on a job interview, you want the company to come back to you with a contract in one hand and a thumbs-up sign in the other. But that doesn't always happen. Sometimes when you follow up, the company says, "Sorry for you. Application unsuccessful."

This puts you in a tricky situation. On the one hand, it may not have been the company for you. On the other, you need a job and your self-esteem's just taken a bit of a dive. So now what? How do you keep going, with a clear sense of what you're worth? Here are a few tips:

1. ***Become a shameless self-promoter***

The people who get the best jobs are usually those who know how to punt themselves - who put themselves out there with a good dose of (sometimes fake) self-confidence and work on building their brand. Here's how you start:

Complete the following sentences, as if you were your own mother/father, writing about you...

_____ is an absolutely brilliant _____ who can add _____ to your company. Hire him/her now and watch as _____.

2. ***Chew on other ideas, like freelancing***

In any given profession, freelancers sell or contract their work to clients, rather than being employed. Freelancing means using your skills to accommodate your work/life balance. It opens up the potential to steer your career in a direction that suits you. It's also about working at your own pace and taking responsibility for your future.

On the up-side:

1. **You're your own boss:** this can be extremely enjoyable and very satisfying.
2. **You have more freedom:** freelancers can, mostly, choose when and where to work.
3. **You're more marketable:** by moving from company to company and sometimes contract to contract, freelancers can develop varied experience, impressive CVs and good contacts.
4. **You pay less tax:** freelancers who take good advice can reduce their tax burden.

But the best part is that freelancers tend to earn more money than permanent employees. I promise. There's also a delicious turnover of people, working environments and cultural diversity, so you don't get as bored as quickly. I promise. Of course, if freelancing were such an easy way to earn a living, *everyone* would do it - which would defeat the purpose entirely.

On the down-side:

1. **There's less security:** freelancers are not protected in the same ways as employees.
2. **There's more uncertainty:** there are no guarantees of new work, money or benefits.
3. **There's more hassle:** because you're running your own business, there are forms to complete, rules to obey and accounts to keep.
4. You're on your ace: as well as the possibility of being lonely, being your own boss means that nobody pays you when you take a holiday, you're a new mom or you're sick.

My take? No matter what the additional stresses of going it alone, it tends to even out when you face less traffic, less office drama, no leave forms, no retrenchment risk - and most of the profit!

3. ***Master the crucial art of networking***

A key part of marketing yourself is making professional contacts who can support you, advise you, collaborate with you - and refer you to job opportunities. How to start networking?

- Participate in appropriate **Facebook** groups.

- Join **online social networking forums** such as Twitter, MyGenius or LinkedIn.
- Join professional industry **organizations**.
- **Speak to people** in your field and in related fields.
- Go to **conferences** that are relevant to what you do.
- **Give business cards** to absolutely everyone.

3. Discover what you like

- What's your **favourite movie**? Write down the title. Is it an action, a comedy, an adventure, a romance, a sci-fi thriller, a courtroom drama, a historical saga or a smart foreign flick?
- What are your **favourite TV channels**? Write them down. Do you watch TV to escape or to learn? Is your best show mindless or meaningful? What programmes really excite you?
- What **kind of art** are you attracted to? Write it down. Photography? Modern art? Classic painters? Look around your home or your office - what pieces appeal to you most?
- What **kind of music** do you like? Are you into hip hop, reggae, classical music, jazz, golden oldies, pop, foreign sounds? Listen to the radio and note the stuff that gets you going.
- What **outdoor environment** inspires you? If given a choice, would you rather be sitting at an outdoor table on Sandton Square, on a picnic blanket at Zoo Lake or on a remote mountaintop in Nepal? Do you feel alive when you're scuba diving with sharks or strolling lazily around an organic market? Where do you feel closest to yourself and most peaceful?

Your professional self is connected to your creative self. Review your notes about your favourite creative endeavours and places; you'll be surprised what they reveal about your career path.

[Disclaimer: the insights you gain from the above interrogation are *not* meant to appear in your CV. In other words, don't put a sentence into your Personal Profile or Interests section that reads, "I love long walks on the beach and *Dirty Dancing*." The intention here, in case you haven't gathered, is to uncover professional avenues you haven't considered before, because they were linked to your hobbies, not to your 'real job'. If you can - *and so many of us do* - make money out of doing something that really excites you, you're in for a happier life.]

4. Update your CV

When applying for any job, you'll have to present a résumé to the interviewer or prospective employer. This should be a concise, clear summary of your overall qualifications, including your skills, experience and other info that allows your personality to stand out.

But you probably haven't gone through the job-seeking process in a while, much less given thought to your recruitment prospects. And if you've been busy, you haven't kept your CV updated. So you don't know what 'they' want to know, and in what format.

Below is a generally accepted standard of the data a CV should contain:

- **Personal and contact details** - the obvious stuff
- **Personal profile** - a 4-5 line sales pitch on 'Brand You'
- **Educational qualifications** - working in reverse chronological order
- **Additional qualifications and memberships** - to highlight your all-roundedness

- **Work experience** - keep it simple and be honest (again, in reverse order)
- **Interests** -to show what a capable, creative individual you are
- **References** - only list people who'll absolutely rave about you

If you'd like a copy of the CV template that has worked best in my experience, [target=_blank](#). And if you'd like more info on my half-day or correspondence programme in self-marketing, [click here](#).

But above all, remember the fable of the plumber - and know your own worth:

A lady had a blocked pipe and called a plumber. He arrived, she pointed to the pipe and he kicked it. The water started running. He said, 'That'll be R450', to which she replied, 'How can you charge me R450 for fixing this pipe? All you did was kick it!' And the plumber answered, "I'm not charging you R450 for kicking it; I'm charging you R450 for *knowing where to kick it*."

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