

Career Transitions

Get ready to shine
after a career break



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About reachIRE

reachIRE is designed to support your career success as you return to work through exclusive corporate returnships, cohort training programs and personalized coaching. We'll help you build on your past professional achievements with the latest business and technical skills — plus provide leadership training to empower your advancement. We'll connect you with hiring partners committed to fostering gender equality in the workplace by creating new opportunities for people at all stages of their career.

With reachIRE, you will have access to free, in-depth training programs, ongoing professional support and a community of talented, accomplished professionals like you.

We'd love to stay in touch - [join our newsletter](#) to:

- learn about upcoming events,
- see more tips and
- view [open return-to-work opportunities](#).

The Elevator Pitch: Crafting Your Story

People hire people, they don't hire résumés.

Interviews are a chance to give employers a chance to get to know you, so why focus on what's already listed in your resume?

To present a memorable first impression, you want to craft an introduction that is concise, appealing, and informative. An elevator pitch is a 60-90 second description about yourself, that you can share in the time it would take to ride in an elevator ride with someone.

Of course, each of our stories are complex and none of us can be summarized into a few sentences, but the point of an elevator pitch is to prepare your opening words, so you can respond to the rest of the interview questions with poise.

Your elevator pitch should also be work-focused, it's not the time to mention kids, hobbies, or family background. You want to select words about your passion that align with the work you want to do.



Start Strong

The best elevator pitches start with a leading statement, followed by relevant details, and ties your experience back to the position. You want your initial sentence to be a strong, powerful topic sentence that reinforces your capabilities.

A common mistake is to begin with standard narratives that repeat what is on your resume such as, *"I graduated from,"* or *"I have 20 years of experience."*

Instead put thought and flair into your opening line:

"I'm an accomplished [role-related: sales, operations, project manager, etc. or activity: storyteller, revenue driver] with a history of successfully [accomplishing results: managing large, complex projects, or propelling operations to new levels of efficiency or story-based: removing headaches for the C-Suite, connecting dots for sales teams]."

Help Them See The Future – With You In It!

After your opening statement where you share who you are and your career passions, look to the future. Talk about where you are today, your interests, and the next step you want to take. For instance:

"After taking a career break for family reasons, I'm exploring roles where I can use my project management

and partnerships background to create impact. The position at [Company] requires similar skills – organization, negotiation, and relationship-building – to those I used when I managed 12 partnership programs and improved applicant flow and success rate by 20%.”

If you are able to share details, they should portray your story as well as predict your future success in the position.

We know sometimes it’s hard to quantify results and tie experiences together in a neat bow. A few tips on getting in the right frame of mind:

- Share successes, accomplishments and achievements in a way that mirrors the culture of the company
- Even though you may not have been in the workforce for several years, consider how your prior efforts contributed to the accomplished person you are today
- Establish a present state of mind and focus on the potential you possess right now

Demonstrate Results

Finally, conclude your pitch by stating why you would be a good fit for the company. Combine all the information you shared and explain how it can be successfully attributed to the position at hand. Let them know you would love to bring your skills and attributes to this position and thank them for the opportunity to talk further.

“In my last role, I led the creation of a \$600K healthcare training program with [ABC Company] that helped people from diverse backgrounds jumpstart careers in healthcare. We had a 35% improvement in our metrics. I’d love to deliver the same results for you.”

Should You Address Your Career Break?

You can share your career break if it is relevant to your story or if you feel comfortable doing so. However, in an elevator pitch, you don’t need to feel pressure to talk in detail or reveal more than you feel comfortable.

You might say something like, *“For the past five years, I took a career sabbatical to care for a family member. During that time I took online courses in project management and recently completed a certificate in web design to update my skills.”*

Let Yourself Shine

Returning to the workforce can be intimidating, but crafting a well-prepared elevator pitch can help ease the nerves. Exude an appealing personality that doesn’t restate your résumé, but rather shares your background in a manner that reflects the culture of the company and where you want to go. The key is to elaborate on how your achievements and skills will contribute to your promising future at the company, because you are an accomplished and dynamic professional. You’ve got this!

Learn more about [crafting your elevator pitch](#) on the reachHIRE website and by watching [an on-demand webinar](#).

Using the Power of Three to Make a Lasting Impression



The key to making a lasting impression is to have a unique, genuine introduction. We often recommend researching the best Shark Tank pitches. Usually, the most gripping are those with a compelling story that complements the entrepreneur’s drive to succeed. In other words, they include something beyond the product. These stories resonate with the Sharks, or in this case, an interviewer.

“The Power of Three” is a strategic technique that can be used to build a powerful brand and story. Think of three elements, verbs or adjectives that can be used to describe yourself. Avoid falling into the false belief that promoting yourself is bragging, because truly, politely and eloquently talking about your attributes is appealing to the interviewer. Choosing three words that are truly unique to you provides a framework to communicate three specific attributes. In addition, by comprehending your own strengths and weaknesses, you can then create a story about yourself that is just as intriguing as the entrepreneur’s Shark Tank pitches.

Legendary author and thought leader Tom Peters wrote a classic article, “[The Brand Called You.](#)” In it he explains the concept of branding yourself, and how your reputation is invariably a compilation of your previous accomplishments, behaviors and actions. Building a personal brand is first and foremost in developing an authentic understanding of yourself. Finding three attributes that encapsulate your essence can help to enhance the impression you leave.

Developing a true understanding of your personal brand is also a helpful tool when it comes to being asked the unoriginal question, “What is one word which describes you best?” You’ll have three. Nothing beats being over prepared! The elements you choose should suitably describe who you are as a person, your work ethic, and reflect your passions. Have choices that are specific to the position you want, avoiding clichés, like “I am hardworking.”

As illustrated in Shark Tank, differentiation is imperative to selling a product. Why is your product better than any other? Why should I hire you? What will you do for my business? Being able to effectively articulate who you are in addition to explaining your credentials is imperative. If it was always only about the product, a robot could present the product to the sharks. But, it’s not. It is the story beyond the product that will seal the deal.

Translating your uniqueness into value is something that not a lot of people are able to communicate with ease. However, by utilizing the Power of Three, you can make a lasting impression that works to maximize your career potential and land that new role.

reac**HIRE** Resume Toolkit

Strategies to put
your best self
forward, so
employers see
you, not your
career gaps



Congratulations - you are taking the first step on your journey to restart your career! reachHIRE has experience bringing hundreds of people back to work, guiding them through the process so their aptitude and attitude shine through instead of career gaps.

How to Address Your Career Gap on Your Resume

Employers will notice if your resume has a career gap, especially if you have been out of work for several years. But a career break doesn't have to be a career breaker.

We recommend your resume be a true and honest presentation of your experience and skills, and that means acknowledging your time away from a full-time career.

This Toolkit offers ways to present your gap so initial questions are answered, without sharing a lot of details. The best places to expand on your career gap are: a cover letter if one is requested, within some online application portals, or during a first phone interview.



The good news? Career gaps are becoming more common. Between shutdowns related to the coronavirus, recognition of the importance of family caregiver roles, and the reality that businesses face downturns, organizations are more accepting that the best candidates may not have smooth, linear career journeys.

At reachHIRE, we partner with progressive companies who rely on us to find talented people who are interested in returning to full-time employment after a career break, and work with those candidates to prepare for full-time roles. We work with you to bring out your skills and confidence and provide you with a community of people returning to full-time employment. Just like you.

This toolkit is focused on using your resume to highlight the skills you bring to the table, supported by the accomplishments of past work and volunteer experience.

Let's get started.

The Look

There are many resume formats and templates to be found all over the internet. Some look like portfolios and are best suited for certain professions such as design professionals. There are also bold formats with images, strong colors, and pie charts. Those formats may make your resume look trendy and modern, but it's often difficult to translate skills and experience into a compelling graphic. The results might not communicate the story you wish to share.

There's another a big catch. Many organizations use Applicant Tracking Systems – computer programs designed to scan resumes for keywords and skills – and those fancy resume formats aren't always conducive to being read by those programs. Since we want the focus to be on you, not a career break or a complicated bar chart, we recommend using a simple resume format that provides flexibility to tell your story.

Overall Formatting

- Keep your format simple and professional – no images or photos
- Two pages or less
- Less is more – be concise and consistent
- Select a resume format that appropriately reflects who you are, your work history, and the job you are applying for
- Use official titles and company names
- Add dates for jobs and education/graduation
- Avoid overuse of abbreviations and acronyms – they may not be widely known and can come across as casual



Tips for Fonts, Margins, Spacing

- Use simple fonts and colors so a scanning program and the recruiter can view clearly
- **Arial, Calibri, Tahoma** – 10.5-12 points – anything smaller is too hard to read
- The general rule is to set margins at 1.0 inch on all sides, but you can go slightly smaller (.75 inch) to help information flow smoothly on a page
- Format your resume to be single-spaced, with a blank line between each section

The Content: Resume Elements

Here's where you can shine and highlight your skills and strengths, not just where you worked and what roles you held. As you begin to craft your resume, research position descriptions for your desired role, no matter the level or location. Once you see how similar positions are worded, weave similar keywords and skills into your resume, so your story aligns with market needs.

Let's look at the major sections of a resume we recommend:

- Career Summary
- Professional Experience
- Technical/Skills
- Education
- Certifications and Languages
- Volunteer Work



Career Summary

A Career Summary is a concise vision statement that summarizes the traits, skills, and abilities reflected on your resume. Think about what personality traits, strengths, and expertise you exhibit. Remember, this is the employer's first impression of you, so call out your superpowers!

A career summary's purpose is to:

- Describe your purpose and motivation for the job
- Help an employer determine if your goal is in line with company and position
- Deliver a powerful opening statement
- Reflect your strengths as a candidate
- Make a strong argument for why you are the best choice

Crafting your career summary can be the most time-intensive part of creating your resume. If you have friends and family who know your professional skills, call on them to help you see yourself in a new light. It's also a good time to check in with former colleagues to let them know you are ready to return to work. Their recollections about you can help define your strengths and prioritize your skills.

Let's look at two versions of a Career Summary.

Before

Experienced business professional with a broad background in sales, marketing, business development/alliances, and strategy. Industry focus in information technology and non-profit sectors.

Candidate reviews job descriptions for similar roles, consults a trusted former colleague still in the same field and makes these changes.

After

Harvard MBA and metrics-driven business leader executing strategic plans and building teams in marketing, sales, business development, and partnerships. Expertise in IT industry with specialties in:

- *Market Strategy* • *Partnership Development* • *Market Research*
- *Brand Positioning* • *Business Plans & Analysis* • *Relationship Building*

The revised version does several things:

- Pulls an impressive education to the forefront which is sure to get the reader's attention
- Replaces generic words with more powerful one such as "leader" and "strategic"
- Updates terminology, like replacing "alliance" with "partnerships"
- Closes with a bulleted list of keywords that align with roles the job seeker is targeting

Most importantly, the job seeker is now communicating the type of role they would like – to craft strategy and lead teams based on strong business relationships.

Tips for Building a Compelling Career Summary

- Research professionals and jobs in industry-related areas
- Search for jobs and titles online
- Collect "key" words and phrases that describe the professionals and job profiles
- Assess your strengths and build a transition statement

Professional Experience Section

Addressing Your Career Gap

There's often a temptation to fill career gaps on resumes by expanding work start and stop dates or supplying details of volunteer work and part-time roles. We've found that it's more likely an employer will call you if they know how you've spent your time during a career break, whether you were a stay at home parent, caring for an elderly relative, or freelancing.



Place the reason for your career break at the top of your professional experience section before your last work role. Here are some samples of wording and format you can use to communicate your break:

Career Sabbatical to be a Caregiver, 9/15-Present
Career Break to Raise my Family, 6/12-Present

That's it. Simply listing the break communicates to the employer that you were purposefully not working instead of making the recruiter wonder if you were unable to find a job.

Did You Work a Little?

Many job seekers try to fill in the career gap with recent volunteer work or lots of small jobs. Volunteer roles, especially where you held a leadership position, can be important, and we suggest you list them after your employment history (more below).

However, if you were working a little during your break to keep busy or contribute to the household finances, you should gather similar experiences under one heading so it doesn't appear that you frequently jumped positions. Highlight a few related professional achievements focused on results. You don't need to list everything you did, especially if you were underemployed. Only share what is relevant to the role you are seeking or that demonstrates a skill. Here's a sample:

Part-time Freelance SQL Programmer, 9/15-5/19

- Created ordering app for a small grocer, helping to increase sales by 10%
- Reworked a user experience in two days to meet new product launch

Independent Sales Contractor [Avon, Amway, Rodan & Fields, etc.], 11/17-Present

- Expanded territory by 30%, up-sold customers, and won annual sales award

Employment History

The most common format for resumes is to present your experience in reverse chronological order. This means your resume is arranged so that your jobs are listed with your most recent employer first.

Begin by sharing the company name, location, your title, and dates of employment. You can list your title first, to highlight your position in each job. Another option is to list the company name first. Regardless of which format you choose, be consistent down your entire list.

Here's the layout of a title first format:



Director of Media and Public Relations, COMPANY NAME, City, State, 7/15-5/18

- Describe responsibilities and achievements...
- Describe responsibilities and achievements...

Multiple jobs at the same company? We advise you stack job titles:

COMPANY NAME - City, State, 5/12-5/18

Director of Media and Public Relations, 7/15-5/18

- Describe achievements...
- Describe achievements...

Marketing Manager, 5/12-7/15

- Describe achievements...
- Describe achievements...

Tips for Describing Roles and Responsibilities

- Describe major achievements or accomplishments with a focus on results
- Use bullets to succinctly communicate those results and accomplishments
- Use action words and quantitative data
- Avoid devoting space to routine tasks or obvious duties associated with the role

See these examples for ideas on how to use action words and quantify your accomplishments:

Information Technology Examples	Communications Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Developed an online training platform resulting in an increase of 50+ employees enrolling in company development courses per year</i>• <i>Launched a company-wide digitized filing system that led to a 20% average increase in efficiency for all departments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Improved employee participation in Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives by 60% through launch of a multi-phase awareness campaign</i>• <i>Generated readership of 150+ employees (up from 10+) by improving the quality of the materials published on the company's internal website</i>

Technical/Skills Section

The resume skills section allows you to list, re-iterate, and expand upon your skills and abilities that are relevant to the job to which you are applying.

The Skills Section is where you can list your useful abilities and align them to the responsibilities and accomplishments in the bullet points of your Professional Experience Section.

It is most important to be relevant and brief in this section. Keep your skills targeted toward the job to which you are applying. More employers are now emphasizing the need for soft skills, not only hard skills and technical acumen. Make sure you add all three to your Skills Section.

What are Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills?

- Hard skills: easily quantifiable and learned through work experience
 - Examples: Project Management, Software Developer, Product Life Cycle
- Soft skills: more subjective and harder to quantify; “people skills”
 - Examples: Communication, Cross Functional Relationships, Team Collaboration
- Technical skills: Go beyond MS Office – should be relevant to job
 - Examples: Agile, Salesforce, Excel expert

Education

It's a best practice to include your education on your resume, even if your degree is in an unrelated field or you graduated a long time ago. It's important to show commitment, and completing a degree is an easy way to demonstrate this.

Your education – specifically where you went to school – can also help build connections. In addition to networking through school alumni, you never know if the hiring manager attended the same school. Sometimes those little things can put your resume in front of the right people.

Here are some ideas on how to communicate your education:

- List education in chronological order with most recent schooling first
- Provide university/program name, location, degree, and area of study
- Include year of graduation if you are comfortable doing so, although some older job seekers may decide to leave it off
- Include college degrees first, then any additional education not leading to a degree
- Extra education such as individual classes or workshops can be listed in a group, especially if they were obtained from multiple sources

Professional Certifications and Languages

- Add relevant, accredited certifications such as Professional Project Manager, Certified Human Resources Professional, or Certified Scrum Master
- When listing your languages, include whether you have working knowledge, are fluent, or are a native speaker

Other Experience

List any part-time work you have done during your break that does not directly relate to your desired role/profession. For example, working in real estate, serving in the military, selling products or services as an independent contractor or multilevel marketer, substitute teaching, etc. all have transferable skills which can add to your resume.



Volunteer Work

Using the same format as the Work Experience Section, present relevant volunteer work in which you served in a leadership role or made an impact.

Volunteer work should be listed at the end of your resume, after Professional Certifications and Languages.

Here are some examples of how to present your volunteer accomplishments:

Volunteer Examples	
<p><i>Volunteer Fundraiser, The United Way, Montclair, NJ, Fall 2012 to Present</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Recruited, coordinated, and trained 14 volunteer fundraisers</i>• <i>Generated more than \$80,000 in pledges through planning and promoting 3 successful fundraising events including a silent auction, a dinner, and a concert</i>• <i>Increased contributions by 25% over the previous campaign</i>	<p><i>Volunteer, Habitat for Humanity, Birmingham, AL, Fall 2012 to Present</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Coordinated and led work parties that constructed 15 homes for low-income families in need of housing</i>• <i>Conceptualized and successfully launched initiative that collected contributions of gently used furniture and other household items to sell in the Habitat for Humanity store</i>

References

References will likely be requested at some point in career journey. However, you shouldn't include them on your resume. It is a good practice to prepare your reference list separately in a similar format to the rest of your resume – same font, sizes, etc. Here are some other tips on references:

- The best references are former managers or superior from work
- Alternates can be from volunteer work, professors, or former colleagues
- Do not use close friends or family members as references unless you worked with them in a professional capacity
- Prepare your references – call or email them in advance and make sure your contact information is up to date

Summary

Your resume is often the first impression a hiring manager or recruiter has of you. Make sure it is focused on your potential and the tremendous skills and experience you bring to an organization. **We wish you the best in your career journey!**

About reachIRE

reachIRE empowers professionals who have taken a 2+ year career break from the full-time workforce return to work with confidence, alongside a cohort of returners who support each other along the way. Visit reachire.com for more information and resources to support your career journey.