

 BlueSteps

GLOBAL GUIDE TO PERSONAL BRANDING FOR EXECUTIVES

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO
IDENTIFY YOUR VALUES,
ARTICULATE YOUR MISSION,
AND OPTIMIZE YOUR CAREER DOCUMENTS
TO BECOME A THOUGHT LEADER AND
WIN THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES.



BY BLUESTEPS

THE EXECUTIVE CAREER MANAGEMENT
SERVICE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
EXECUTIVE SEARCH AND LEADERSHIP
CONSULTANTS (AESC)

INTRODUCTION

Personal branding isn't new. It's a concept that's been around in the business realm for a couple of decades, but before it was even articulated—its coinage credited to a Fast Company article by Tom Peters in 1997—it was happening both in corner offices and around town.

Back in the late nineties, there was a mass realization among business leaders that everything around us was branded, from the clothes we wore and the pens we used, to the coffee we drank and the technology we adopted. By attaching ourselves to those brands, we were also saying something about us as individuals and as business leaders.

The savviest leaders quickly understood that they had their own marketable brands, distinct from those of the companies they worked for. Their personal brand was mobile and it could be carried from the office to out on the town, and from one organization to another. Business leaders began to nurture their brands, shape them and attract brand followers. They sought out brand coaches to help strengthen them and they won new opportunities because of their clearly recognizable and increasingly desirable personal brands.

Fast forward 20 years and we find ourselves in a new era of global business. Our society has transitioned from analogue to digital and the accelerated growth of technology has created a business climate of lightning-fast speed and constant change. There is a premium on top talent and fierce competition for executive-level jobs worldwide. Practically everyone has their own digital presence and today's business leaders must differentiate themselves from the competition to be successful. To do that, it's critical they understand their personal brand and how its narrative thread is carried out through all that they do.

We have developed this **Global Guide to Personal Branding for Executives** to help today's executive-level professionals craft a strong personal brand for the first time or to reshape their executive identity. This guide is intended to help you understand what personal branding means today, why it's important, what it includes and does not include, and how to convey an effective personal brand to clearly communicate your value and win new opportunities.



Kathy Simmons
BlueSteps Advisor



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WHAT IS PERSONAL BRANDING?

Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room.

JEFF BEZOS
*Founder
of Amazon*

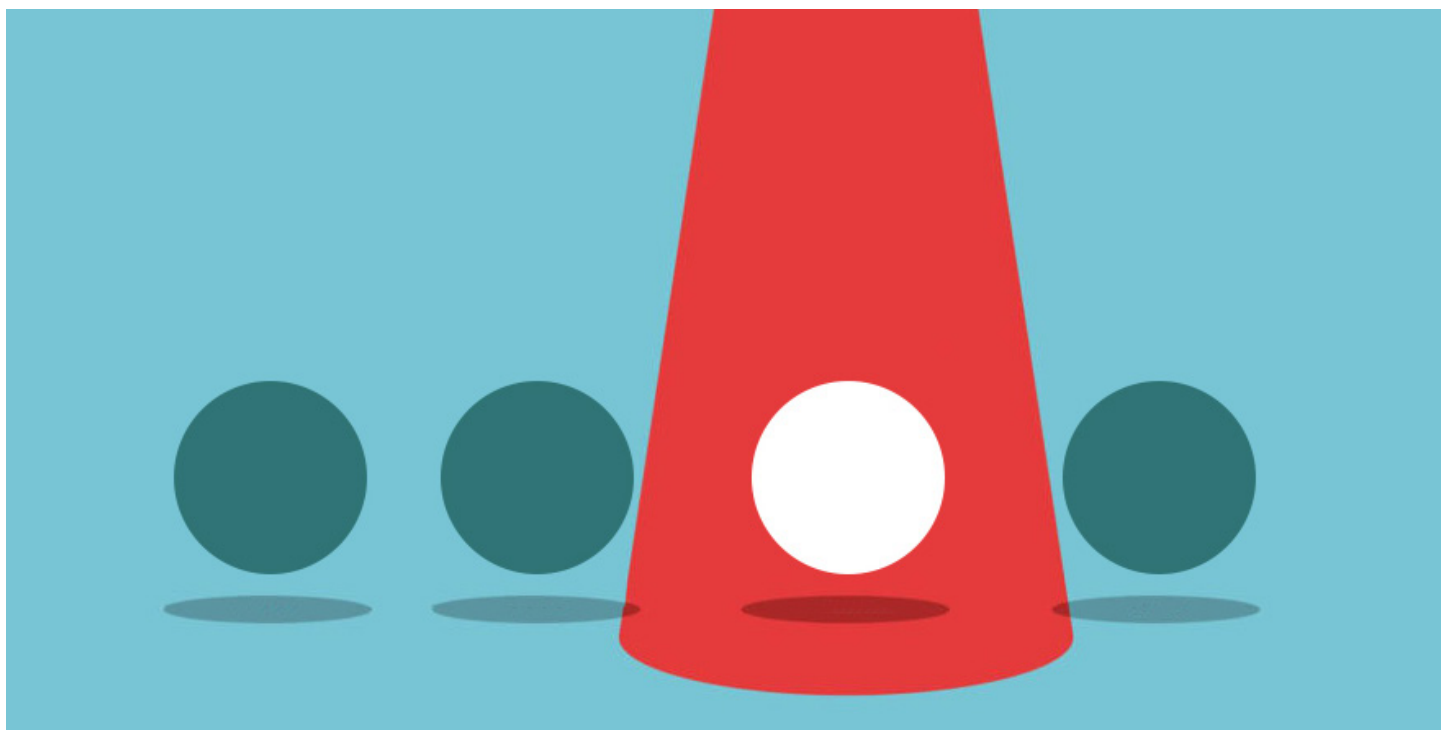
The good news is you already have a personal brand. In fact, you are a brand. You may or may not be aware of your brand identity, and if not, that's okay. That's why we are here—to help you uncover your authentic personal brand and to fully leverage it for maximum opportunity.

But before we dive in to the specifics of you and your brand, what do we mean by personal brand? What is it?

A personal brand is everything that you bring to the table. It includes your skills and your values, as well as how you add value in any situation. Think of a business contact you know. What first comes to mind when you hear their name? Now think about you. What comes to the minds of others when your name pops up in conversation?

Marketers McNally and Speak define the personal brand in this way: “Your brand is a perception or emotion, maintained by somebody other than you, that describes the total experience of having a relationship with you.”

Ironically, your personal brand is ultimately not about you – it's the perception others have of you based on the value you deliver to them.





NO! THIS IS NOT PERSONAL BRANDING.

- COMPETITION
- EGO
- EXPOSURE
- POPULARITY
- SELF-PROMOTION
- PUBLICITY
- CELEBRITY
- A FAD
- NARCISSISM

YES! THIS IS PERSONAL BRANDING



- AUTHENTICITY
- VALUE AND VALUES
- CLARITY
- PASSION
- DELIVERY
- REPUTATION
- DRIVERS
- PURPOSE
- CREDIBILITY
- TRUST
- STRENGTHS

WHY IS PERSONAL BRANDING SO IMPORTANT FOR TODAY'S BUSINESS EXECUTIVES?

In many ways, your brand is an intangible outside of your immediate control. You cannot ultimately control the perception others have of you, but you can certainly influence it. Everything you do and how you do it shapes your brand, as well as what you choose not to do.

That's what makes personal branding so critical for today's leaders and a conscious approach to it so important. Think about how much more transparent our lives are now compared to 20 years ago. Data about us is being constantly collected and analyzed. Because of the rise of digitization, there is more information about us in the public than ever before.

Whether we like it or not, we leave behind us more evidence of who we truly are than ever before. This has created a new component of our overall reputation. Today's executives must be conscious of their offline reputation and their online reputation, and for an authentic personal brand, both should align. To stay true to their brand, who someone is offline should also reflect who they are online.

While your personal brand is distinguished from your organization's brand, they are interconnected. Today, a disloyalty to one's personal brand could easily become a breach to your organization's brand, especially for business leaders in roles of great responsibility and visibility.

SO, HOW MUCH CAN YOU REALLY INFLUENCE YOUR PERSONAL BRAND?

A lot. Just like company brands, personal brands can be turned around after a losing streak or optimized to speak to a new audience. Your personal brand is something you can proactively work on and strengthen. The important thing to keep in mind is your brand is built on what's important to you, but ultimately your brand is for others. And because of that, again, just like company brands, personal brands can repel or attract. Branding is the framework you use to establish a relationship with your "customer." It's okay if not everyone likes your brand. In fact, your brand shouldn't be for everyone. A powerful personal brand needs to be specific and speak to your specific customer. ●

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS EXECUTIVES SHOULD ASK BEFORE GETTING STARTED

2



EXERCISE ONE

Discover what's important to you as an Executive Leader.

Crafting your personal brand can be a daunting process at first. It calls for us to look inward to ask ourselves who we are and the leader we aspire to be—two big questions for anyone to answer. To help you get started, we have developed the following exercise. Consider each question and just start writing without editing yourself. Just keep writing until you feel you have genuinely answered the questions.

Once you have answered each question, be sure to save your responses. They will be useful to revisit later as we move along in helping you define and articulate your brand. ■





Remember, if you try to market to everyone, you are marketing to no one. It's also worth bearing in mind that everything is database driven (ATS/LinkedIn/Facebook/BlueSteps etc.). Any branding is about speaking to your ideal / target customer(s) and how you can help and bring value.

CATRIONA MCDERMOTT
BlueSteps Advisor

IDENTIFYING YOUR VALUES, ARTICULATING YOUR MISSION AND FINDING YOUR VOICE

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You probably know your company's core values well. Maybe you can even recite them. But what about your own values? You probably know them inherently, but have you ever truly articulated them?

Identifying your values is foundational to exuding your brand. It is the core of who you are and what emanates outward to others. Companies that stick to their core values are more recognizable and more successful in the marketplace. The same holds true to individuals. And not only are they more recognizable, they are also more fulfilled. When work and life are aligned with your values, this is when you are at your best. You are positioned to succeed.

When work and life are misaligned with your values, you experience unhappiness, unrest, fatigue; you start to pick up bad habits and develop practices or behaviors that do not align with your personal brand and principles. This is clearly not where you want to be. Sometimes, we end up here because our values have changed over time. This is normal. When you are starting in your career, for example, you may more highly value money, success and doing whatever it takes to propel yourself forward. As you age, you may more highly prioritize balancing work with time for friends and family. The point is, your values evolve over time and what you value in work and how you need to be positioned for success change over time, too.

Most of us have vague notions of what we value, but if prompted, we may not be able to articulate what is truly important to us. Sure, we know the things that societally we know we should—and likely do—value. Things like family and friendship and a peaceful world. But what matters to us as individuals that makes us our unique selves?

KNOWING WHAT YOU VALUE TAKES SOME WORK

The first step is reflection. When you think back at times in your life when you were happiest, when you felt most confident, what were you doing in work and life? Who were you spending time with? The previous exercise may have uncovered some thoughts that brought you closer to understanding your values. Refer back to that exercise. To go deeper in uncovering your values, consider the following questions and make a list of your responses:

Think back to a time in your life when you felt good about who you were and what you were doing. Consider both work and personal life.

- What did you value then?
- What gave you purpose?
- What else made you feel fulfilled?
- What made you proud?
- What made others proud of you?

EXERCISE TWO

Find what you truly value in your career.





EXERCISE THREE

Determine your core values.

Once you have addressed these questions completely, now think about the elements you uncovered that still hold true with where you are today. What has changed? What is new that wasn't in the picture then? Now address the following questions and record your responses.

- What do you value now?
- What gives you purpose?
- What else makes you feel fulfilled?
- What makes you proud?
- What makes others proud of you?

Now that you have reflected on what you valued in the past and what you value in the present, as well as what has changed and what has remained, think about words that describe those core values. To help you get started, here is a list of common values below, but certainly feel free to create your own not on the list. You should aim to start a list of about 10 values and then work to narrow that list to 3-5 values that are core to who you are at this point in your life. As you continue, you may find that some values are similar and you can combine them.

What Do You Value?



EXERCISE FOUR

Write your value and mission statements.



INSIDER TIP

For some, once you've completed these steps, your mission statement may come relatively easily. For others, this is an area where a career coach can bring tremendous value by helping you uncover what it is you truly value and hope to accomplish throughout the rest of your career. To better understand how coaching can help, see page 10.

Now that you have your list of 3-5 values, it's time to turn those 3-5 words into values statements. A values statement can look like the following examples:

- I VALUE GIVING BACK TO MY COMMUNITY.
- I VALUE OPEN-MINDEDNESS.
- I VALUE LIFE-LONG LEARNING.

Your values statements should be short, single phrases. The values statements will be used to write your personal mission.

Now it's time to write your mission. Your mission statement should be succinct and articulate your purpose. A good mission statement will guide you throughout your career, help you pivot direction when you're at a crossroads, and will serve as the elevator pitch-size statement for your personal brand.

Your mission statement should reflect not only your values (what you stand for), but it should also include your past contributions (what you're known for) and your goals (what you still want to achieve). Consider these three elements as you write your statement. Start by referring to your values statements. Now think about your contributions and what you are known for. List those. Lastly, what do you still want to achieve? List your desired achievements. Now that you have identified each component, you can begin to craft your mission statement. Don't try to include everything. Include what you consider to be most core to who you are and what you want to accomplish in life.

Once crafted, your personal mission statement will act as the building block for your brand. It should set the tone for how you engage with the world and shape your voice. ■

Personal mission statements of famous executives

"To serve as a leader, live a balanced life, and apply ethical principles to make a significant difference."

DENISE MORRISON
CEO of Campbell Soup Company

"To be a teacher. And to be known for inspiring my students to be more than they thought they could be."

OPRAH WINFREY
Founder of OWN, The Oprah Winfrey Network

"I define personal success as being consistent to my own personal mission statement: to love God and love others."

JOEL MANBY
CEO of SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment

"To have fun in my journey through life and learn from my mistakes."

SIR RICHARD BRANSON
Founder of the Virgin Group



"To use my gifts of intelligence, charisma, and serial optimism to cultivate the self-worth and net-worth of women around the world."

AMANDA STEINBERG
Founder of DailyWorth.

THE VALUE OF EXECUTIVE CAREER COACHING

4

Like with financial planning and fitness training, you don't have to go it alone. An expert career coach can help you uncover your values, articulate your mission, and find your voice.

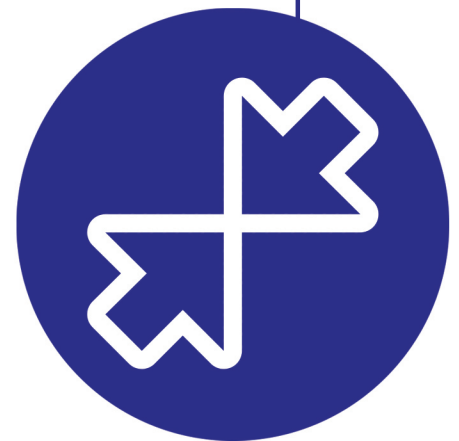
A GOOD CAREER COACH WILL:

1. ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS
2. ELIMINATE THE EXTRANEOUS
3. ADVISE YOU THROUGH ACHIEVING BREAKTHROUGHS
4. HELP YOU GET UNSTUCK
5. GAIN CLARITY ON WHAT YOU REALLY WANT AND HOW TO GET THERE FROM WHERE YOU ARE
6. IDENTIFY CAREER POSSIBILITIES THAT WILL CONNECT WITH YOUR PURPOSE AND PASSION
7. LIKE A FITNESS TRAINER OR A FINANCIAL PLANNER, A COACH WILL HOLD YOU ACCOUNTABLE
8. LEARN YOUR STRENGTHS, SKILLS, VALUES AND MORE THROUGH ASSESSMENTS SUCH AS INTEREST INVENTORIES, PERSONALITY TYPE INSTRUMENTS, ETC.



A GOOD CAREER COACH WILL:

9. MATCH YOUR SKILLS, INTERESTS AND PASSIONS WITH IDEAL CAREER PATH, JOBS AND WORK ENVIRONMENTS
10. CREATE A PLAN TO EXPLORE AND PURSUE A NEW CAREER DIRECTION
11. OVERCOME OBSTACLES IN YOUR PROGRESS, WHETHER DUE TO EMPLOYMENT HISTORY, LACK OF THE "RIGHT" QUALIFICATIONS, OR PERSONAL/FAMILY ISSUES
12. IDENTIFY THE BEST COMMUNICATION OF YOUR UNIQUE VALUE IN YOUR EXECUTIVE RESUME, LINKEDIN PROFILE, EXECUTIVE BIO, AND OTHER CAREER DOCUMENTS
13. SHARE THEIR SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE MARKET
14. REENERGIZE YOU DURING JOB SEARCH
15. HELP YOU DETERMINE YOUR WORTH IN THE MARKET
16. BE YOUR CONFIDANTE





EXERCISE FIVE

Incorporate your executive values and mission into your bio.

EXECUTIVE BIO

5

While all of your career documents should consistently reinforce your personal brand, the executive bio is your strongest opportunity to focus on your brand. You can think of your executive bio as your marketing brochure. The cover letter is your value proposition and the resume or CV is your product spec—we'll cover those next.

The executive bio goes beyond just the facts in your resume or CV and presents an opportunity to inject personality into your career story. Your executive bio should provide the reader with a sense of the human being behind it, evoking what it would be like to work with you.

COMPONENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE BIO

BlueSteps recommends an executive bio of 100-150 words. Your bio should be succinct, easy to read and include captivating and compelling information about your background and expertise. To craft a bio that best reflects your brand, include the following six sections:

1. CURRENT RESPONSIBILITIES.

In your opening paragraph, you need to outline your current roles



and responsibilities in a way that will capture the attention and interest of your audience. Start with a clear branding statement which encapsulates what makes you unique. Be sure to highlight your value proposition, key accomplishments and expertise

throughout this section.

2. PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE.

Aside from what you do in your current role, it is important that



your audience doesn't lose sight of what you have accomplished in your previous roles, too. Use this section to explain your past achievements, both inside and outside of the prior organization. Remember, you can also use hyperlinks and supporting data to provide

the audience with more information on these. You should integrate statistics and measurable successes throughout.



Describe your best career accomplishments, awards and accolades from a networking, personal brand building and thought leadership standpoint.

CHETAN PINTO
BlueSteps Advisor



3. INDUSTRY HONORS.

If you have been recognized in your field of work, by way of awards, honorary degrees, or in alternative ways, this is the section where you can elaborate on them and make sure that they are known to the reader. You can also use this section to include details of any board positions, press interviews or published works.



4. COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT.

Alongside their busy work schedules, many executives volunteer their time for the benefit of worthy causes. This can help to demonstrate leadership qualities, personal strengths, and passions outside of the office environment and can be integral to a successful executive bio.



5. EDUCATION.

Like with any career marketing document, it is important to include details of your educational background and qualifications. Be sure to include not only where you went to school, but also your academic honors, certificates, and other work-related training courses.



6. FAMILY AND HOBBIES.

Once you have provided the reader with your career story, at the end of an executive bio, many executives choose to wrap-up with information that will make them more personable, such as mentioning their spouse and/or children. This will highlight to the audience that you have a successful work/life balance. Discussing other hobbies and other leisure activities can have the same effect. ■

THE EXECUTIVE BIO – A CAREER MANAGEMENT ESSENTIAL

BY TIFFANY HARDY, BLUESTEPS EXECUTIVE CAREER ADVISOR

Landings the perfect-fit C-suite position is hardly as formulaic as polishing up your resume and shooting it out in response to job ads. The reality is that the vast majority of executive-level jobs never make their way into an advertisement—meaning that your chance to be privy to such opportunities requires you to rely heavily on your network of contacts for introductions and hints regarding such undisclosed opportunities.

With this in mind, your resume must be updated and primed for the more advanced stages of conversations with key decision makers (which may happen sooner than you expect), but it may not be the most-fitting tool for getting a foot in the door with key organizational insiders. In fact, if you are meeting with someone who is not directly looking to hire you, but has agreed to have a networking meeting or informational interview with you, sending a resume may look, well, a bit presumptuous—and your contact may even feel put on the spot.

Enter the Executive Bio as the networking tool par excellence: A more prudent approach to initiating exploratory conversations with targeted contacts.

So, what exactly is an Executive Bio? An executive bio is a one-page document describing your core value, brand attributes, and career history and accomplishments—as related to your current goals—written in standard paragraph format in the third-person narrative.

Here are five tips for crafting your high-impact bio:

1. STAY CONSISTENTLY ON BRAND.

It is critical that your bio maintain a consistent message that is backed up across your entire executive portfolio—resume or CV, cover letter, and LinkedIn profile. That is, your unique value proposition must be highlighted and must “hook” your reader early on. This may be your ability to lead successful turnarounds, drive cultural change within your organization, break into new markets, or create organizational infrastructure.

It is also important to stay on brand visually. Use the same polished look and feel as your expertly crafted resume and cover letter—matching the attractive and industry-appropriate font and design elements to instill harmony across your entire career portfolio.

2. LET YOUR PASSION, PHILOSOPHY, AND STYLE SHINE THROUGH.

Be creative when writing your bio, and be sure to weave your leadership approach into your story, which will help readers understand the values and attitudes that have led to your major successes. Here are a couple of examples of how to inject passion and style into the bio:

“John has proven himself to be a highly flexible leader, delivering tangibles that have far exceeded the expectations of his employers by adapting quickly to ever-shifting corporate priorities.”

“Mary cares deeply for her team members and is committed to both business and individual successes. Her ability to lift leaders up to optimal performance is evidenced by the fact that over 25 of her direct reports have advanced to senior leadership positions.”

3. DESCRIBE YOUR CAREER PATH IN A STORYTELLING FORMAT.

Starting either with your current role, or with your early-career foundation, take the reader through a light, readable—but substantive—account of your career, highlighting the overall impact you had on the organizations you worked for. Don’t get hung up on details such as dates, reporting structure, or any of the other factual minutiae that, while important on a resume, will bore a reader hungry for a quick, compelling narrative. Make the content digestible, avoiding dense paragraphs or lengthy sentences.

4. INCLUDE SIGNIFICANT QUALIFICATIONS.

Add a paragraph that describes university degrees, if relevant, language skills or any other major qualifications, such as board leadership experience or professional memberships. Only include what is most relevant—with your target audience in mind. Remember, your details, in the form of a well-crafted resume, will be read later by the appropriate hiring audience. The bio is not the place to list every training program you’ve ever participated in.

5. INCLUDE A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPH AT THE TOP AND YOUR CONTACT DETAILS AT THE BOTTOM.

Again, consistency is key. Use the same clear, professional headshot used on your LinkedIn profile and ensure that your contact details match those on your resume and cover letter. Include your Twitter handle, LinkedIn URL, or any other relevant web content, such as an online portfolio or blog.

Once your on-brand executive bio is ready and is fully aligned with the rest of your polished career documents, you are ready to jump-start your search by truly leveraging your network. You may now initiate dialogue with the right people, knowing that you have the appropriate tool for doing so. With a thoughtfully written and visually attractive Executive Bio added to your complete job search toolbox, you are now prepared for the various stages of conversation—from informal discussions with insiders and well-positioned individuals, to advanced discussions with selection committees and hiring agents. ■





LINKEDIN FOR EXECUTIVES

LinkedIn can be an incredibly powerful platform for executives. If leveraged the right way, it can be highly effective in communicating your personal brand. To make sure you nail your LinkedIn profile and communicate your personal brand to stand out among the 450 million other profiles, consider the following.

EXERCISE SIX

Increase your visibility on LinkedIn by optimizing your profile



1. LINKEDIN PROFILE PHOTO AND BACKGROUND IMAGE.

LinkedIn profiles that have photos are 14 times more likely to be viewed than those without. Adding a profile picture is really non-negotiable if you want to raise your visibility and build your personal brand. But it is important to ensure that you select the right profile picture for the platform, noting that more casual photos such as those used on Facebook are not appropriate. Top tips for choosing the perfect photo for LinkedIn; if you don't already have professional company headshots, would be to select a recent photo where you are wearing professional clothing in front of a relatively plain background. Your face and shoulders should make up around 60% of the image. If you already have a professional headshot for your executive bio, use this. The photos should be the same to emphasize a consistent brand.

Now that LinkedIn has introduced background photos, users are expected to utilize this feature too as it can help your profile stand out and strengthen your brand. As before, make sure the photo you select is professional, eye catching and is consistent with the image and branding that you are trying to create throughout. Avoid clichés such as city skylines. Most people don't put a lot of thought into their background image and just choose something that looks nice. This is a mistake. Think about how much thought is put into the images companies use across their communications and social platforms. Images matter a lot! So, think carefully about a background image that is on-brand for you.



2. CUSTOM URL.

When creating a new LinkedIn Profile, the default URL created usually consists of the LinkedIn web address followed by your name and a jumbled series of letters and numbers. To demonstrate that you're current and also have a clean URL you can use on other career documents, you can clear this up in one easy step by creating a custom URL (also known as a vanity URL). To create your custom LinkedIn URL, follow LinkedIn's own instructions to set this up from your profile. Ideally, your custom URL is the LinkedIn URL followed by just your name, first name, followed by last name with no dashes. If your name is already taken, try adding your middle initial.



Find out who your target audience is, rewrite your profile to appeal to your target audience online. Don't forget to back up your claims with evidence of work and recommendations.

CHETAN PINTO
BlueSteps Advisor

If that is already taken, too, you can add a professional designation to the end such as MBA or CPA. Like with your profile photo, keep it professional—this is not the place to be clever. Examples:

- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/joanyang>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/joanayang>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/JoanYangMBA>



3. HEADLINE.

Most people just use their current job title and company in their headline. While this approach is perfectly acceptable, it is worth bearing in mind that LinkedIn's algorithm factors keywords in the headline in terms of how you rank in searches. If used sparingly, the headline can also reinforce your brand beyond your current role and company. The goal here is to be authentic to your brand and include only what you are truly known for in your headline. You don't want to come across as gimmicky or trying too hard to impress. If you are an author, a regular columnist, a regular keynote speaker, you are a known thought leader in an industry, or you serve on a board of directors in addition to your full-time role, those are all appropriate to include in your headline. Again, use sparingly, and if it doesn't feel quite right, just stick to your title and company. Here are some LinkedIn headlines of prominent influencers, as of publication of this guide:

MIKE O'NEIL

CEO, Integrated Alliances; Forbes Top 50 Social Media Influencer
Sales Navigator Expert, Trainer; Speaker, Author, Futurist, LinkedIn
Industry Leader

LIZ RYAN

Founder and CEO, Human Workplace; Author, "Reinvention
Roadmap"

JEFF SELINGO

New York Times bestselling author, Washington Post columnist,
higher education strategist, LinkedIn Top 10 Influencer



4. YOUR SUMMARY.

One way in which your LinkedIn profile differs from your executive resume or CV is that you have the space to tell your professional story in more detail. Although you should be mindful to keep this section concise, your summary is your opportunity to explain your professional passions, interests, achievements and goals. It is also an excellent opportunity to incorporate industry related keywords which will help you appear in more candidate searches.



Focus on your unique and compelling value! You and your competitors might have many things in common, but commonality won't brand you as a "must-have" candidate to employers. Whether it's your executive resume, bio or LinkedIn profile, you need to stand out, NOT blend in.

GEORGIA ADAMSON
BlueSteps Advisor

Highlighting your brand in the first two lines of your summary is critical. By default, on your profile as of publication of this guide, the first two lines are visible to the reader with a link to "show more" below. You must assume some viewers will not click to see more, so you really want to encapsulate your brand in these first two lines. Refer back to your mission statement and pull from there to start your profile off strong.

In writing your summary, be sure to show your values and vision. Most LinkedIn profiles are written in first person and they are conversational in tone. You want to be sure you are connecting with people. Be sure to avoid creating distance with the reader and focus on engagement. The LinkedIn profile summary is less formal than your resume, so you should feel encouraged to inject personality. Show your human side—provide a glimpse of your life outside work without going overboard. Make people curious about you as a person.



5. EXPERIENCE.

Often people tend to just list their three or four most recent roles and any board positions, and don't include any description in the experience section of their profiles. But again, as of publication, LinkedIn's algorithm also factors content in this section, so that is something to keep in mind. It is also an opportunity to include two or three bullet point accomplishments for each position to help reinforce your brand. As in your resume, avoid overused adjectives. If the company is less known, you can also include a concise statement about the company to help readers better understand your background.

The experience section is also an excellent way to demonstrate some concrete examples of what you've done by adding relevant media. Were you the author or co-author of an important white paper or report? Were you the focus of a company video? If so, you can include one or two examples of media for any position you've held. Again, stay on-brand and demonstrate examples of accomplishments that you would like to be known for and ideally continue to do.



6. SKILLS.

LinkedIn also gives you the ability to list your relevant skills and allows your connections to endorse those skills. With this section, the rule is definitely quality over quantity. Make sure that rather than creating an endless list of skills, including skills that are not entirely relevant to what you do now or where you want to go, be selective and choose your core skills. This will help readers immediately identify what you excel at and what your strong suits are at a glance.



Make it easy for recruiters to find you. List your email address under the Contact section (on the upper right and in the Summary Section (under your name.) Make sure your LinkedIn Profile is consistent with your resume.

AMY PERONNE
BlueSteps Advisor



7. LINKEDIN PUBLISHER.

Authoring and publishing original articles on LinkedIn is an excellent way to demonstrate your expertise, increase followers and build your brand.

However, like with blogging and other forms of media, only attempt using this feature if you can do it well, or if you can hire someone who can help you do it well. If you are a great writer or a good communicator with a good editor, then you should consider using this feature.

Some personal branding advisors and coaches also provide ghost writing services, but you should utilize this carefully. Even if an editor or ghost writer is assisting, the content should be ultimately coming from you and should be authentic to your brand. Anyone else involved should only be helping to polish it and make it more readable.



8. GROUPS.

It's a good idea to join a few LinkedIn groups that align with your interests and expertise and contribute content or comments when you can.

If you are a CMO, there are groups for CMOs. If you are a FinTech executive, there is likely a group for that. BlueSteps offers the "[Executive Talent: Insights for the C-suite by AESC](#)" group for executive-level professionals and covers content of interest to global decision makers. The goal here is to engage with others knowledgeable in a particular area, demonstrate your expertise and network.



9. WRITE AND RECEIVE RECOMMENDATIONS.

Writing a few recommendations for colleagues, vendors or subordinates can showcase your management style and network. If for subordinates, it can demonstrate how you have built your team and helped others develop. If for colleagues or vendors, it can showcase your ability to collaborate internally and externally, and communicate cross functional knowledge in the process. Writing a recommendation for someone after finishing a project or when they have moved on to another role can be a good time. Also, don't be shy about requesting recommendations either. Again, think carefully about timing, though. ■

HELPFUL TIPS

PRIVACY SETTINGS.

Make sure you know what your privacy settings are at any given time. If you are actively job searching and updating your profile a lot as a result, you may want to turn off notification to others when your profile changes.



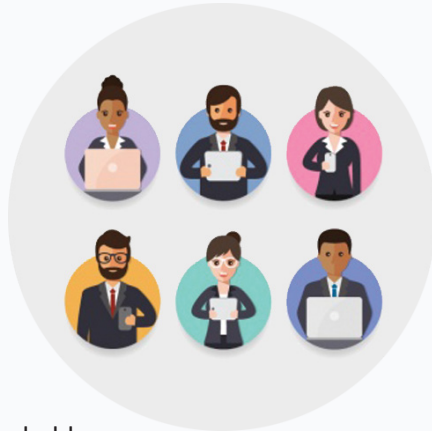
ALWAYS PROOFREAD BEFORE POSTING!

Typos can kill any goals you may have to build your brand by suggesting you are careless or lack attention to detail.



CONNECT WISELY.

Don't just automatically accept invitations, but you will likely want to accept most. After all, LinkedIn is a networking platform. But look at someone's profile first before you accept their invitation to connect. If something suggests they are a spammer or an overzealous vendor, you probably don't want to accept as they can indirectly harm your credibility.



DON'T PACK CONTENT TOO TIGHTLY IN YOUR SUMMARY AND EXPERIENCE.

Give the reader some white space so they will likely want to continue reading on.



DON'T OVERPROMOTE.

Keep it professional and show expertise or insights when you can, but don't make the goal of LinkedIn to promote yourself. The best brand marketing today is based on insights and helping someone solve a challenge. Keep this in mind for marketing yourself and building your personal brand.



7

EXECUTIVE COVER LETTER

The cover letter is the opportunity for an executive to clearly articulate their value proposition. No matter how good your resume is, it often will not be looked at without a compelling cover letter. Too often, cover letters are written in haste and come across as an afterthought. This is a huge mistake, especially at executive level. You need to put as much care and craft in your cover letter as your resume, but it's something that many senior-level executives struggle with. Since there's such a short amount of space to make a positive first impression and explain why you are suited to the role, we have provided three simple steps to help you on your way:



EXERCISE SEVEN

Showcase your personal brand and unique value with a stand-out cover letter

STEP 1

WRITING YOUR INTRODUCTION (DEFINING WHO, WHY, WHAT AND HOW)

WHO?

The recruiter or employer can learn a lot about you from how you address him or her in your first salutation. If you spend time researching the name of the hiring professional and addressing the email directly to them, it will demonstrate to the reader that you have done your due diligence thoroughly, whereas "Sir or Madam" can appear generic, lazy or underprepared. You can easily find the name of the hiring manager by searching on Google or LinkedIn. Even if you don't get it right, showing that you have tried harder than everyone else to do your research will set you apart.

WHY?

Your cover letter is your chance to explain why you want to work at that specific company, rather than at any company. Therefore, it is important to personalize your cover letter and explicitly mention the name of the company within the text, followed by a brief explanation of what interests you about them.

WHAT?

You also need to use the cover letter to pitch to the employer what you can do for them. This can be done by giving the recruiter an insight into your background which will encourage them to learn more by reading your attached resume.



HOW?

Make sure you start out with a strong opening paragraph, using strong verbs throughout. The cover letter is your first opportunity to make an impression on the hiring manager. You want to use it to not only highlight your personal brand, but to demonstrate how it aligns with the organization's and how you can use your talents to make an impact at the company and help them achieve their corporate goals.

STEP 2 WRITING YOUR MIDDLE SECTION (VALUE AND TRAITS)

VALUE: Conveying your potential value to the prospective company should be your primary focus in this section. You should outline how you plan to contribute to the company's success based on research of the company's goals, accomplishments and opportunities. Make your case stronger by including impressive performance metrics when relevant.

TRAITS: Explain how your personal traits make you suited to the role and put you ahead of the competition. It is important to position yourself as the best possible candidate for the role, using powerful language. This is a chance to showcase your brand and demonstrate how your brand fits the company culture and what the company is trying to achieve.

STEP 3 WRITING A POWERFUL CONCLUSION, EDITING AND SENDING

CONCLUSION: Your cover letter should whet the reader's appetite and leave them wanting to read more about you—either through your resume or by arranging an interview. Make sure you use a positive call to action for the reader at the end of the cover letter to either ask for an interview or direct them towards your resume.

EDITING: It is compulsory to have perfect spelling and grammar. Your cover letter helps recruiters and potential employers evaluate your core writing skills; and when presented with a large selection of applicants, the first step for hiring professionals is to cut out those who have made basic spelling, grammar and typographical errors. Therefore, it is vital to proofread your cover letter, or ask a friend to proofread it with you.

SENDING: When sending your cover letter by email, it is advisable to copy and paste your cover letter into the body of the email, instead of sending it as an attachment. Sending a cover letter as an attachment is a common mistake made by executive applicants, as most hiring professionals are not going to take the time to open it.

Remember, this is your chance to grab the reader's attention and you only have a few seconds in which to do so. The creation of an impeccable cover letter can be tricky, but it can also be the key to landing your job. ■

HOW CRITICAL IS A COVER LETTER IN YOUR EXECUTIVE JOB SEARCH?

BY LOUISE GARVER, BLUESTEPS EXECUTIVE CAREER ADVISOR

Nearly every time I talk with executives about their job search and the career documents they need, the long-standing question comes up...

Do I really need a cover letter and is it really being read?

Some executives will tell me that they personally don't read candidate cover letters (the reasons: they are usually not well written, sound canned, not tailored, etc.). Others will tell me that they do read them—some before they read the resume and others after they read the resume, looking for consistency between the two documents and interest in their company and the position.

They also tell me that a focused and well-written cover letter that supports the resume or CV will attract their attention over a candidate whose letter is poorly written or who does not provide one at all.

So, can a cover letter distinguish you from other candidates and help you in your search?

The answer: Yes, with some employers and some executive recruiters. Like many things in job search—there is no absolute—and you will never know which employers or executive recruiters want to read your letter unless they state this information (which they don't typically do when you respond to a job post).

However, when it comes to cover letters, the following points will guide you in what to do.

1. IN GENERAL EXECUTIVE RECRUITERS (RETAINED OR CONTINGENCY) AREN'T INTERESTED IN LENGTHY COVER LETTERS, AND SOME WON'T READ A COVER LETTER, PREFERRED TO DELVE INTO THE RESUME.

They do advocate a brief introduction inserted in the body of the email.

In a BlueSteps webinar that featured a panel of three retained executive search consultants (US and international) addressing the topic of "Top Strategies for Networking with Executive Search Consultants," the question about cover letters came up.

They advised executives to write a brief introductory email (resume or CV attached to the email) stating the facts: the executive position you are seeking, your geographic preference, the reason you are in the job market, if you are open to relocation, etc. Keep in mind that if you have a mutual contact that referred you, it's also helpful to include that information in the opening line and even subject line.

As an aside, I want to mention that I personally know executive recruiters who want to receive a lengthier (one page only though)

cover letter. They view the letter as an additional supporting document to introduce themselves (their ROI qualifications), get a sense of the person behind the "facts" and how they communicate in writing—all of which they say helps them to get to know the executive a little better as they initially screen documents.

2. ACCORDING TO SURVEYS CONDUCTED OVER THE YEARS IN THE CAREER INDUSTRY, TWO-THIRDS OF HIRING AUTHORITIES WILL READ YOUR COVER LETTER.

Some employers will read your cover letter first, some will read it after they read your resume or CV, and some won't read it at all. Just like a lot of things, it comes down to a personal preference.

Some job postings or applications mention submitting a cover letter and resume or CV. That's always clear cut. Other employers don't mention it, but don't assume that your letter won't be read if they don't ask for it. So, unless you are told otherwise, include a cover letter—especially when it comes to posted jobs.

3. WRITE TARGETED, COMPELLING LETTERS THAT DEMONSTRATE HOW YOU ARE A MUTUAL GOOD FIT WITH YOUR

TARGET EMPLOYER.

Be prepared and include a focused one-page cover letter or eNote (about 150 words or less pasted in the body of your email message) that compels your audience to open your resume and want to learn more about you.

Start with an attention-capturing statement about your expertise and value proposition. For example:

Your need for a CEO with deep experience in turnaround leadership that revives financial and operational performance to achieve sustainable, profitable growth is my expertise.

Or...if you have a connection:

John Marland, Vice President of Sales at Company X, suggested that I reach out you to about your company's need for a Chief Marketing Officer.

Make sure to provide specific examples of your contributions (a few) and strengths in the body of your letter. Match their needs with your promise of value and pinpoint the ROI you will deliver.

Bottom line: You wouldn't want to lose out on an opportunity because you didn't include a cover letter for the hiring authority or executive recruiter that considers letters an important part of the job search process. ■



EXERCISE EIGHT

Craft a compelling executive CV or resume.



A resume is used in a very specific way. It operates in a highly competitive market, and the information presented is being compared. A competitive, comparative environment. The reader is actively comparing you to other candidates. They want the best candidate for the job.

The best candidate is the one who will deliver the greatest success. Therefore, the reader of your resume seeks to assess your capability in terms of the impact you had on an organization, not the actions you were there to perform. This is why an outcomes-based resume will always trump a functional resume in the complex economic climate in which we find ourselves today.

DAVE MORAN
BlueSteps Advisor

EXECUTIVE RESUME OR CV

While the executive bio is your “marketing brochure,” or your opportunity to emphasize your personal brand, and the cover letter is the place to demonstrate your value proposition, the executive resume or CV can be thought of as your “product spec.”

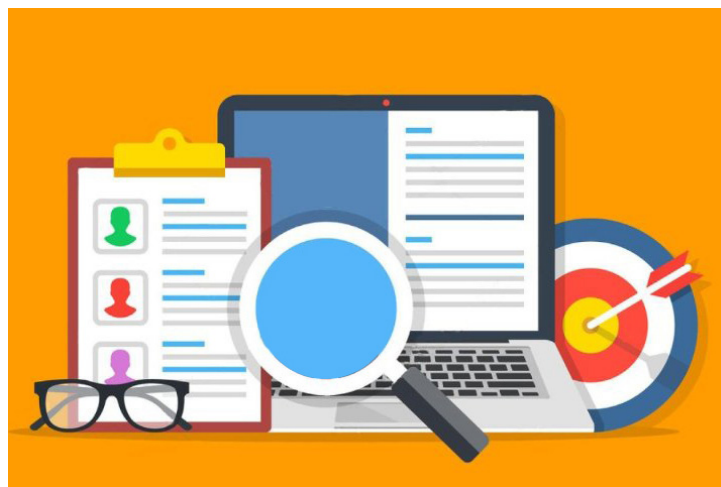
If you want to stand out in today’s competitive job market, often a good resume is not good enough. So, what makes up the components of the perfect executive resume or CV? Below are our top recommendations for what makes a perfect executive resume:

IT GETS AN A+ FOR SPELLING AND GRAMMAR.

This is so much of a no-brainer that you might scoff that we even mention it in a guide focused on executives, but unfortunately, we feel it our duty. We see too many mistakes, even on executive resumes, and you want to be absolutely sure this does not apply to you. When perusing through your resume, if a potential employer or search consultant finds spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes, including typos, your application will immediately be dismissed and relegated to the confines of the trash can. While this may sound harsh, particularly for a single typographical error, the mistakes can seriously damage your reputation and brand by leading the reader to assume that if your resume has careless mistakes, your work will likely follow suit.

IT TELLS THE FULL STORY.

There are many reasons why you might have a gap, or several gaps, on your resume. Maybe you went back to school to do a Master’s degree; perhaps you spent time caring for a loved one;





A. OBJECTIVE:

See your resume as someone who doesn't know you would see it for the first time. The first person who sees your resume typically spends only 6-10 second scanning it. So Keep It Simple and do this test.

Procedure:

1. Print out a copy of the first page of your resume.
2. Turn it over to the blank backside.
3. When you're ready, turn it over so you can see the printed first page of your resume. Imagine you are seeing your resume for the first time.
4. Look at it for 6 to 10 seconds and then turn it back over to the blank backside.
5. Ask yourself, "What do you remember seeing?"
6. Is this what you want others to remember about your resume? Would they see what's most important, e.g. your title, company name or accomplishments?
7. If not, simplify your resume so you focus the reader's attention on what's significant.

B. FORMATTING TIPS:

The reader's eye is drawn to bold, underline, larger fonts, and \$, % and numbers. Use \$, % and numbers rather than words to describe your accomplishments.

C. SHOW DON'T TELL.

Use bullets to list your accomplishments rather than to describe your job.

AMY PERRONE
BlueSteps Advisor

or took a year out to do volunteer work for a worthy cause. Taking time out of your career is a common occurrence among professionals. If you have done this, it is important that the time is positioned correctly on your resume. Having multiple, large gaps on your work history with no explanation can be a red flag to a search consultant or internal recruitment team, but there is an easy solution. Simply include your additional degree under "Education," add a "Volunteer Work" section to your resume or add any freelance projects or newly acquired skills you worked on during that period. Make sure your resume tells the full story, instead of making the reader assume the worst.

IT KEEPS THE FORMAT SIMPLE BUT EFFECTIVE.

It is a widely known fact that a recruiter or hiring manager has limited time to look over the volume of resumes they receive, so it is important to make sure that the information in your resume is easy to find. This means executives should avoid fancy layouts and stick to traditional fonts and font sizes. No matter how much experience you might have, the average resume in most cases should not exceed two pages. White space should be used effectively to draw the reader's eye to important points.

When creating your resume, make sure it is prepared in a simple word format that is compatible with most computers, ensuring that tables, templates, charts, headers and footers are not used, as these features often get scrambled.

It maintains clear and consistent personal branding. In today's digital age, resumes are often transmitted and read via computers, so providing a link to your professional online profile can be a great way of providing recruiters and potential employers with additional information that is different to that which can be found on your resume. Even if you do not include a link to your professional online profile, recruiters or hiring managers will Google you if you are being considered as a candidate. Including a link can save the recruiter or hiring manager time, and also avoid mistaken identity.

It is also advisable to maintain a consistent name and brand across all mediums: LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter, Facebook or any other social networks you use for professional networking. If you use a middle initial, or shorted version of your name in your resume, make sure that you use the same name in your other profiles.

IT HAS MEASURABLE ACHIEVEMENTS, NOT SIMPLY A LIST OF RESPONSIBILITIES.

It is important to make sure you include a selection of measurable achievements and that they are presented in a readable fashion. If listed in a block of dense text, the reader will be deterred. Instead, it is better to list your achievements in two to five bullet points per position, with greater emphasis



State your accomplishments clearly re-written as Challenge, Action & Results bullets, from a 360 degree leadership perspective (both hard skills-professional/technical & soft skills-leadership/team-building, mentoring/talent development, quantify these skillsets for impact and ensure the best of the accomplishments are reflected on page one.

CHETAN PINTO
BlueSteps Advisor

on your most recent achievements. Using metrics can be a great way to grab the search consultant's attention and create a good impression. Remember, references relating to your achievements should not be listed or offered. This can be done at a later stage of the application process.

IT IS KEYWORD OPTIMIZED.

To maximize the impact of your application for an executive role, it is vital that you review and rework your resume for each new opportunity. This includes incorporating any relevant keywords or industry specific buzzwords into the document (without overdoing it).

Keywords play a significant role in applicant tracking systems (ATS), and can get your application past the first elimination stage to be viewed by human eyes. But regardless of whether your potential employer uses an ATS, keywords can help highlight your skills and experience.

IT PROVIDES HELPFUL COMPANY DESCRIPTIONS.

When writing your resume, it is wise to provide the reader with as much useful information as you can. Being the director of a large, international organization is very different to being the director of a small to mid-size company. Therefore, it is helpful to make it explicitly clear on your resume. Adding this information to your resume can be as simple as rewriting a line from your company's "About Us" section on their webpage. Providing a company description can also be advantageous as it allows you to let the recruiter know what industries you have worked in too.

IT USES AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY INSTEAD OF AN OBJECTIVE STATEMENT.

Many lackluster executive resumes start with a generic objective about being "an executive looking for new opportunities to leverage my skills," which does not add anything of value to your resume and takes up valuable real estate on the page. Instead of this, executives are advised to start with an executive summary, more similar to an elevator pitch, which explains who you are and what you are looking for in a concise manner. It should also highlight what you are most interested in and how you would provide value and ROI to a potential employer.

IT DOES NOT USE PRONOUNS.

Resumes should never be written in third person, even if your resume is written by someone else, but equally, your resume should also avoid using pronouns. The use of "I" and other pronouns not only looks out of place, but also takes up space that could be used more effectively on the page.



YOUR RESUME AND YOUR PERSONAL BRAND: SIX WAYS TO MAKE YOUR RESUME AN EFFECTIVE TOOL TO MARKET YOU

BY KATHY SIMMONS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BLUESTEPS EXECUTIVE CAREER SERVICES

As an executive career consultant of 25 years, I am often asked: “Is this a good resume?” However, it is impossible to answer this frequently asked question without understanding the individual’s career context. An executive resume can be considered “good” for a variety of reasons. What really matters is if it is an effective resume, which is much harder to achieve.

Whenever I do a resume consultation, I always start by asking, “What is your goal?” The answer to that question is what guides how the resume is written. Your resume needs to be aspirational as much as it is historical to achieve its purpose.

It needs to be thought of as the strategic document that helps get you where you want to go. Writing an executive resume with that in mind is what ultimately separates a good resume from an effective one. As you start updating your own, here is my advice on what to keep in mind to write an effective strategic resume:

1. IT’S AN EVOLVING DOCUMENT.

Your resume and what accomplishments are listed on it should change as your goals and experience do. The best way to keep track of your accomplishments effectively is to keep an updated, ongoing list of things that you’ve done and for which you have received recognition on a day-to-day basis. Then when it gets to the point where you need to update your resume, you have a list of strong content to draw on.

2. YOUR EXPERIENCE DOESN’T CHANGE, JUST WHAT YOU EMPHASIZE.

When listing accomplishments on your resume, you should think of everything in the lens of, “Does this support my strategy?” If it does not, then it should be replaced with information relevant to your career goals. On an executive resume, you usually only have space to list a few accomplishments for each role you’ve held, so why would you want to list something that doesn’t help you? Embrace your strategy and only highlight things that get to where you want to go!

3. UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE AND WHAT MATTERS TO THEM.

Different metrics are important in different roles and industries. In marketing, you have certain key performance metrics that are important, but in finance, those are very

different. You want to be conscious of the way things are measured in your respective field and even the type of language that is used to describe those measurements. If you are looking to make a change, a career consultant can be a great resource because they know how to write for hiring managers and search consultants based upon industry and function.



4. FOCUS ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS, NOT RESPONSIBILITIES...AND KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

My only hard and fast rule when it comes to writing an executive resume is to focus on accomplishments and not responsibilities. Responsibilities describe the job; accomplishments describe you. At a senior level, recruiters and search committees are focused on the impact each prospective candidate had in their previous positions, so it is important that comes through clearly on your resume.

5. DON’T BE AFRAID TO BRAG.

From a young age, we are told not to put ourselves forward so as not to sound arrogant or conceited. Most experienced executives I know can market anything, but when it comes to selling themselves, they become uncomfortable. Talking about ourselves goes against a lot of our conditioning. On your resume, you need to embrace it! Talking about yourself on your resume is the only way to show what makes you the best candidate for the job and all you can bring to a company.

6. UNDERSTAND THE TRUE VALUE YOU PROVIDE.

People often struggle with understanding the special value add they can provide to a company simply because they are too close to recognize it. The things we do well we often take for granted because they come so naturally to us. Before you write your resume, it is helpful to take a moment to reflect on what you do successfully and how you do it to understand your unique selling point with the way you approach challenges and problems.

Your resume is an important piece in your career toolbox. It is a marketing tool, and with it, you are positioning yourself for the future. A strategic executive resume which reflects where you want to go not simply where you have been can position you for the right opportunities and make you stand out as a candidate.





NETWORKING FOR EXECUTIVES

9

Now that you have perfected your career documents and have woven your personal brand throughout, it is time to take your newly invigorated personal brand public. Networking is an opportunity for your personal brand to shine.

In-person networking events, however, can cause apprehension for even the most experienced executives. But, attending such events can have a huge impact on your career trajectory, so it is vital that executives should make time for networking in their schedules. Even if you are not actively seeking a new role, it is important to start building your network as soon as possible. The key to efficient networking has always been to build a network before you need one. It is vital to remember that networking should always be a mutually beneficial practice and you should try to have something to offer those with whom you are seeking to connect.

While online networking has dramatically increased in relevance with the rise of social networks and can help with making connections quickly, in-person networking helps to develop deeper relationships. Therefore, it is advisable to integrate both into your career management strategy.

To assist you in your goal to become a master networker, here is a step-by-step guide to navigating an in-person event, courtesy of BlueSteps:

1. PRE-EVENT PREPARATION.

Before you attend the event, it is wise to set reasonable expectations and make a plan for with whom you are aiming to connect. Having a plan with purpose will help you to achieve your networking target. To prepare in advance, you might choose to contact the event organizer and request a list of fellow attendees for a more targeted approach. Searching the event on social media can be a useful way to see if others have mentioned the event and are planning on attending too.

Another way to prepare pre-event is by reading up on industry research and related news articles. This will help you to speak intelligently about trends and issues that could be of interest to those with whom you are networking. By having informed yourself based on your reading, you will be seen as someone who is worth connecting with.

Make sure you plan an outfit that is appropriate for the event. It is always better to dress more formally and conservatively, than

to underdress. Never underestimate the power of a good first impression.

Finally, prepare a list of questions that you want to ask and practice them. You may also find it helpful to prepare a short summary of who you are and what you do, an elevator pitch, so that you can showcase your skills and experience in a succinct way.

2. WHEN YOU ARRIVE.

Be one of the first people to arrive at the event. This will allow you to meet people at a slower pace without having to infiltrate existing groups and have to work your way into conversations.

You should locate and introduce yourself to the host of the event. As the event organizer, they will usually have a full list of attendees and will be more than happy to make suggestions of who you should connect with.

They can make introductions for you too to make the task of networking even easier. However, while at the event, do not feel pressured to work the room. Your goal is to make several quality connections, not quantity.

3. TIPS FOR EVENT NETWORKING.

Get to know the other person first. As a general rule, people love to talk about themselves and their business. By asking questions about them, you not only prove yourself to be a good listener, but you can also better determine if they would be a good connection for you.

Once you have asked them questions about what they do and what challenges they are currently facing, you can give them a reason to connect with you. As mentioned earlier, networking is all about mutually beneficial relationships, so be prepared to offer your network and support to others to help them. People remember those who helped them and they will be more likely to offer their help to you in return.

As you make new contacts, it is important to keep track

of them as you go along. Collect business cards and jot down relevant notes immediately after networking to help you frame what you might write to them in a subsequent follow-up email.

4. WHEN YOU GET HOME.

Using the business cards that you will have collected during the event, and the key information that you have recorded about each person, you will be able to construct personalized emails for each contact. In your emails, you should introduce yourself, remind them of where you met, and perhaps give them some information that would be of benefit to them, including links to articles you may have mentioned, webinars, or names of people who could help them.

It is advisable to email your new contacts within 24 hours after meeting them and possibly end with a comment about catching up again in a few months if appropriate.

You might also wish to make a note in your calendar to remind you to follow up with them in three or four months.

5. POST-EVENT ACTIVITIES.

Aside from following up with new connections via email, you should consider using social media to your advantage. You can search for your new contacts using LinkedIn. When you send them an invitation to connect via LinkedIn, be sure to personalize the pre-set message. If your new connection is in from the same industry as you, you should also check out the LinkedIn groups that they belong to, as these groups might also be advantageous to you too.

6. CONTENT MARKETING

Utilizing content and social media is a great way to grow your network. You can increase your visibility further by volunteering to speak at professional events, publishing articles online, blogging, and commenting in LinkedIn discussions. You can also send a contact a follow-up message with an article relevant to a discussion you had to engage with them further. ■



THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF NETWORKING WITH EXECUTIVE SEARCH CONSULTANTS

Building and maintaining relationships with executive search consultants should be a vital component of your career strategy, regardless of whether you are in an active job search or just proactively managing your career next steps.

For executives who are new to executive search, it can be difficult to know where to start, but there are several essential do's and don'ts that can help you on your way.

THE DO LIST

BE PREPARED

Before networking with executive search consultants you should assess all your career marketing documents and online presence, including your resume or CV, LinkedIn profile, executive bio and cover letter. It is important to make sure that these documents are in order because, should you be of interest for a search they are actively working on, you will need to provide this information immediately. You should also take time to understand exactly what you are looking for and how to articulate these career goals to others.

BE SELECTIVE

When developing your networking strategy, it's best to create a targeted list of carefully-chosen consultants who are specialists in your industry, function and region. Once you have identified consultants in these areas - this should total around four to six consultants - you can then begin your outreach.

MAKE A STRONG FIRST IMPRESSION

When sending your initial correspondence to your target consultant, make sure you keep your introduction concise and straight to the point. You should aim to introduce yourself with a short paragraph explaining your interest in connecting and then four to five bullet points on what you are looking for, and any professional achievements that would be of interest to them.

USE YOUR EXISTING NETWORK

Like with any form of networking, being introduced by a mutual connection can have its advantages. If you know of someone who could personally refer you to a search consultant, it might be in your interest to do so. Your existing connection could also provide you with further advice on how to connect with search consultants in general.

NETWORK IN-PERSON

Many executive search consultants participate in industry events and seminars both as speakers and attendees. By researching

events that your target search consultants are attending in your location, you could join that audience and gain the opportunity to get an in-person introduction.

MAKE THE RELATIONSHIP MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL

If you are contacted by a search consultant for a specific role, but do not feel as though that role is suited to your professional needs, it can be advantageous to suggest others in your network for the role. This will further endorse you as a useful and well-connected source, which will work in your favor in the future.



THE DON'T LIST

DON'T SEND MASS EMAILS

Many executives mistakenly think that volume over targeted outreach will work in their favor when networking with executive search consultants. It doesn't. Sending mass emails is strongly discouraged and executive search consultants will spot a mass email immediately, dramatically reducing your chance of receiving a response. Make sure you create a targeted list of consultants to contact, and then explain why you would be interested specifically in working with them as an individual within your initial email.

DON'T ASK SEARCH CONSULTANTS TO FIND YOU A ROLE

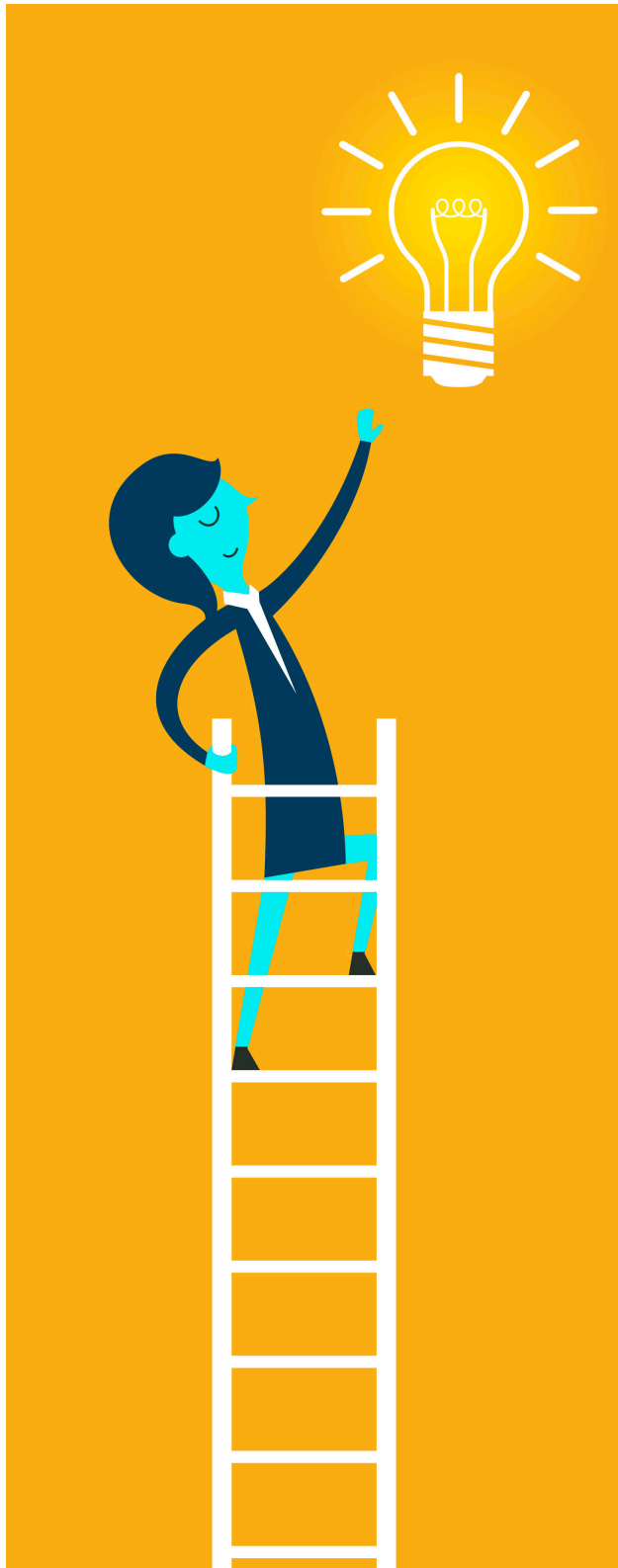
It's important to understand and acknowledge that executive search consultants work for the employer, not the executive. Their client will always be their primary focus; and while they might keep you in mind should further opportunities arise, they will not be able to actively search for roles on your behalf.

DON'T ASK SEARCH CONSULTANTS FOR GENERAL CAREER ASSISTANCE AND ADVICE

As mentioned above, executive search consultants work for their client, the employer, so it is not part of their role to review your resume, give general interview tips (unless they are putting you forward for a role), or to provide career advice. This should all be finalized prior to connecting with the search consultants.

Don't only seek to build relationships when you need them: Creating relationships with search professionals should be done at the earliest opportunity in your executive career. It's much easier to engage with existing connections when you need them, than to start with a blank page if you have been unexpectedly laid off or have had to resign.





BECOMING AN EXECUTIVE THOUGHT LEADER

10

A thought leader is an individual who is recognized as authoritative and an influencer. Thought leaders are recognized by others as such because of the value they bring to a subject or industry. One cannot just become a thought leader overnight. You must prove your credibility to others through your knowledge on a subject because of your specific education, experience, or background. The best thought leadership is fueled by passion and most thought leaders are considered experts in their fields.

When preparing yourself to be viewed as a thought leader, focus on what you are passionate about. Focusing on your passions will ensure you have enough material to fuel your brand. Thought leadership includes intentional writing and speaking opportunities where you can bring experience and credibility to a topic.

Thought leaders are recognized often as those who could, because of their knowledge, credibility and influence: speak on panels at conferences and events, serve on advisory boards, land new leadership positions, or serve on a board of directors. The best thought leaders embrace humility. They know their area of expertise backwards and forwards, but also defer to others when something is not in their wheelhouse. They know what they are expert at and what they are not.

So, you want to be a thought leader? The first step to becoming a thought leader is to be great at what you do. But it doesn't stop there. Thought leaders are lifelong students, constantly learning, improving and more importantly, sharing their insights for the benefit of others.

NETWORKING

When first deliberately preparing oneself to become a thought leader, networking can help you establish connections, that can lead to relationships, that can lead to opportunities. Networking also affords others the opportunity to learn about you, what you do, and your areas of expertise. Networking can help you get in front of people who should know about you, those who you can offer value. Participate in industry events with sessions on subjects that you want to be known for. Identify networking opportunities with your

industry or professional associations and alumni clubs. You can also build networks online, on LinkedIn and other platforms—more on that below.

PUBLISHING, BLOGGING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

If you are a good writer and can commit to quality, blog-length articles on a semi-regular basis, then publish to your own blog or contribute to others. Quality is more important than quantity, but blogging does require some frequency in order to establish your voice. The good news is that if you do blog, there are more ways than ever to share your articles. LinkedIn's publishing platform is a great way to share articles with your network and connect with potential new contacts. Publishing to LinkedIn's Publishing Platform also lends credibility from your network if your connections comment on your articles. LinkedIn articles are also highly shareable and can help amplify your audience. Publishers like *Forbes* and *Business Insider* also present opportunities for those who can demonstrate a point of view and industry expertise. You'll need to prove yourself for opportunities to contribute to these networks, but the return can be significant in building your personal brand and amplifying your reach.

If you simply cannot commit to the frequency or length of publishing articles (typically 1000-1500 words, with the occasional 2500 word article as a best practice), leverage social media platforms like Twitter, or depending on your industry, Facebook. Approach these platforms in the same way as you would a blog, though. Commit to frequent updates and be deliberate. Focus on quality engagement and stick to what you know. You can still also leverage LinkedIn by commenting on the posts or articles of others or by joining LinkedIn group discussions. The key here is to reinforce your area of expertise while offering value to others.

INDUSTRY AWARDS

Awards and nominations can give serious weight to your name and define you as a more credible thought leader, but it can be difficult for executives to enter the nomination process passively. To achieve success in this arena, many executives nominate themselves, or ask a colleague to do so on their behalf. Stay ahead by researching key awards in your industry, be mindful of crucial deadlines and requirements, and don't be afraid to nominate yourself.

SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES

Whether online or in-person, public speaking events are a valuable way to catapult yourself into the realm of thought leadership. With so many executives shying away from public speaking due to its daunting nature, agreeing to speak at such events can make you stand out in your industry, particularly if you do so repeatedly. When public speaking, remember to take pictures and recordings of the event to share your success and create new content for your social media platforms to maximize your efforts. ■



HOW BLUESTEPS CAN HELP

As part of the global Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC)'s commitment to Candidate Care, AESC created BlueSteps, a trusted career service for global executives. Our BlueSteps platform helps busy executives manage their careers, track their goals and stay visible to the right recruiters for life-long success.

Starting at Director-level through C-suite, BlueSteps Members represent all industries and functions worldwide.

BlueSteps Members can take advantage of proactive tools and services to help progress their career from one stage to the next. These include:

- Create a confidential career profile exclusively searched by AESC Members -- stay visible to these vetted executive search firms so they can be considered for the best executive opportunities while ensuring their privacy is protected at all times
- Search hundreds of current executive and board-level opportunities worldwide, updated daily
- Receive a personalized executive career consultation with an expert advisor
- Use the BlueSteps MyGoals feature to help you stay on track with simple, effective prompts to meet your goal
- Participate in executive career webinars and live Q&As for exclusive career intel directly from executive search consultants
- Listen to the Ask an Expert podcast series and receive targeted answers to your top career management questions

A BlueSteps membership provides you with a complimentary career consultation with an expert career advisor. Our advisors can help you identify what areas you can strengthen to build your personal brand and position yourself for the best executive opportunities.



Are You Ready to Take the Next Step in Your Executive Career?

**BlueSteps**

A service of the
Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants

BlueSteps, the confidential career management service of the Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC), helps busy executives like you advance their careers, track their goals and stay visible to the right recruiters. We are proud to include your program in our Global Business School Alliance Program, which includes over 40 of the top business schools.

BlueSteps Guides You Through



Executive Job Searches

Finding a new role with our Opportunities Page, featuring 400-600 executive-level opportunities including ones exclusively shared on BlueSteps.

Learning about executive search, what the process looks like and how to effectively leverage it as part of your career plan.



Executive Recruiting

Making lasting relationships with executive recruiters who align with your interests using our database of 9,000 AESC members around the world.

Creating a BlueSteps profile to increase your visibility to AESC member recruiters who fill 80,000 positions each year.



Career Management

Building short-term and long-term career strategies with our Guide Series on topics ranging from compensation negotiation to landing a board role.

Gleaning the latest insights with 40+ reports and digital magazines on trends in the C-Suite and executive job market.

As a benefit of your school's partnership with BlueSteps, alumni and current students receive an exclusive **30% discount and free lifetime Premium Services** using the code **BusinessSchool30**.

Find Out More & Become a Member of BlueSteps:
<https://www.bluesteps.com/partner/school>



ABOUT BLUESTEPS

BlueSteps.com is a global career management service for senior executives. As an exclusive service of the Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC), BlueSteps enables senior executives to manage their careers, track their goals and stay visible to the more than 9,000 AESC member executive search professionals who use BlueSteps as a tool to identify candidates who match their executive search assignments. For more information, visit www.bluesteps.com.



ABOUT ASSOCIATION OF EXECUTIVE SEARCH AND LEADERSHIP CONSULTANTS (AESC)

AESC is the voice of excellence for the executive search and leadership consulting profession worldwide. Its rigorous Code of Professional Practice guides our members in nearly 1,300 offices in 74 countries and beyond to serve as strategic advisors on behalf of their clients. In turn, AESC members are best positioned to provide companies with a competitive advantage—the ability to find, attract and develop the best talent in the world and ensure that executives are successfully integrated.

By virtue of selecting an AESC member, clients can be secure in their choice of consulting firm, and can reap the benefits that only a trusted advisor can deliver. To learn more about AESC and to view a list of AESC members, visit www.aesc.org.

To learn more about AESC's career service for executive-level candidates, visit www.bluesteps.com.

THE BLUESTEPS PERSONAL BRANDING GUIDE FOR EXECUTIVES CHECKLIST

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- ✓ Understand what personal branding is and is not
 - ✓ Reflect on past accomplishments, current goals and priorities, and what you want to be remembered for
 - ✓ Identify your values
 - ✓ Write your mission statement
 - ✓ Learn how career coaching can help
 - ✓ Ensure you have consistent career branding documents and that your personal brand is woven throughout your:
 - Executive Bio
 - Executive LinkedIn Profile
 - Executive Cover Letter
 - Executive Resume or CV
 - ✓ Exude your personal brand in networking
 - ✓ Become an executive thought leader