

How to Quantify Your Career-Job-Work-Life Accomplishments for Employers

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Employers and others who evaluate individuals based on their accomplishments love to see numbers. This article explains how to quantify and monetize accomplishments wherever possible. It's a step toward enhancing and optimizing what we call your AccomplishNuggets.

Why Quantify Accomplishments?

As many achievements as possible should be measurable, especially quantifiable. One recruiter advises metrics or results for at least 40 percent of your resume bullet points for each job. "Anytime you can quantify your accomplishments, you give them more credibility," said another. Don't despair, however, if you can't quantify as many accomplishments as you'd like. "Subjective results are well accepted, too," Allan Hay writes in his book *Memory Mining*, "Employers simply want to know if you are someone who will contribute to their organizational goals and objectives."

Most people don't quantify their accomplishments, though. Scot Herrick, of the blog Cube Rules, coaches clients to attach metrics to their achievements. "Asked to produce a single number that would show they increased productivity, I get crickets," he writes.

"When it comes to accomplishments, numbers talk," asserts Sharon Graham of Graham Management Group, a Canadian firm specializing in career transition strategy for six-figure professionals. "Recruiters who are scanning resumes typically notice and hone in on digits." Graham cites the "elimination factors" that provoke employers into rejecting candidates. One such factor is lack of measurable accomplishments, as she affirmed when she conducted a research study to evaluate 1,000 randomly selected resumes. "There is much literature available to job-seekers," Graham says, "explaining how to quantify their accomplishments, yet most are still missing this point. In our sample, almost none of the resumes included adequate measurable achievements reflective of a six-figure professional."

Metrics are perhaps the most effective way to highlight successes and attract the attention of recruiters. "Metrics is the language of business," says executive branding expert David Topus in "Making Your Resume Recruiter Ready," an ExecuNet publication. "Anything that's measurable and has metrics associated with it is high impact."

If metrics is the language of business, dollars are the holy grail of business-metrics language. "Show us the money," says one recruiter. Dr. John Sullivan adds that "characterizing the dollar impact of your accomplishments on the organization can be a key differentiator."

Developing Metrics for Accomplishments

This list of metrics is not exhaustive but will give you a good idea of the kinds of numbers employers and other audiences seek:

- sales volume, number of items/units sold (and ranking in comparison with peers and compared to previous years' performance, competitors, counterparts, forecasts/projections, industry trends, percent of quota)
- dollars and percentages tied to other types of revenue-generation
- contracts/bids won
- increase in market share
- increase in profitability
- increase in shareholder value
- numbers of customers served
- numbers of customers retained
- numbers, percentages of internal performance benchmarks achieved
- number of direct reports, number of people managed
- number of people you've hired
- size of teams you've led
- amount of money you've saved
- monetary budgets/funds saved
- percentages by which you've improved efficiency
- numbers of anything you've done in great quantity, such as repairing many pieces of equipment
- process-improvement percentages
- cost-containment as compared to industry averages
- number of times selected as team or project lead
- timeframes of accomplishments, especially when you exceed deadlines or expectations
- how you rank in performance; for example, you are the No. 1 performer or in the top 10 percent
- number of awards
- number of publications
- number of successful grant applications

Be sure to provide context. Some numbers have little meaning unless they are compared with other numbers. Take this resume bullet point from a vice president of sales, for example:

Directed 12-person sales force to \$15 million in sales while simultaneously bolstering sales in own territory from zero to \$2.5 million.

The second half of it is excellent because it compares the zero sales initially to \$2.5 million (even better would have been to include the amount of time required to achieve the \$2.5 million in sales). But the first sales figure, \$15 million, doesn't mean much because it lacks context. Is \$15 million good? Compared to what? The job-seeker should have provided, for example, the sales figures from before he was VP of sales.

Another tip about numbers: Some accomplishments involve a range of numbers. Let's say over the span of time in which you worked in a given company, you managed between 15 and 75 employees. Or let's say you've managed budgets ranging from \$750,000 to \$5.2 million. Instead of giving the range, leave off the number at the low end and say:

- Supervised up to 75 employees.
- Managed budgets of up to \$5.2 million.

Those statements are completely honest, but you're placing in front of your audience the more impressive high number.

My personal preference is for a clean, uncluttered resume, so I prefer to spell out "percent," rather than use the "%" sign and abbreviate large numbers as, for example, \$5.2 million, instead of \$5,200,000. Rick Gillis, however, writes in his book, *Job!*, that symbols and zeroes jump out at employers.

Measuring Percentages of Improvement

You can use percentages as a metric to show how you improved virtually anything. "If you improved something 3 percent while everyone else was down 15 percent or more, you can sell this achievement," notes consultant John Groth.

How do you come up with these percentages? In many cases, you'll have to estimate, which is acceptable, says Sullivan, as long as you can explain your logic. Sullivan offers this example: "Implemented changes to the _____ process that resulted in a 32 percent increase in output with no noticeable impact on quality."

Framing Accomplishments that are Difficult to Quantify

The lament of many of the clients of Darlene Zambruski encapsulates the issue of hard-to-quantify accomplishments: "I don't have any accomplishments, especially quantified accomplishments."

But as author and career-coach educator Susan Whitcomb points out, the work of most people has an impact on the bottom line; if it didn't, their job security would be in jeopardy. "Figure out a way to tie it to the bottom line," Whitcomb advises.

One way Zambruski connects her clients' accomplishments to the bottom line is to ask them: "If you were to quit today, how many staff would your company need to replace you?" Invariably, Zambruski reports, they answer "two." Zambruski's response: "Let's say you're paid \$60,000 annually. If you're doing the work of two people, each paid \$60,000, you're saving your company \$60,000 annually. That's an accomplishment."

Some people feel they must be in very high-level jobs to be able to quantify accomplishments. But as Gillis writes, an administrative assistant or person working in the skilled trades can focus on how he or she added value by working smarter, faster, and more efficiently. My partner Randall Hansen suggests deeply probing into every aspect of your job for aspects you can quantify. Asked by a security officer, for example, how to attach numbers to his accomplishments, Hansen advised quantifying the number of hours, days, weeks, etc., without incidents; the number of hours of training and professional development; the number (and types) of security devices/technology mastered; number of security investigations successfully closed; and commendations (or other records of achievement) received.

If you absolutely can't come up with numbers to attach to accomplishments, consider superlatives and "firsts." Use words such as "first," "only," "best," "most," "top," and "highest." Here are examples, taken from resumes:

- Established for the first time Tokyo's brand positioning in Japan, followed by design and execution of thematic advertising strategy and calendar, thereby raising the bar for ad agency; implemented consumer communication, PR strategies, and trade operational programs for Japan.
- Became consistently top revenue producer; maintained distribution in region within top 10 nationally and was named Finalist, American Women in Radio and Television Awards.
- Led creation and development of first international sales and marketing materials for Europe.

Final Thoughts: Avoiding Over-Quantification

Despite employers' lust for accomplishments metrics, avoid communications so full of quantitative data that they are hard to read and understand. When I surveyed hiring decision-makers for a book I was writing about resumes, several cited overzealous quantification (especially in resumes, in which excessive use of numbers can hurt your document's readability) as a pet peeve. Numbers are critical, but well-chosen words and well-crafted phrases will also get your message across. Don't go overboard.