

Lived Experience and Employment

Many people are concerned that having a varied career and many different jobs is less valuable than having one straightforward career path. Similarly, it's a common misconception that a variety of jobs means you have not found your passion.

The fact is, many people have jobs, not careers. Some have had a career and now prefer to have a job with less responsibility. Some have travelled, raised a family, recovered from an illness, gone to school, or even taken a sabbatical. It is also possible that people's passions lie outside of their work and that they work to live, rather than live to work. If any of the above sounds familiar know that your history with work is valid and valuable. In fact, companies need people like you. Through your experiences, you have developed the kind of traits and skills that companies require in this fast-changing global economy.

Change your mindset

Instead of being hard on yourself, try this mindset instead:

“Because of my varied work and life experience, I am an adaptable, flexible and skilled person who hits the ground running.”

Having had several jobs could mean that you've experienced different workplace cultures, management styles, team structures, customers, systems, machines, deadlines and daily tasks. Wow! Think about the skills and knowledge you've gained by having had to learn new skills quickly, and adapt and organize yourself to manage multiple simultaneous professional and personal activities. It's these experiences that help you develop resilience and other skills that companies value.

A unique challenge of your work history, however, is connecting the dots on your resume to paint a picture of a person who's been actively engaged in work. Here's an approach that will help you to tell your story effectively to prospective employers:

Prepared by YWCA Moncton as part of the curriculum of **Employment My Way**, which was the program documented for Phase Three of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures project.

Adapted from YWCA Metro Vancouver, How to Build a Resume When Your Work Experience is Varied, 2015; see <https://ywcavan.org/blog/2015/12/how-build-resume-when-your-work-experience-varied>.

Break it down

There will always be threads that join unrelated jobs or experiences. It usually comes down to three things: the **tasks** you had, the **skills** you used to complete those tasks, and the **personality traits** you brought to or developed through the job. Use this activity to document what you've done:

STEP 1 - Make a list of your major work and life experiences

STEP 2 - Beside each job or life experience, list the related tasks

STEP 3 - List the personality traits you brought to each task

Do this for each job and major life experience you have had, including volunteer work and serious hobbies, such as sailing.

Example:

Step 1: Life and Work Experience	Step 2: Tasks	Step 3: Personality Traits
Took a year off to go sailing around the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read books on solo sailors and conceived of the idea of my own journey• Researched various types of boats, keels, sails and equipment• Interviewed other sailors about their experiences• Organized fundraising events to raise money for my trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focused• Organized• Methodical• Mathematical• Open-minded• Creative• Good listener• Convincing• Friendly

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STEP 4 - Put it together in your resumé

Once your notes are down, you'll likely notice some patterns and themes. To help you organize your achievements, ask yourself the following questions:

- Which tasks, skills and traits are repeated?
- Which skills have improved the most, and which did you enjoy the most?
- Where do I see important knowledge or experience gaps?

Make a list of recurring skills, tasks or traits and put them into your resumé under a “Highlights Qualifications” section. Here’s what you might write based on the previous example:

HIGHLIGHT QUALIFICATIONS

- *Five years’ experience researching and planning a complex long-distance sailing voyage*
- *Exceptional listening, interviewing and persuasion skills in both corporate and private sectors*
- *Open-minded, creative, friendly and skilled at developing rapport*
- *Proven ability to create results on limited budgets*

Moving forward with confidence and clarity

With this strategy, you can present yourself with greater confidence and clarity. Taking time to track your career achievements, experience and skills on a regular basis will also help you pay closer attention to the tasks, skills and traits you most enjoy and those you wish to develop. Remember: your ability to adapt to change demonstrates the qualities companies need in today’s world, so make it known in your new-and-improved resume.

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