

Transferable Skills Professional Development Workshop

LEANNE RALSTIN: Hi, everyone. My name's Leanne Ralstin. I'm with WSU's Carson College of Business with the Carson Center for Student Success. I'm a career consultant here. And we're going to talk about leveraging your transferable skills.

Some people call transferable skills, soft skills. These are those skills that they're not really tangible so much. They're more about who you are and how you act. So we'll be talking about those because these are the things that the employers really want to see.

They want more. The skills, your hard skills, your tangible skills, like you know how to run a computer program, or how to operate machinery, or how to analyze a financial situation, these are things that will get you the job, those tangible skills, but it's the transferable skills are the soft skills that will help keep you the job. You'll continue with the job.

I've heard employers talk about, hey, yeah, they hired this great person. But it turned out this person had horrible communication skills. And so, they had to let them go. So transferable skills are very important.

So what do employers want? They want knowledge, of course. That's what you know. Those are the things that you know about. Those are the things that you'll get in college. Those are the things you'll get in your classes.

They want skills. These are things you're good at. We talked about those. Those skills are what's going to get you the job.

They want experience. What have you done? What kind of experiences do you have? Have you had an internship?

Have you had jobs, and what did you do at those jobs? Did you practice those skills and that knowledge? They want these things.

They also want abilities. This is what you're capable of doing. And this echoes to the idea of transferable skills. But it's up to you to make the connections between what you're capable of doing and what you've done.

So what are some of the transferable skills? Number one that I've heard about over the years, over 10 years of being a career consultant and career advisor, one of the top things that's consistently at the top in surveys with employers is communication skills. Simply, can you communicate with others? Can you write a coherent sentence, put a nice paragraph together? Or are your skills lacking?

They want to know that you can solve problems, that you're organized, that you plan, that you're a leader, that you have a willingness to learn. One of the things that I see over and over

and over again on internship job descriptions is a willingness to learn. Obviously, you don't know everything. Nobody knows everything. But if you're willing to learn, employers like that. And then they can teach you what it is specifically that you need to know.

There's many more transferable skills than these listed here. These are just some of the more popular, top rated ones. Any questions yet on what transferable skills are? I see we might have one question.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Yeah, we have one question. What is worth more, work experience or a completed internship?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Both are experience. They're both worthy. If you have a job that's directly related to what it is you want to do then, yeah, that's very valuable. But an internship also is very valuable. And we can talk about that more in just a little bit.

So one of the first things you need to do when it comes to thinking about your transferable skills is to set good goals. What do you want?

And there's two basic kinds of goals out there. There's the outcome goals. This is like the ultimate prize. And for many of you that are students, the ultimate prize is maybe graduating from college with your degree.

But the process goals, those are those little steps that get you to the outcome goal. What do you want? Ask yourself this. What do you want? And set goals that get you there.

You want to graduate, yeah, but beyond that, what kind of job do you want? And this will tell you the kinds of transferable skills that you need to build on in order to get to that dream job someday.

What I suggest is that you just go out and find job descriptions of those great jobs. Let's say you want to work at this great big company. Let's say it's, I don't know, Amazon. You want to work at Amazon some day.

Look for the jobs that they have open. Study the job descriptions. Think about what you need in order to get that job beyond just the skills that you're learning in school now. Those are the transferable skills.

Next, think about what you've done. Those experiences, those internships, those jobs. Work, service, volunteerism, all of these are legitimate things that you could put down as experiences on your resume.

Responsibilities and duties. Usually people will list responsibilities and duties under their different experiences. And this is great, and it shows that you did your job. But go beyond that.

Think about accomplishments. These will make you stand out. And the thing about accomplishments, if you use the wording of transferable skills, like "communicated effectively with," "worked on a team with," "problem solved this issue." if you talk about those things under accomplishments, that's going to make you stand out.

Because most people know, if you put a job title, most people know pretty much what that job title, or they can guess what it is that they're responsible for. But what did you do? And it's what you did that's going to make you stand out.

So some examples. Let's say you had a project or an activity that you did. Some of the transferable skills that you could use when you're describing your accomplishments would be planning, organization, dependability, creativity, problem solving. These are all transferable skills that you can tie in with what you did. Make it into an accomplishment and it's going to make you stand out.

Even if you were just an officer in a club, or a member of an organization, you're like, I'm just a member. But maybe you're a team player, maybe you show a willingness to learn. Maybe you're reliable, that you can always be counted upon to do the projects that your organization does. These are all transferable skills.

Just because you're an intern doesn't make it any less of a work experience than if it's just a regular paid job. They're equally important, especially if they're relevant to what you ultimately want to do. So, any questions so far? No. OK.

Finally, this is the biggest thing that I think that you should do. Gather your stories. What have you accomplished, what have you done, what have you learned? These are things that you should put together in what I call a master resume.

A mater resume is everything, all the details, all your experiences. Yes, duties and responsibilities, but add on to those. So it was your responsibility, let's say, to take out the trash. Did you do it?

Then talk about it. Tell them what you accomplished. Took out the trash daily. I mean, that seems like a very small task. But it shows more about what you accomplished rather than what you were just responsible for.

List those accomplishments. Put numbers to them, put percentages to them. Claim plus proof. This is something that you're taught when you're writing your research papers, for instance. You make a claim. You need to prove it with facts.

The same goes when you're talking to employers and convincing them that, hey, I have these skills. I'm a team player. You made the claim, I'm a team player. OK. Now prove it. What did you do that proves that?

Go back to your master resume where you listed everything, remind yourself of these times where you were a great team player.

What did you do? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? What did you develop? Claim plus proof. The proof is in your experiences, in your education, your training.

Key words and relevancy. So going back to that dream job that you want at Amazon, or wherever it's at, study it for those key words that are in there. Those key words are often those mysterious transferable skills.

How do you have that? If they're asking for a willingness to learn-- let's say you're going after an internship. And I saw this recently on, I believe, it was an Amazon internship job description. They said willingness to learn.

What have you done that shows a willingness to learn? Put it in your cover letter. Put it in your resume. Talk about it in your interview.

I have a willingness to learn because I did this or I did that. And use those key words that they're using in the job descriptions because then they'll relate to it naturally and realize that you're talking their language, if you will.

So, any questions? I kind of went through it fast. Here's a question.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: The question is, what is your thought on having multiple resumes?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Multiple resumes? You absolutely should. You should have a different resume for every job, every internship that you ever apply for. The master resume has everything that I talked about. Everything that you ever did in as much detail as you can imagine.

But from that, you pull the details to create these targeted resumes for every job that you have. Yeah, you should have multiple resumes. Bottom line.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Another question asks, is being actively involved in the university or a university activity, can that be called an accomplishment, or where would that fit within a resume or a transferable skill?

LEANNE RALSTIN: So on a resume, it depends on your level of involvement. If you're, let's say, an officer in a club, it might go under experiences. If you're a member, it might just be under extracurricular activities, or service, or volunteerism.

But do have it on there. And then be willing to talk about it in a cover letter, in an interview, not just on your resume. You need to connect all of these dots together for them. We have another question.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Yeah. Two questions. How long should a cover letter be? And should you always send a cover letter with your resume even if it hasn't been requested?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Rule of thumb, cover letters are usually about a page. You don't want to write a book. But if it's the kind of job that has a lot of details, and the employer is asking you to address all your qualifications, it might be more than a page. But as a rule of thumb, most of the time, they're about a page.

And the second part of the question was?

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Should you always give a cover letter?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Should you always give a cover letter? If given the chance, yes, because it allows you to explain more about those transferable skills, and your experiences, and your skills as it relates to the job. Absolutely.

If you're given the chance. But if they just say, just a resume, follow the directions. But if they allow you to, why not? Another question?

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Another question. If your skills are through a religious organization should you list them neutrally so there is no bias if your potential employer has different views?

LEANNE RALSTIN: That's the problem that comes a lot of times. There is that possibility. Some people choose to go ahead and name their religious organization that they work for knowing full well that the employer may or may not agree with it.

And that's a choice that you make. You do not have to reveal your religion in any job description. That's against the rules, against the law, basically.

So it's up to you. You can say it neutrally, but then, if the experience is extremely relevant and pertinent to the job you might want to take the chance. And if someone won't hire you because they're a different kind of religion than you, maybe you don't want to work there anyway.

So these are choices that you have to make. But the employer, they can't ask about your religion. It's against the law. It's illegal. So it's a choice you have to make with your eyes wide open.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Another question is, should the resume or cover letter be double spaced?

LEANNE RALSTIN: No. That just spreads it out too much. In my opinion, it should be single spaced. I think you should fill up one nice page, at least.

If you have a lot of relevant experiences and you can fill up two full pages, go ahead. If you're in academia and you have a PhD, or a graduate degree maybe it's more than two pages because you might have publications and other things that make it longer.

But rule of thumb for most people, probably one nice full page, single spaced. For those with good experiences that are relevant, two pages is fine.

Well, that's really all I have right now. So thank you for your time. Oh, more questions. Sorry.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Another question is, how long should a resume typically be?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Typically, it's one or two pages. If you can fill up two pages with relevant information then go ahead. But typically, one, especially for networking purposes. But if you're actually applying and you have a lot of great experiences, why not?

Two pages tell more of a story. As long as it's relevant. If it's just fluff, stick to one page.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: And another question is, let's say you've been a stay at home parent for a while, out of the workforce. How can you best transfer those skills of what you've been doing, the work you've been doing at home when you're talking to employers, when you're ready to rejoin the workforce?

LEANNE RALSTIN: I think one of the greatest things that stay at home parents have is time management. Time management, organization skills, communication skills. Think of all the people that you communicate with when you're a stay at home parent.

You typically are the one talking with, for instance, teachers in your kid's schools, all kinds of teachers, all kinds of parents. You're like, no, I only talk to three-year-olds all day long. But you're still talking with professionals, like the kid's pediatricians, their health care providers, different people like that.

Don't minimize what you do. Because you do a lot of really good things. And you're a caregiver.

So don't minimize that. But it depends upon what you're going after, obviously, which kind of transferable skills you would emphasize over others. Another question?

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Yeah. Should skills be listed separately from job experience?

LEANNE RALSTIN: In my opinion. This is my opinion. If it's a tangible skill, like technology or foreign language, something like that, I would say list it separately. It makes it stand out more.

You could say something like proficient in Microsoft Office Word, or something like that, fluent in Spanish. Those kinds of skills, yes, if it's tangible. But if they're the transferable skills, like

communication, they're much more effective if they're woven into your experiences because then they become more tangible.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: And we have another question on resumes. Someone asks, should we use colored paper or white paper for our resumes?

LEANNE RALSTIN: White or off-white is my recommendation. Err on the side of conservative, basically.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Another question. How do you add your academic achievements to your resume without coming off as arrogant or making it a primary focus?

LEANNE RALSTIN: If it's the truth it's not bragging. It's not being arrogant if it's the truth. So don't make it more than what it is. But certainly, there's nothing wrong with putting your academic achievements on your resume.

Keep in mind, whatever you put on the resume should be relevant to the job that you're going after. If they want you to be a good student make sure you put that 4.0, or whatever it is, on there. And those honors, the fact that you're in Honors College.

If it's just a list of the various scholarships that you got, if some of them were academic related, absolutely. It might show even more so that you are a good student. But if it's just a scholarship just because you're a Washington resident, maybe not. Maybe it's not relevant. So you'd have to make that balancing act between what's relevant to the job and what isn't. Another question?

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Another question. How do you show personality on a resume. Or, should you do that exclusively on a cover letter?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Well, we hope it's a positive personality. Really, the cover letter and the resume are meant as pretty conservative documents. And it really depends upon your field how much personality you want to put in there. You might want to be pretty conservative and pretty neutral.

You might want to add a little bit of personality. But keep in mind that you're writing to people who may not know you. This is basically an introduction to you and why they should hire you. What are they looking for?

I think, have a career advisor look at the resume and see if you're going overboard or if it's just enough. I would say, have someone like myself or some other career advisor take a look at it, see if it's conservative enough for your field. Try not to go overboard. We have another question.

KRISTIN BULZOMI: Another question. Holly asks, I have a yoga teacher certification that was a lengthy course. But I'm in human development, so it doesn't really apply. But I want to highlight the time and skills put into it.

LEANNE RALSTIN: So talk about, instead of just saying the certification, talk about the transferable skills that you learned through it. Like maybe dedication, maybe teamwork, maybe patience. I don't know. It depends on what you're going after. If they're going after human resources, human resources is very people oriented.

So maybe think about this yoga certification, how did you deal with people? What did you learn, what did you develop? What did you accomplish as a yoga instructor or in your yoga certification that relates to HR? So making those connections is very important.

More questions? OK. Well, thank you very much for your time and patience. And I hope you learned a little bit more about how you can utilize transferable skills in your job search. Thank you.