

CV basics – Personal Statements

- *"I am a versatile, pro-active, board level manager with wide range of skills encompassing sales management, marketing, operation efficiency and corporate planning. Having worked in highly pressurised situations I have shown the necessary skill set to bring complex situations to a fruitful conclusion. I have been instrumental in orchestrating and managing teams during complex and innovative sales of technologically advanced ..."*
- *"A business leader with a natural ability to communicate effectively at all levels and build cohesive and functional teams. I have developed a strong understanding of how businesses really operate, the politics that influence decisions and how global issues affect them."*
I am a self-starter with the ability to build from nothing and also successfully lead change programmes ... I look to 'add value' to an organisation, whether it is the company I work for, or a client. I base my success on establishing excellent rapport in my professional relationships, commitment to every task I undertake, and honesty and integrity in everything I do. I am highly ambitious and I have drive, determination, and the ability to succeed, whilst delivering results."
- *Over 20 years experience in sales and implementation of high value adding IT solutions to the financial community throughout Europe"*

What are they?

About half of CVs received by Harvey Nash have some kind of statement similar to the examples above on them. There seems to be a view among candidates that these kind of statements are needed.

In a straw poll among consultants at Harvey Nash — not a scientific poll admittedly, but illustrative — not one consultant said they thought they were worthwhile, and no one actually read them.

Do you need one?

No.

Should you have one?

That is up to you. Space on your CV is precious. The rule about CVs being about two sides, and certainly no longer than three should be a golden one. Therefore do you want to waste precious space on an area that is unlikely to be read?

However, many candidates feel it gives a useful overall summary of themselves. If you do want to include one there are some factors you must keep in mind. If you get it wrong, you can end up worse off by including a statement than if you had not put anything at all. Of the three "personal statements" above, only one is acceptable. The last one is short and factual.

- **Keep it factual** Although it may sound impressive to describe yourself as a "hands on proactive team player with business acumen and entrepreneurial flair who strives to exceed" it is, even if true, just so much flannel. Keep in mind two things: "Says who?" and the immortal words of Mandy Rice-Davis "Well he would say that, wouldn't he?".

In much the same way that there is no point newspapers describing someone as famous (if they are famous then you already know it, if they are not, then by definition you can't make them famous just by saying so) a list of your personal qualities does not become true just because you put them down on your CV.

This is an area where you can damage your chances. Too much of this kind of thing and interviewers are going to get suspicious. The question to ask yourself when considering what to put down is "what would the converse say about me?" No one is likely to be looking for a low-achiever, or someone who is not a team player, or sets low standards. This is definitely a case of less is more.

- **Keep it short** The grim truth is that recruitment consultants are going to spend *at most* a minute reading your CV when compiling a long list. A huge slab of text at the top of the page is not going to be read. Keep it to around three, bullet-pointed, sentences. One to outline in the most general terms your career to date including your current (or last) employer ("20 years experience in IT sales culminating in the position of VP Sales at Widget plc"), one to highlight your most significant experience ("Spent five years as deputy head of sales and marketing for EMEA for Widget plc") and one your most significant achievement ("Introduced new sales structure that increased year on year sales by 14 per cent with a cost reduction of three per cent").

Words to avoid in your statement

Anything that sounds like management waffle. Eg proactive, entrepreneurial (unless you are really an entrepreneur in which case call your self something else), hands-on, high standards, any sentence containing the phrase "core competencies", visionary, excellent, achiever, dynamic, veteran, drive, tenacity, outstanding, motivated, pressure, results-oriented, problem-solving, enthusiasm, creativity.

And above all do not refer to yourself in the third person.

Other points

If you work on the basis that a recruitment consultant may scan 400 CVs in a day, and yours is the 397th consider what would that person want to see. Something simple, easy to read, clear, which shows a clarity of thought and the ability to present the most salient facts concisely.

Layout, which will be covered in another article, is very important. Make your statement easy to read, in a simple, clear font (Times Roman or Arial are good solid fonts that scan well) at a reasonable size (nothing less than 10 point, nothing more than 12pt). No shading, no boxes. Short sentences with good use of white space.