

How to Make Those “Silly Little Jobs” on Your Resume Shine

by *Katie Douthwaite* January 20, 2014



When I landed a job managing a cupcake shop right out of college, I was ecstatic. It was exactly what I wanted in that moment, when I thought my career was headed toward owning my own small business.

A year later, when that goal changed and I decided I needed to get into the startup space, I found myself managing a friend's budding business: a cleaning and concierge service.

But another year—and another career goal—down the road, when I was applying for a corporate position with more potential for advancement, I cringed at the thought of my resume. Cupcake shop? Cleaning company? I was two years out of college, but I felt like I'd made absolutely no career progress. I couldn't imagine a corporate recruiter looking at my resume and seeing any potential in it—or in me.

Even when I did land an interview here and there, the questions were inevitable. The interviewer would lean back, peer at me over my resume, and chuckle as he or she asked, “A cupcake shop?”

It was humiliating. I'd timidly try to point out what I'd learned from it (or brush it aside completely with a self-deprecating, “Cupcakes were just so trendy, you know?”), but how was I supposed to showcase confidence and poise and prove my worth when I was embarrassed of my own background?

But as I learn more about myself and take a look back on my journey so far, I'm figuring out how to embrace my resume—everything on my resume. And if you're in the same place, whether you waited tables for a few years after college or nannied abroad, here are a few tips and tricks that helped me.

Connect the Dots

Before I could even think about how to present my experience in a more positive way, I had to come to grips with it myself. The first realization? My background isn't going to change. I took those jobs, I put in the time, and there's no going back now. Until I have a quite a few more years of work experience under my belt, those lines aren't going to drop off my resume.

But, that's not a negative thing; now, a few years later, I'm able to look back and connect the dots along my career path. Just one small example: Working at a small business (the cupcake shop), a startup (the

cleaning company), and my current corporate job has given me a unique perspective and an arsenal of example situations that I can now use in my freelance writing work.

Even if you can't see that far ahead at this point, trust me: One day, you're going to look back and see how it all fits. (Even if it's just an interviewer, once a server him- or herself, who appreciates the work ethic that it instills in young professionals, and gives you a job because of it.)

Don't Downplay It

Whenever I was asked about my cupcake shop job, I used to gloss over it as quickly as possible and dive right into why I was ready for something else: "Right out of college, I thought it was my dream job, but now I realize I'm ready for something on a bigger scale where I have more opportunity to learn and grow." And that was that.

While that's not a terrible answer, it completely plays down the year I spent at the bakery. Sure, I had some less than glamorous tasks, like ringing up customers and washing frosting-cemented spatulas, but I also oversaw all the day-to-day operations of the business—because the owner lived in another state.

She'd call and check in, but she wasn't there if a wedding order got dropped on the floor or if we ran out of flour. I managed the employees, our inventory, special orders, and everything in between. So even though the subject matter was cupcakes, the job truthfully did a good job introducing me to important aspects of management and customer service. And that's a great story to tell to a hiring manager.

Even you don't see any redeeming qualities to your job, the point is that you aren't doing yourself any good to talk it down. Your time there produced something, whether it was time management skills, savings for school, or a customer-oriented attitude—so don't be afraid to talk about it with confidence.

Use All the Tools in Your Arsenal

When you're a bit insecure about your resume, one of the most helpful tools you have is your cover letter. Your resume may let a hiring manager know that you worked at a less-than-impressive job, but your cover letter can put it into context and explain how that seemingly irrelevant experience will help you in this new position.

For me, I let the bullet points of my resume explain my accomplishments and main responsibilities at the cleaning company, but my cover letter told more of the story: The company staff was small, so I essentially worked almost every role, including PR, marketing, advertising, sales, and customer service. And to boot, it was a startup company with big goals to open up locations around the country. Once I was able to give that background and explain more of who the company was, I felt like the hiring manager could get a better idea of why I worked there in the first place and how it's prepared me for the role at hand.

The bottom line is this: No matter your background, it has shaped you—and is still shaping you—for your future path. And while it may take a few years to appreciate that and see how it all fits together, you will someday. Trust me.

About The Author: Katie comes to The Daily Muse from a variety of management gigs, from small town music venue to big city cupcake bakery. Most recently, she's leapt into the corporate world in sunny Florida, where she constantly challenges her team of support techs to provide over-the-top customer service. Outside her cubicle, you can find her perfecting her homemade bagel recipe, writing silly poems, and dressing in scarves and boots despite the lack of fall weather.