

TTTTTThe Butterfly Effectttttt

How a seemingly throwaway line on a resume led to a fulfilling career in tribology.

The current downturn in employment opportunities reminds me of the difficulties I faced upon graduating...the first time. There I was, freshly out of my school's chemical engineering program and waiting to hear back on the many resumes I had sent, but by summer's end I had not received one phone call. With my credits I realized I could go back for one more year of school and earn a 4th Class Power Engineer's Certificate. I adjusted my lofty goals of being an engineer's assistant designing industrial plants and resolved that a job looking after boilers was better than no job at all.

School started in September, and by Halloween I was proactively sending out resumes with the additional education listing: "4th Class Power Engineering – To be completed in May." The first and only phone call I received was on St. Patrick's Day from a tribology lab I did not even remember contacting.

The interview went OK. I got along well with my future boss and seemed to be answering all questions satisfactorily. They said two points stood out on my resume. The first was my school schedule—I would not graduate until the end of April, and they wanted me to start the following week. I felt I could rearrange my schedule and work that out, so I asked about the second point.

At the very bottom of my resume, under the Additional Skills heading, were three simple words: "Fluent in French." That stub of a sentence—a nearly throwaway piece of information that I added to fluff my resume up to nearly a full page—is responsible for my entire career. With that single flap of a butterfly's wing, an entirely different chain of events began to unfold.

This company had many applicants with similar and often more appropriate skills than mine, yet I had this one advantage over them all. The lab had just been awarded a national contract that stipulated provision of bilingual technical support. For this reason alone I was offered the job. My excitement was barely containable—if I only knew then where this would lead!

I worked as a lab technician for barely six months before getting my first promotion to lab coordinator—and membership in STLE. Fifteen months later my team earned both ISO 9001 and ISO 17025 certifications, which earned me a promotion to lab manager. I found management suited me well, and I enjoyed many successes. During that time, our Eastern Division started a training program that I quickly assumed in the West. I was surprised by my passion and enjoyment of this new offering.

With my next promotion I realized I could go no higher, and I missed the customer training sessions. I left that company to work for another in a research role where I was able to present my findings at STLE annual meetings and other conferences. My current boss knew me through STLE, as we were both part of our local section Executive Committee, and he took notice of me during one of my scheduled presentations. We talked about how much I enjoyed public speaking and eventually

found a way to work together. My story has a "happily ever after" ending, and I owe it all to an innocuous statement that put me on a path that included STLE membership.

I encourage anyone looking for a job, whether recent graduate or "right-sizing" victim, to review his or her resume to ensure every available skill is listed. When I used to sift through dozens of applications for an entry-level secretary, five years of experience would be trumped by one year that included experience with a Meridian phone system like ours.

So good luck to you all, and if you're not an STLE member, sign up and go to meetings. Something great might come of it!



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