



## How to Tell Accomplishment Stories

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**Online Community  
Assisting Veterans**

You've organized the information you want to use for your resume. You've followed some good advice. You've focused on identifying "accomplishments," not just what tasks you performed or your skills. But now comes the most important next step: translating these accomplishments into effective "stories" for your resume, interviews, and LinkedIn profile. Stories? Absolutely!

Stories have three compelling components that make them a powerful part of your career search strategy:

1. Stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end.
2. Stories include emotion: excitement, suspense, humor, or strategy.
3. Stories spark interest in the reader to know more.

Now comes the toughest part – your resume and interview needs to contain short stories – only short stories. And this is where lack of preparation – and perhaps a natural tendency – creates the biggest mistake. Many job seekers are OK with the idea of telling stories – but they start the stories with the equivalent of "Once upon a time..." and drag on until the reader or interviewer figuratively, if not literally, falls asleep. This is represented by a "just the facts" boring description of job duties on resumes.

This is a challenge often perceived to be a major factor for veterans. There's a common belief that military experiences do not translate to the civilian world. It's perhaps important to note others share this belief with only slightly different reasons.

Other job seekers are uncomfortable telling stories, so the answers to interview questions are too short, and they struggle to make even-known accomplishments interesting on their resumes. A big factor I've noticed is simply stated if not simply solved. High school or

college graduates frequently tell me they “haven’t accomplished anything yet.” Individuals with years of work history tell me they “just did their jobs.”

It's helpful to change your perspective. When working on a resume or preparing for a possible interview response, it's common to take an almost clinical approach, “what I am supposed to do is record the facts.” That’s not the best tactic. Change your perspective! Think about how you felt about these experiences as they happened or as you shared them with colleagues or family. Think about the times you said: “You won’t believe what happened today.”

We’re easily misled by novels, television shows, and movies – where it takes 100’s of pages, multiple episodes, or two hours to get to the solution or the end of the story. For your resume and interview preparation, you’re better off looking at some examples from news media, either print or online. There, you’ll find the importance of headlines and that almost all news articles are written in an “inverted pyramid” style – where the most important information comes first, and all the details trail off to the end of the article. Your accomplishments in a resume should be no more than the first paragraph of a well-written news story – and the first 2-3 paragraphs are your answer for an interview.

## **Resume Stories**

You should create 3-4 stories for your current and most recent positions. Each story should be no more than 3-4 lines –about a 20-30 second story. Experienced recruiters suggest some different formats. I find the “Challenge-Action-Result” format to be one of the best. What was the “challenge” you faced? What did you “do” to meet the challenge? And what was the result?

Here’s a military example from a “Mailroom Manager:”

*Reorganized and resolved all postal compliance issues within two months.  
Inspired an existing team to address long-standing challenges and quickly  
respond to service needs of*

“Resolved all postal compliance issues” is an intriguing statement. It contains specific results. What’s important about this statement is that, as a hiring manager, this statement sparks my desire to know more about how the candidate “inspired an existing team.” I want to know more about the story. The same is true for this example:

*Designed and presented an employee “onboarding” program at the request*

*of department managers. Involved representatives from each department in presenting department visits as part of the program. Produced video on company history for the program. Presented program bi-weekly for one year while training department managers to take over presentations.*

## **Interview Stories**

Much is the same for your interview preparation – but there’s one big difference. Your interview stories cannot be 20-30 second responses. That’s too short. So, for interviews, you need the “Goldilocks” solution. Stories that are too short will lead the interviewer to believe there’s not much substance to your responses – or at least you’re not prepared. But if you give a wandering five-minute response, your answers are too long. So, you need to prepare – and practice – interview stories that are “just right.”

Hiring expert Lou Adler offers an outstanding format for preparing a “universal answer” to interview questions: the Say-A-Few-Words 2-Minute Response. The SAFW 2 Minute response should include:

- An opening statement
- Amplify the opening statement
- Add some examples
- Wrap it up

Let’s look at the last example in the context of an interview – “tell me about your experience at...”

- Open: I directed the training for all managers and employees...
- Amplify: One of my most important responsibilities was developing new, highly experiential training programs.
- Example: I developed a completely new employee orientation program... (details)
- Example: I responded to a request from the owner to improve the effectiveness of managers meetings...(details)
- Wrap: The programs I developed were all reviewed positively, with excellent participant attendance.

With the details added as indicated, it should be easy to see how this answer could be a SAFW 2 Minute response. You should prepare 3-4 of these responses for each of your positions. Prepare and practice! If you develop true stories, you’ll spark interest in companies and interviewers – **they’re your stories. Tell me more!**

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