

Professional Development: How to Highlight your Coniston Experience

A Walk through the Job Hunting Process

November, 2018

We get it. You sometimes hear it from your friends or relatives. Being a camp counselor can have the connotation of being a “summer off” from preparing for the “real world.” But as you and I know, it’s the lessons learned at camp that are some of the most powerful in our day-to-day lives. In this role of responsibility, the challenges faced and experiences gained provide skills and confidence that are applicable not only in daily life, but in ANY field or industry. Remember: Every summer, parents trust you with their most valuable possessions: their kids! These resources are provided to assist in applying your skillset to the language and process of hiring.

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Considerations Before You Apply

According to Forbes: The 10 Skills Employers Most Want in 20-Something Employees

1. Ability to work in a team
2. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
3. Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work
4. Ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization
5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell and influence others

You’ll notice that 7 of the 10 skills listed above relate directly to your summer work, including the top 5 items. Feel confident in the amazing work that you’ve done, and don’t be afraid to highlight how it sharpened these skills.

According to our Coniston network...

We spoke with employers responsible for hiring, and they provided an additional list of traits that they indicated are important for employees to possess.

Top Traits Indicated in Our Research (In alphabetical order)

Ability to influence others	Effective decision making and problem solving
Ability to work both independently and in a team	Enthusiasm
Able to manage competing priorities	Integrity
Adaptability- can adapt to industry shifts and keep the company current	Intelligence
Attention to detail	Leadership Ability
Can stick to a budget	Learning Agility
Communication skills- increases productivity	Organizational awareness = emotional intelligence and interpersonal awareness
Competence	Personable

Conflict resolution- indicator of maturity and leadership potential	Responsive to constructive criticism
Courage (willingness to take risks and accept challenges)	Self-aware
Critical observation- a fresh perspective, intuitive solutions, new ideas	Self-starter

Letters of Recommendation

Give your recommenders plenty of time to complete their letters. Four to six weeks is generally considered a respectable amount of time. Provide a “power-packet” for all of your recommenders. This packet will not only be extremely useful, it demonstrates a high level of preparation on your part. It should include:

- A list of all the programs or positions you are applying to and their due dates
- A copy of your transcript
- Addressed and stamped envelopes to all your programs (unless letters are to be submitted online)
- Your resume or curriculum vitae (CV)*, which details experience, accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and educational awards
- Any recommendation forms required by your program
- A list of attributes the business is looking for, what do you want the recommender to highlight

Be sure to send a nice thank you note after all your applications are in. Keep your recommenders updated on your job search.

**A curriculum vitae is a written synopsis of an applicant’s experience or qualifications for a job opportunity. CV’s are primarily used within academics.*

References

Ask your references in advance if they would be willing to serve in that capacity. This way you give them a heads-up so that they can expect and prepare for a call. If they are unable, you will then have time to find an alternate.

Your Online Presence

Social media has been around in its current form for about 15 years, so it’s no secret at this point that your information and presentation online isn’t private and, if inappropriate, can lead to real-life consequences. Regardless of how secure you think your social media (including (F)Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat) is, ask yourself before posting “what if my boss saw this? My grandparents? My professor?” etc. This may sound redundant, but nobody who has accidentally gotten in trouble because of what they posted on social media *ever* thought that that would be the result... that’s what makes it a mistake!

Some advice:

- On Facebook, turn on timeline review. This helps to ensure that anything somebody tags you in or writes on your wall will be approved by you.
- Additionally on Facebook, know that oftentimes a like, follow, or comment on a post is broadcast throughout others’ timelines.
- A story on Snapchat or Instagram doesn’t exist in the short term if a screen shot is taken of it.
- Always keep in mind that there isn’t a Millennial out there who doesn’t look back and cringe at their posts from 10-15 years ago. It never hurts to think before posting.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn isn't just for full-time professionals or job-seekers. As a student, it's a great way to connect professionally with your classmates before you graduate and spread out. Additionally, it is an excellent way to incrementally prepare all of the steps that applying for a new job or opportunity entail, as opposed to putting together the language for a resume and cover letter all at the same time. That being said, LinkedIn isn't the kind of thing that is worth *half* doing. A blank profile doesn't tell anyone about who you are or what you do.

Here are some steps to get started:

- 1.) Before setting up a profile, you should prepare at least a profile picture and a "headline" ahead of time.
 - a. Don't overthink the profile picture. Wear what you would in your professional setting. Lighting is everything in a portrait, so consider asking a friend with a basic DSLR camera to help out. Explore what others post to get a sense of what the expectation is in your field. Additionally, many colleges and universities offer some type of headshot service.
 - b. The "headline" is the little segment of text--120 characters—that appears under your name. Don't waste this space, especially if you are job searching. Instead of writing your current job title, or "unemployed," consider a line that explains what you bring to the table as a candidate or how it could be helpful. Do you want to be an "unemployed former camp counselor," or "energetic youth development professional seeking non-profit internship opportunity?" There is a lot of writing on how to craft a better headline with plenty of examples, but you can try starting [here](#). Try out this blog post to get the gears turning.
- 2.) Keywords are important. From Google to Facebook, and in this case LinkedIn, companies are honing in on bringing people the exact information they are looking for based on what they have shown interest in previously. What that means for you is that the more keywords, i.e. words that are specific to who you are, what you do, or the direction you want to head in that are packed into your LinkedIn, the more likely your profile is to pop up for those who are typing in those keywords, or their recommendations. Maintaining a natural flow to your writing, consider adding as many keywords as possible to your page, especially your headline.
- 3.) After providing basic information, the next step is to provide past work history. We'll get to resume language in a little bit, but consider copying some of what is there to your LinkedIn page for that section. Try picking and choosing your language here, on your cover letter, and on your resume to coordinate the most out of limited space and paint the fullest professional picture of you possible. That being said, make sure your best and most clear stuff is on your resume and cover letter.
- 4.) Don't feel the need to be too specific with the rest of the information that LinkedIn will prompt you to post. Too much can be cluttering, so keep to what feels natural and paints a clear picture.

Informational Interview

An informational interview is a combination of a networking opportunity, an informational session, and a job interview. To set up an informational interview, target people in an aspirational role but who are not so high up that they will not have the time to meet with you. If you have a personal or organizational connection, they will be more likely to help out or meet with you.

Reaching Out

Start by asking for help. Be clear and specific (include your expectations for meeting). The more personalized your ask feels, the greater chance of success you'll have. Be considerate- they are taking time out of their day to talk to you. Make sure you don't seem like you are asking for a job, even if that is the case.

Below is an example of the kind of email you might send to set up an informational interview:

SUBJECT: Coniston Alumni seeks your advice

Dear Jasmin,

I am a YMCA Camp Coniston staff member and John Tilley suggested I talk to you. May I have 20 minutes to ask you about your experience with IBM? I am exploring marketing careers in technology companies, and your insights would be very helpful. I know you may be busy, so I will try you again next week if we are unable to connect this week.

Thank you,
Taylor

Cover Letter

Your cover letter should tell a different yet complementary story to your resume. You want the reader to learn more about you, not just to repeat everything that is in your resume. Leave the reader with a clear takeaway message about who you are and what you've done. If you try to fit in too many examples, your important accomplishments and characteristics will be forgotten.

A strong personal statement will tell your future employer that you know what you are getting yourself into. You can think of it as a picture that provides a snapshot of who you are as a person or an indication of your priorities and judgment. They want to know that you are informed and are prepared to take on the job. Acknowledge your weaknesses and tell the reader how this position will help you improve if it is applicable. This shows that not only do you acknowledge your weaknesses, you are actively committed to improving them.

Your Current Address

Mr. or Ms.

Title

Organization

Street Address

City, State, Zip

Dear (Their Name),

First Paragraph: Get right to the point. Name the position, field, or general area you are applying for at the organization. Tell how you heard of the opening or organization. Name who if someone at the company suggested you apply or has given you information. Include why you are interested in the position using specific information about the organization/position.

Second/Third Paragraph: Illustrate how your qualifications match the ones the employer is seeking. Be specific and give examples. Mention one or two qualifications you think would be of greatest interest to the employer, ones that were not directly asked for, but that you believe would be beneficial and help you stand out among other candidates. Tell why you are particularly interested in this type of work. If you have had related experience or specialized training, point it out. Expand on the information stated in your resume (do not just repeat it).

Final Paragraph: Close by making a specific request for an interview, if appropriate. You may suggest a specific date and time that you will phone to make an appointment. Make sure that your closing statement is positive and requests a specific action from the reader. Thank the reader for his/her consideration.

Close Your Letter:

Sincerely,

Your Signature and Typed Name

Each position you are applying for has many different responsibilities. Your task is to tailor your resume to the exact job you are applying to (if you are applying to 10 different jobs, you should have 10 different resumes). Look at the job description, research the position and company, and schedule an informational interview if appropriate. Utilize this information to make yourself appear as informed and qualified as possible.

Use at Least Five of these Keywords and Phrases in your Resume:

A professional summary at the top of your resume is a good way to increase your keyword density. It can help if you do not have much experience and need something to beef up your resume. Keywords are strengthened when they are presented with context; include your accomplishments to exemplify further your expertise within the competency. If you do not currently have some of the skills they desire, you can add an "Areas of Interest" on the bottom of your resume.

- Collaboration
- Effective decision making
- Problem solving
- Communication skills
- Ability to influence others
- Manage competing priorities
- Leadership ability
- Organizational awareness
- Attention to detail
- Conflict resolution

In the examples below, the words in italics are power words, while the ones in bold are the keywords. The 'what' emphasized by the power words improve the strength of your resume.

- *Created* a **training program** for **first-year staff**
- *Coordinated* **product launch campaigns** and **outreach events**
- *Developed* a budgeting software using **JavaScript** and **HTML**

More concepts to keep in mind as you craft your resume:

- Remove any camp jargon- it only confuses future employers and makes them more likely to discount your experiences
- Start each line with an action verb
- Use active voice
- A comprehensive resume tells your story. It should not have every detail but rather give the reader a good picture of who you are. Focus on specific accomplishments- it should include a list of results and should not read like a job description
- Use a strong and informational beginning
 - Hiring managers will look at your resume for 6-25 seconds before moving on if they do not see anything notable
 - A professional summary can be used to front-load your resume with keywords to spike the readers interests and highlight your qualifications
- Leave space within the text. Don't cram everything in there- if it is too long, no one will read it
 - Add a line break between jobs and a small space between bullets
- Keep it to one page- do not try to include every detail or every experience. It should be a sample.

Matching Your Talents to the Position

Positions posted with desired responsibilities are already indicating what they are looking for in an applicant. This may sound redundant at first, but think about how easy it could be to send out the same resume to every position, without tailoring it to fit the needs posted in that position. There is no need to guess what an employer MIGHT want.

In this chart, we have listed job description language on the left. Provided by alumni who were recently on the job hunt, it will give you a sense for the language you can expect to see on a posting. The resume bullets on the right describe what you might include on a resume to address how you possess the skills that are desired for the position.

Job Description Language	Resume Bullet
<i>Assist in the planning and execution of various gift planning internal and external meetings including estate planning and cultivation events</i>	Create, coordinate and supervise one large-scale event per week for the summer season
<i>Respond to calls and emails from donors, prospects, and inquiries at large: Determine the urgency of the situation. Suggest appropriate response and inform supervisor when the situation merits his/her attention</i>	Represent organizational culture through superior customer service interactions with parents; maintain a high level of competence, professionalism and act as a face of the organization
<i>Work closely with other team members to help them with relevant tasks, show them how to learn new skills, and help resolve emerging problems on different projects.</i>	Mentor and supervise peers, including the individualized education and training of a first-year staff member Facilitate conflict resolution and manage activities to resolve disputes
<i>Communicate clearly and effectively while contributing as a productive member of both the geospatial analysis team and the Institute as a whole.</i>	Meet weekly with management to provide updates and ensure clear communication Communicate regularly with managers and executive leadership, includes reporting when needed
<i>Become adept with multitasking across projects, as well as understanding timelines and prioritizing tasks</i> <i>Ability to independently manage simultaneous projects in an organized manner</i>	Prioritize and efficiently manage multiple requests through the implementation of time-management skills in high-demand settings

Example Bullets:

Remember when we said that resumes should be crafted for the specific position to which you are applying? To assist in that process, we have provided these example bullets. Select four or five bullets that are the most appropriate for the position you are applying to to add to your resume.

Tilley's Top Six Bullets!

These are some of Tilley's favorite bullets. Use them when possible based on the job description

- Represent organizational culture through superior customer service interactions with parents; maintain a high level of competence, professionalism and act as a face of the organization
- Supervise and evaluate staff or 10 (or more!)
- Facilitate conflict resolution and manage activities to resolve disputes
- Maintain an upbeat demeanor through a twelve hour work day
- Critically evaluate emergency situations and act within established protocols
- Receive critical evaluation and take corrective action

Cabin Counselor

June 2014- August 2017 (Seasonal Position)

YMCA Camp Coniston- *Croydon, NH*

- Supervise and manage 64 participants for nine weeks, around the clock
- Facilitate conflict resolution and manage activities to resolve disputes
- Maintain an upbeat demeanor throughout a twelve hour work day
- Manage participants from an array of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to create a single community built on respect and inclusion
- Critically evaluate emergency situations and act within established protocols
- Implement lesson plans to instruct 640 participants over the course of the summer
- Receive critical evaluation and take corrective action
- Establish and monitor each camp member's safety and security by fostering an environment of welfare
- Represent organizational culture through superior customer service interactions with parents; maintain a high level of competence, professionalism and act as a face of the organization
- Communicate regularly with managers and executive leadership, includes reporting when needed
- Identify and respond appropriately to behavioral issues, alert management to ensure high quality communication with parents and medical providers
- Certified and trained in First Aid, Lifeguarding and CPR by the American Red Cross
- Teach and provide appropriate emotional and critical incident response to emergency situations; including drills around active shooters, medical emergencies, drowning victims and missing individuals
- Collaborate with peers and supervisors to ensure effective and efficient organization functioning
- Mentor and supervise peers, including the individualized education and training of a first-year staff member
- Prioritize and efficiently manage multiple requests through the implementation of time-management skills in high-demand settings
- Give regular verbal feedback and written performance evaluations
- Extensive training in child abuse prevention and awareness, the stages of child development, behavior modification, and customer relations
- Solicit daily feedback from participants and take corrective action
- Step up and volunteer for additional positions and programs as needed
- Perform an evaluation of each participant to better serve and place them in the future
- Adhere to a schedule and ensure the successful completion by each participant
- Utilize theories of child development in the daily care of each participant

Division Leader

June 2017 to August 2017 (Seasonal Position)

YMCA Camp Coniston- *Croydon, NH*

- Perform all duties of a Cabin Counselor
- Actively support and supervise 30 staff and 120 participants, ages 13-15
- Create, coordinate and supervise one large-scale event per week for the summer season
- Communicate regularly with management regarding any camper or staff problem
- Meet weekly with management to provide updates and ensure clear communication
- Lead training sessions for 100 staff members in industry standards, emergency procedures, and general camp protocols
- Moderate meetings with staff members to award distinguished behavior of campers
- Work effectively, collaborate and communicate with seven mid-level managerial peers
- Act as a contact, maintain and set an appropriate emotional response during an emergency procedure

Program Area Director (this should be the position title on your resume)

June 2014 to August 2017 (Seasonal Position)

YMCA Camp Coniston- *Croydon, NH*

- Develop and execute age- and skill-appropriate lesson plans
- Maintain a safe and clean area; including the safe storage of all equipment and implementation of rules
- Give regular verbal feedback and written performance evaluations
- Develop activities to engage campers during unstructured times during the program
- Successfully completed the National Archery Association Basic Instructor Level One class

A Brief Anecdote: A manager of over 30 years who has made countless hires in his time, describes one phrase on a resume or cover letter that tends to do more harm than good. *“Cover letters that describe the applicant as ‘detail-oriented’ often set themselves up for failure. Why? Because should there be any type of mistake in grammar or content, it instantly hurts their credibility as being a ‘detail-oriented’ person. A truly detailed-oriented person is invaluable, but that phrase ends up on my ‘no’ pile simply if they demonstrate an inability to perform a skill that the applicant chose to highlight themselves.”* Ouch! What types of words do you use to describe yourself in the job hunting process? What steps do you take to demonstrate them across the board?

Preparing for that Interview**Congrats, you got the interview.... Now what?****On the day of the interview:**

- Double check the length of the route to the interview and give yourself extra time to arrive.
- Discuss with others who may be more established in the industry what the recommended attire might be. The old adage is to dress for the position above the one you’re applying to, but check with those in a similar line of work to see what they wear. There are a lot of different philosophies out there!
- On a similar note, ask around regarding the expectation for exposed tattoos or facial piercings.
- Be aware of wearing too much perfume or other scents.
- Scope out where exactly you will be meeting. You don’t want to show up at the wrong offices!
- If the interview is over Skype, consider what environment you are in. Is there good WiFi? Is the background a clean, professional space?
- Don’t be afraid to bring a professional bag with your resume, cover letter, or any other useful piece of information.

Questions to Consider for the Interview Process:

- What do you see as the most important skill you got from your camp experience?
- If you had a million dollars what charity would you give it to and why?
- What do you like in a manager? What characteristics do you value in a supervisor?
- Tell me about a project or accomplishment that you consider to be the most significant in your career.
- Suggestions on how your strengths will help to benefit the company?
- I’d like you to provide a brief overview of your background as it relates to this job. What have you done that is similar?
- What are you looking for in a new job?
 - Why is this important to you?
 - What would you need to know to determine if this position meets your criteria?
- Tell me about your education. Why did you select your school? Your major? What did you like most? Least? Do your grades accurately represent your capabilities?

- When I call your manager for a reference, what will he or she say about your dependability, work habits, and ability to work with others?
- Let's review one or two examples of your volunteer work. What did you do? Why did you get involved? What did you discover about yourself?
- What does being inclusive mean to you? Describe a situation when you were intentional about being inclusive?
- What does it mean to be "socially responsible"? In what ways do you express your personal social responsibility?
- You might be asked about compensation or salary, or at least have that discussion. Research what others are making in that field, with similar backgrounds to you.

Don't get caught with a blank stare when your interviewer inevitably asks "Do you have any questions for me?" It is always recommended to have a few questions prepared for your interviewer. Here are a few basics, which can be used in conjunction w/ more specific ones.

Questions to Ask an Interviewer:

- How will I be trained?
- How will my performance be reviewed?
- What are the most immediate projects that need to be addressed?
- What are the skills and experiences you're looking for in an ideal candidate?
- What is the last person who held this job moving on to?
- Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed to?
- Where do you see this company in the next few years?
- Are there opportunities for advancement or professional development?
- Why does this role matter to the growth of the company?
- What do you like most about working here?
- What are the opportunities facing the company/department right now?
- What are the biggest challenges facing the company/department?
- What are your top three priorities for me this year, how will those be measured and how do they relate to the company's plans for this year?

Thank-You Letters

Just because the interview is over, doesn't mean it's *over*. A thank-you letter is an AWESOME opportunity to highlight your strengths while demonstrating a continued interest in the position. A thank-you note will look very different if it is for someone who wrote you a letter of recommendation, served as a reference, or took the time to sit down for an informational interview. They can be more personal, and perhaps can give an update on your job search or some other anecdote. A thank you note after an interview should be:

- Brief: keep it to a few paragraphs
- Timely: write it within 24 hours after the interview
- Polite: thank the interviewer for his or her time
- Positive: highlight and re-emphasize your skills/abilities relevant to the position
- Informative: include any brief post interview information that would be helpful

Below is an example of what you might include in your thank-you note:

Your Name

Address, phone number and email

Date

Name, address of person to whom you are addressing the letter

Dear Mr./Ms. _____:

Part One: A one sentence thank you and quick reminder of where/when the interview took place. Use the actual date in lieu of 'yesterday' and mention the positive aspects of your conversation.

Part Two: Show understanding of the employer's situation, needs of the organization, and the position. Reiterate what you have to offer the organization. Quick summary of your skills/abilities that are relevant to the position.

Closing Paragraph: Reaffirm interest in the position. Include that you would be willing to supply any additional information needed. Thank them and let them know you are looking forward to hearing from them soon.

Close your Letter: Sincerely, sign your name and type your name.

The Big Takeaways

- In all communications, use full sentences and capitalize words as you would in a formal writing assignment. This shows professionalism and care for what you are doing.
- Send thank-you notes.
- Be on time.
- Always come with a couple questions for your interviewer in case some of them get answered.
- Have a basic understanding of the position and company.
- Proof-read everything. Better yet, have someone else do it too. Consistent verb usage, spelling, and grammar are very important!
- Craft your resume and cover letter to fit the job you're applying for. Generalize camping lingo.