What to do when your job title doesn't match your job responsibilities

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A friend of mine asked for my help recently in composing her resume. She works as an Office Manager for a small business. In her role, she assumes all responsibilities of an Office Manager. In addition, she partners with the company owner to set policies, works with freelancers on marketing materials, serves as a liaison between vendors and shipping service companies, and conducts calls for sales leads that are collected at trade shows. In other words, her title doesn’t encompass all of her job responsibilities. Several potential employers have in fact had concerns about the difference in her title and her overall position in the company, wondering if she had exaggerated her responsibilities on her resume.

Many professionals run into situations where the title they have at their current job is so specific to the company that it carries no meaning outside of the organization, or it implies that they are a level or more below their actual work responsibilities. The difficulty we face in these situations is accurately accounting for our professional experience on our resume in order to advance in our careers. There is no easy way to address this as you want to remain truthful on your resume; you wouldn’t want your potential employer calling for a reference check and getting an impression you lied about your work history, do you?

There is a debate among professionals about listing job titles versus job functions on your resume. Some people prefer listing their title as it is, followed by a list of responsibilities, while others strongly prefer finding a way to rephrase your title to encompass your job function(s). The best option, however, is to find a happy medium and list your job title along with a few words that describe your job function, before you begin listing your job responsibilities.

First, let’s explore making changes to the job titles as you include them on your resume. If your title unusual, or very specific to the organization, you should try to find an equivalent title that is well accepted and understood within your industry. For example, if you work as a customer support representative supporting a specific product and your title contains the product name, you can simply list Product Support Representative on your resume. However, be careful not to exaggerate your title. Do not change your title so that it implies change in responsibility or salary level; do not change the area of the organization where you work, or change your title in a way that suggest you are directly reporting to a person in a higher position than that of your manager. Any such changes on your resume are dishonest, and will negatively impact your credibility with your potential employer.

If your title implies less responsibility than you hold, chose the middle ground option described above. List your actual title on your resume. For example, if you are a Product Support Representative but are also responsible for training new hires for your team, list your title as follows: Product Support Representative/Customer Support and New Hire Training. All you are

doing here is elaborating on your job title by including a brief description of your job function. Following this title, make sure that your resume includes power statements describing your actual job responsibilities, in order of their importance and relevance to your career title. This method is preferred because you are honest about your title, but you are also indicating to your employer that your responsibilities are slightly different than what the title implicates. When background checks and reference calls are conducted, you will not have to worry about misrepresenting your title, or causing raised questions about your credibility. Above all, your resume must be honest. Do the best you can to remain objective when it comes to your job titles and functions – focus on the positives, and you are sure to have a winning resume.