

How To Spin Typical College Side Jobs Into Legitimate Work Experiences On Your Resume - Forbes



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Throughout my four-year college education, I held a number of jobs, both during the school year and in the summers when I returned home to where I'd grown up. My roles ranged from restaurant server to writing-center staffer. I didn't intern like many of my friends, and when it came time to cobble together my first professional resume, I was initially nervous about my lack of real-world experience.

Fortunately, it didn't take me long to see how my [random jobs](#) (yes, even that one working weddings at the fancy country club) actually added up to quite a lot. As long as I figured out the right words, I could sell myself—in spite of not being able to boast of editorial internships or freelance writing gigs.



Here's the job listing:

Responsibilities:

- Drive growth by selling marketing services to small-to-medium sized employers (SMB)
- Develop relationships through phone, email, social media and professional networking
- Prospect revenue opportunities (cold call) and build a pipeline to reach quota
- Analyze and present monthly analytics reports to advertisers
- Develop account relationships and close sales quickly

Requirements:

- Bachelor's degree
- 0-2 years of experience in a sales-driven environment
- The ability to learn and apply new concepts quickly
- A metrics-oriented, competitive attitude
- Exceptional written, verbal, phone and presentation skills
- Experience with an online Client Relationship Management (CRM) system
- Passion to hunt (cold-call), educate and sell - not easily intimidated

Now that you can see what company's looking for in the ideal candidate, you can get started transforming all your previous experience into relevant bullet points that highlight all the boxes you already check off.

On-Campus Jobs

Did you eat for free in exchange for working in the school's dining services department? Maybe you served food or swiped meal cards. Maybe you even did the clean-up at the end of a shift. Or perhaps you worked as the bookstore stock person for three consecutive years? Whatever odd on-campus job you had, display it proudly on your resume—with the appropriate skills, of course. All of those miscellaneous on-campus positions require you to be reliable, something every employer wants. Team player? That's something every hiring manager looks for.

If you got paid to do janitorial or food service work, you're a person

who has a strong attention to detail and who can handle doing sometimes boring, laborious tasks; you, my friend, are resilient. Minding the bookstore register means you probably regularly called upon your problem-solving skills—remember that barcode that would not show up in the system? The economics textbook with the missing pages?—but you also had to get good and comfortable with doing stuff that didn't thrill you and not making a big deal out of it.

Know what that's called (and praised)? Adaptability? Many companies are looking not for a cookie-cutter corporate employee, but for a team member who can roll with the punches, who can try to deal with a clogged sink or pitch in when the cleaning crew doesn't show up and there's an investor meeting in half an hour. Don't underestimate the skills derived from doing an often joyless or menial job. Play it right, and there'll be pay-off.

Let's say you want that job above and you worked in food services for four years. Here's how you might tailor that part of your resume:

Food Service Worker at University of Michigan — September 2013-May 2016

- Managed 5 incoming food deliveries each week and communicated with the delivery service via phone
- Collaborated with colleagues to assign daily clean-up tasks, making sure no one had to work past his or her scheduled hours
- Learned how to operate three different kinds of registers within the first week
- Analyzed the flow of students to best prepare for busy hours and make sure everyone moved through the line quickly

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Administrative Roles

From working behind the science library desk, checking books in and out, to being a part of the campus IT team fixing computers and

tutoring students in subjects you excel in, if you held an administrative-type position during college, it's likely that you've already started fashioning a story of your skill set based on your job history. Admin roles are a bit easier to pigeon-hole as far as skill determination goes. Still, you want to make the absolute most of your work even if it does seem like being a teaching assistant is an easy sell.

Your experience assisting a college professor suggests that you're a competent researcher, sure, but it also indicates that you're attentive to details and sharp. You know how to systemize and organize data, and, what's more, if your research led to a completed project, then you've got the gumption to see a big project through to the end. This tells a recruiter that you're focused and productive.

Working as a tutor or in your university's writing center is a clear demonstration of your leadership skills. If you participated in the latter, then you, of course, can boast of your excellent written and communication skills—two things nearly all hiring managers care about. If your experience was in the IT department but you're not actually trying to get a job in IT, that's OK. Having those skills is great, but so is being able to say that you learned to multitask, figured out how to get along with a boss *and* manage your time, all while staying up on tech trends.

Again, let's look at what this would like you if you wanted the job above if the majority of your work experience is from being a writing center staff member:

Writing Center Staff at University of Central Florida — January 2014-May 2016

- Worked with more than 100 undergraduate and graduate-level students on writing assignments on a variety of topics
- Developed relationships with 25 regular writing-center students, which helped me understand their preferred writing style and voice

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- Kept detailed logs of each session and used them to work with new students who had similar writing issues
- Pushed students to excel by encouraging them to compete against themselves and make fewer and fewer errors with each new paper

Restaurant/Retail/Babysitting Roles

If you waited tables, tended bar, worked retail every holiday season or babysat for the school president's kids, you must have some killer time management skills, my friend. Everybody knows those hours are grueling and the customers (yes, I'm including small children here), at times, difficult. To go from class to study group, to your Greek house's mandatory meeting, to the most popular bistro in town, you've got to be more than just responsible; you've got to be dedicated and ambitious—and, as for how to label those transferable skills, you've got to thrive under pressure.

Restaurant work teaches you [teamwork](#), as does retail. Both also give you the skills you need to deal with challenging situations (ahem, people) without losing your cool. Tell your future boss about the time you deftly navigated the situation with the angry couple who tried to return a clearly used and nearly destroyed juicer and you'll be seen as someone who can figure a way out of even the most annoying workplace conundrums.

Babysitting, of course, is a bit of a different beast than either restaurants or retail, but there are similarities. First of all, you've got to be ready for anything. Who knows when you'll suddenly have a sick kid on your hands or have to break up a disagreement between the twins? If you've ever babysat, you know how to think on your feet. You probably have terrific [conflict resolution skills](#), and you know how to communicate with all types of people. You have sharp listening skills and you can be persuasive ([sales job](#), anyone?). Just because you can't count office internships as notches on your belt doesn't mean you can't be applying for the same jobs as people who did. It doesn't matter *how* you learned your skills; it only matters that you learned them.

Last, but not least, let's look at what waiting tables would like on your hypothetical resume:

Restaurant Server at Blue Plate Café—October 2012-April 2016

- Worked with both front-of-house and back-of-house staff to prepare restaurant for dinner service three nights a week
- Increased per-check sales by speaking intelligently and passionately of menu additions and special items conceived of by the head chef
- Greeted each new table with enthusiasm and a friendly demeanor at all times

Whatever you do as you embark upon [the job search](#), don't allow your college gigs to get in the way of your professional success—there's simply no need to. The skills and lessons you learned “before” you start your career can often be lifelong. Check out job listings, [identify the required skills in the description](#) and get started turning your seemingly random experience into a coherent work history that'll make you an asset wherever you wind up.