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## Re-ordering your CV

When was the last time you looked at your curriculum vitae, your CV, or, if you live in the US, your resume? Was it a month ago or was it a year ago? Longer still? Do you remember what it looks like?

If you are uncertain about any of these questions it may be time to take another look. You never know when you are going to need it.

In fact Bill and Michael Faust, brothers who have both pursued careers in marketing, argue that most people need to do more than simply tinker with their CVs.

In a new book, *Pitch Yourself\**, they suggest that the traditional CV needs to be dismantled and reassembled as a kind of elevator pitch - the short and punchy sales talk you would give a customer if all you had were a few seconds together in a lift. The briefest of these pitches, and one they like to quote, is the original idea for the film, *Alien*, sold to its backers as "Jaws in space".

There may well be a case for renaming the CV. Hardly anyone refers to it in the Latin any more. But I would not vote for "resume". It sounds so affected. The Faust brothers prefer to call it an EP, for elevator pitch, but that sounds like sales talk.

On the other hand, perhaps we should view our CV as a sales document. Traditionally it has been viewed as a record of career achievements and progress. The Fausts believe this view is misplaced, that the CV is very much a sales tool and can be ordered and worded far more effectively than it is at present.

"As a sales tool it tries to communicate everything. It focuses on the wrong issues as it begins from a seller's reality rather than the buyer's perspective. It is what you have done and where you have done it," they write. A more effective CV, they say, explains who you are and how you work.

Maybe it took people with a marketing background to explain all this because what they are really talking about is the competence-based CV and few people, other than human resources professionals, like to talk about competencies. The Fausts recognise that competencies - descriptions of individual traits, behaviour and skills - have invaded, multiplied and entrenched themselves across the recruitment sector. HR people love them.

A premise of the book is that, if recruiters are looking for competencies, do not make them look too hard. If you lead in your CV by describing who you are, what you can do and how you do it, it says, you may make the shortlist - and the recruiter will not need to work to tease out such information in the interview.

Competencies are not beloved by everyone. The HR profession positively wallows in them. So today you have structured competence-based interviews and competence-based job descriptions, devised from exhaustive research attempting to work out what kind of skills and traits are needed for a particular job. This has its pitfalls, says Stephen Blinkhorn, chairman of Psychometric Research and Development, a St-Alban's-based psychometric test developer. In a recent discussion at the UK's Association of Business Psychologists, he outlined three competence-based

descriptions for different types of sales job at an FT-SE 100 company.

Apart from subtle differences the wording was the same. Each job wanted the candidate to demonstrate an "ability to construct compelling value-adding propositions" and to have the "confidence and credibility to work with senior decision-makers". Not only were the descriptions heavily laden with jargon; they were very difficult to distinguish from each other. "I certainly couldn't tell them apart," says Mr Blinkhorn, who describes competence analysis as "one of those concrete operational activities we bewitch the world with".

The problem with these kinds of competencies and the way they are used in recruitment, he says, is that they "are not the assessable or measurable core skills needed to do a job. They are ways of articulating praise, or guiding aspiration, but they are useless for selecting or promoting people or designing training."

This is the problem with competencies. They can be all things to all people. That said, they have rooted themselves in HR management. They are the soft currency of recruitment, circulating around large companies and the public sector. The Faust brothers are describing not only a way to live with competencies in recruitment but also a way for candidates to make the best of them in attempting to secure a job.

So how does their elevator pitch differ from the typical CV? Both documents start with basic details - name, address, contact numbers and e-mail address. But where the traditional CV will move into education and qualifications, followed by a career history listing your jobs and achievements, the elevator pitch starts with a short personal statement - the authors call it a personal promise - like this one:

"I continually increase my ability to deal with fast-moving complex situations, whilst inspiring confidence in others around me. I have developed a solid foundation in safety procedures and people management."

This statement describes someone who works as an airline pilot. I don't know about you, but I would find that reassuring if I were looking for a commercial pilot. It tells me something beyond what I will need to see confirmed elsewhere in the CV - that the applicant is qualified to fly passenger aircraft. This kind of statement can help to differentiate candidates beyond their qualifications and previous employment history.

The next stage of this new type of CV goes on to list various abilities - what you perceive as your most important qualities in doing the job you are seeking. It may say "good communicator" and describe various instances where you have used this skill successfully. This new CV, therefore, is a living document that must change if you are seeking different types of jobs.

One danger in using the elevator pitch is that you may sell yourself beyond your capabilities. "I think it is important that you could show this to a friend and they would recognise the person as you," says Bill Faust.

The Faustus are right to suggest the traditional CV has become an arcane document - but then such documents are used to chase specific jobs that are beginning to look a bit arcane themselves. The contract they help seal with an employer is due for an overhaul too - that's another book.

\*Pitch Yourself, Stand out from the CV crowd with a Personal Elevator Pitch, by Bill Faust and Michael Faust is published by Prentice Hall Business, price Pounds 12.99.

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