

DESIGNING AND USING A PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

"One outstanding work sample is worth a thousand resume words."

Martin Kimeldorf in Portfolio Power

WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIOS?

- ❖ Career Portfolios: a collection of documents and other artifacts which illustrate the nature and quality of your day-to-day work. These might include how you increased operational efficiency, increased income, developed new systems, solved problems, improved management, promoted teamwork, improved data collection, produced reports, and completed specialized training.
- ❖ Job Search Portfolios: a selection of materials targeted to your hiring audience which illustrate the knowledge and skills you would bring to their job. These might include letters of reference or endorsements; a resume; list of accomplishments; work samples that show communication skills, people skills or technical skills; transcripts and other information on academic training; specialized certificates; and records of professional affiliations and contributions to the field. The Interview Portfolio is a subset of the Job Search Portfolio.
- ❖ Other types of portfolios include business portfolios (tools to market your business) and personal portfolios.

WHY CREATE A PORTFOLIO?

- ❖ Record of achievement and career development that goes beyond your resume: a portfolio allows you to provide vivid examples of the work you do and what you have achieved that go far beyond the words on a resume and can set you apart from other candidates for jobs and promotions.
- ❖ Creating an ongoing Career Portfolio is part of a continual upgrading of your skills and lets you see where you are strong and where your professional experience and credentials may need more work.
- ❖ "Your catalog of work samples speaks to outcomes rather than the inanimate facts and job titles listed on an application or resume." (Kimeldorf, page 34)

THE CAREER PORTFOLIO

- ❖ "The brave new world of work is evolving towards a state of constant motion, where workers are continually moving on to various projects, teams or companies. In the most basic of terms, it means you are no longer your job title, but, rather a collection of skills moving from one site to another. The portfolio becomes the perfect tool for highlighting these portable skills." (Kimeldorf, page 33)
- ❖ The Career Portfolio is an ongoing collection that documents your on-the-job accomplishments. It allows you to assess your career direction, provides evidence of your value for annual reviews or salary negotiations, provides information and documents useful in future job searches, and can be used to market your skills and services in freelance work if you find yourself unemployed.

Career Portfolio, cont.

- ❖ It is important to keep a Career Portfolio file and collect materials as you go. Look for documents or other artifacts (pictures, memos, e-mail messages, thank you notes, etc) that illustrate specific or technical skills, general or transferable skills, and work habits or important character traits (this can be a convincing way to document soft skills).

THE JOB SEARCH PORTFOLIO

- ❖ This is a subset of your Career Portfolio aimed at demonstrating your skills and abilities to a specific audience - the organizations you are targeting as you search for a job.
- ❖ **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.** Research the skills and knowledge that organizations of this type value, the problems they are facing and think about how you can document your value in this context.
- ❖ Make sure your Job Search Portfolio respects current and former employers' confidentiality.
- ❖ Write brief but clear captions for pictures and other artifacts that require explanation.
- ❖ Add numerical data where it will have impact (that may be part of your caption or in the document itself).
- ❖ **Skill-Factoring:** Understand how your skills are transferable to different settings and how your documentation shows broader skills beyond obvious content expertise. For example, organizing a large event for lobbying on environmental issues at the State Capitol involves a wide variety of communications skills, organizing skills, computer skills, teamwork skills, and knowledge of the political system. This is especially important if you are changing careers or just beginning your professional career.

THE INTERVIEW PORTFOLIO

- ❖ This is a subset of your Job Search Portfolio designed to appeal to a specific employer and to be used for a specific interview. **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.**
- ❖ Use copies, not originals.
- ❖ Select the best and most relevant of your documents. Your portfolio represents the care you'll put into your job if they hire you. You want it to show your best work and to be visually attractive. It is better to select one strong exhibit than three weaker ones.
- ❖ Keep it brief. Employers won't be able to absorb many more than 6 to 10 separate artifacts. Your final product should not exceed 25 pages and shorter is better.
- ❖ You'll want samples of technical competence and specific skills, as well as more general transferable and personality skills, plus training and education.
- ❖ "The employer will be looking to see if you truly understand what the job demands and what the organization needs from its employees in your field and at your level. The person viewing your portfolio will consciously or unconsciously note how well your portfolio artifacts relate to his or her needs." (Kimeldorf, page 63)

PRESENTING YOUR INTERVIEW PORTFOLIO

- ❖ Take your portfolio with you on informational interviews and ask for feedback. That will help you refine your selection of materials and will increase your comfort in presenting your portfolio.
- ❖ The Interview Portfolio is generally useful near the end of the process, when you've been invited for an interview. You would normally NOT send it as part of your initial application materials, but do make an employer aware that you have a portfolio and that it is available upon request.
- ❖ In the interview, whenever you are asked for evidence or examples of how you perform on the job, use the material in your portfolio to provide documentation for your answer. But NEVER attempt to narrate your portfolio page by page. Limit yourself to just those samples that apply to the question.
- ❖ "Keep your portfolio closed during most of the interview, using it only to help illustrate a point or demonstrate a particular skill or experience. However, don't be surprised if you get asked to leave your portfolio behind for examination. In fact, if you're being interviewed by a panel of people, you may discover that some of the panel members will find the portfolio a pleasant diversion from the long hours of listening to applicants." (Kimeldorf, page 66)
- ❖ "A portfolio can level the communication playing field because people who lack confidence in their impromptu verbal skills can walk in with a well-crafted portfolio that doubles as a script or interview aid." (Kimeldorf, page 64)

ORGANIZING PORTFOLIO MATERIAL

- ❖ Portfolios are usually organized by
 1. Chronological events
 2. Functional or skills categories
 3. Thematic subjects
- ❖ The latter two are often most helpful for an Interview Portfolio where you want to highlight specific skills and experiences.
- ❖ It is usually helpful to work from an outline. Major headings become sections of your portfolio.

This material was taken primarily from:

Martin Kimeldorf
Portfolio Power: the New Way to Showcase All Your Job Skills and Experiences
Peterson's, Princeton, New Jersey.