

BUILT TO LEAD CAREER SERIES

TOP 25 RESUME MISTAKES

And How to Fix Them Before You Apply

WORKBOOK

Identify the Mistakes. Strengthen Your Resume. Communicate Your Value.

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Develop People. Build Leaders. Leave a Legacy.

PART I — BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

A Message From the Founder

If you're reading this, there's a good chance you're trying to improve your resume, pursue a better opportunity, change careers, earn a promotion, or simply figure out how to communicate everything you've accomplished.

I understand how difficult that can be.

After more than 23 years of military service, I learned firsthand that having experience and knowing how to explain that experience are two very different things.

You can lead people, solve problems, manage operations, train teams, handle difficult situations, and carry tremendous responsibility — and still struggle when someone asks:

“So what makes you qualified for this job?”

That's one of the reasons I created Built to Lead Career Services.

I wanted to help people recognize the value of what they've already done and learn how to communicate that value in a way employers can understand.

This workbook isn't designed to magically get you a job.

It's designed to help you take a more intentional look at your resume, identify what's holding it back, and make it stronger.

Take your time. Write things down. Be honest about where your resume needs work.

Most importantly, don't underestimate the experience you've already earned.

Your experience deserves to be understood — not overlooked.

— Matthew Gomez

Founder | Built to Lead Career Services

PART I — BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

Why I Built This Workbook

I've reviewed resumes from people with incredible backgrounds who didn't look nearly as qualified on paper as they actually were.

The problem wasn't their experience.

The problem was the translation.

A veteran may have spent years leading teams and managing complex operations but fill a resume with military terminology a civilian recruiter doesn't understand.

A security professional may have handled serious incidents, supervised personnel, coordinated with clients, trained employees, and solved operational problems — but write nothing more than:

"Responsible for security duties."

A supervisor may have improved an entire operation but list only their daily tasks.

A recent graduate may have valuable projects, internships, education, and transferable skills but not know how to position them.

And career changers often struggle to connect where they've been with where they're trying to go.

That's why this workbook exists.

The goal isn't to make your experience sound bigger than it is.

The goal is to communicate the true value of your experience clearly.

PART I — BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

Who This Workbook Is For

This resource was designed for job seekers at different stages of their careers, including:

Veterans & Transitioning Service Members

Translate military leadership, operations, technical expertise, and responsibility into language civilian employers understand.

First Responders

Communicate decision-making, leadership, public service, crisis response, teamwork, and operational experience.

Security Professionals

Move beyond duty descriptions and demonstrate leadership, accountability, incident management, client relations, and operational impact.

Supervisors & Operations Leaders

Show the scope of your leadership, process improvements, team development, and measurable results.

Career Changers

Identify transferable skills and connect your previous experience to your next opportunity.

Recent Graduates & Emerging Professionals

Build a strong professional story even when your work history is still developing.

And ultimately:

Anyone who knows they have more to offer than their current resume shows.

PART I — BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

How to Use This Workbook

Don't simply read the 25 mistakes. Use them to audit your resume. For each mistake:

1. **Read** — Understand why the mistake can weaken your resume.
2. **Review** — Look at your current resume and determine whether you're making that mistake.
3. **Reflect** — Think about experience, accomplishments, responsibilities, or results you may have overlooked.
4. **Rewrite** — Use the workbook exercises to strengthen the section.
5. **Verify** — Make sure everything you add is accurate and something you can confidently discuss during an interview.

By the end, you should have a clear list of changes you can make to improve your resume.

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PART II

The Top 25 Resume Mistakes

Read. Review. Reflect. Rewrite. Verify.

Mistake 1: Using the Same Resume for Every Job

THE MISTAKE

Submitting one generic resume to every employer.

THE FIX

Adjust your summary, skills, keywords, and most relevant experience to match the position you're pursuing.

BUILT TO LEAD TIP: *You don't need to rewrite your entire resume every time. Focus on strategic alignment.*

YOUR TURN

List 3 job titles you're targeting. Next to each, note 2-3 keywords from those postings you should mirror on your resume.

Mistake 2: Writing an Objective Instead of Showing Value

THE MISTAKE

"Seeking a challenging position where I can utilize my skills..." — the employer already knows you're looking for a job.

THE FIX

Use a professional summary that quickly communicates your experience, strengths, and value.

BEFORE

Seeking a challenging position where I can utilize my skills and grow professionally.

AFTER (EXAMPLE)

Operations leader with 10+ years managing multi-site teams, driving process improvements, and reducing operating costs.

Illustrative example only — always use numbers you can verify and explain.

YOUR TURN

Draft your own 2-3 sentence professional summary. Lead with your identity, years of experience, and the value you bring.

Mistake 3: Using a Generic Professional Summary

THE MISTAKE

"Hardworking professional with excellent communication and leadership skills" — this could describe thousands of applicants.

THE FIX

Include your professional identity, experience level, areas of expertise, and the value you bring.

BEFORE <i>Hardworking professional with excellent communication and leadership skills.</i>	AFTER (EXAMPLE) Security operations supervisor with 8 years leading armed and unarmed teams across multi-site properties, specializing in risk mitigation and staff development.
---	---

Illustrative example only — always use numbers you can verify and explain.

YOUR TURN

Rewrite your summary so it could only describe you — not thousands of other applicants.

Mistake 4: Listing Duties Instead of Accomplishments

THE MISTAKE

"Responsible for supervising employees."

THE FIX

Show scope, responsibility, and impact.

BEFORE <i>Responsible for supervising employees.</i>	AFTER (EXAMPLE) Supervised a 20-member team across multiple locations while maintaining staffing coverage, operational accountability, and service standards.
---	--

Illustrative example only — always use numbers you can verify and explain.

YOUR TURN

Pick one bullet from your current resume that lists a duty. Rewrite it to show scope and impact.

Mistake 5: Not Using Numbers

THE MISTAKE

Leaving out the numbers that give your accomplishments context.

THE FIX

Include team size, budget responsibility, number of locations, personnel supported, projects completed, revenue generated, cost savings, or performance improvements. Never invent numbers — use only what you can support.

YOUR TURN

List 3 numbers from your career you could add to your resume (team size, budget, percentage, dollar amount, etc.).

Mistake 6: Using Weak Language

THE MISTAKE

Repeating phrases like "Responsible for...", "Helped with...", "Worked on...", "Duties included..."

THE FIX

Start bullets with stronger verbs: Led, Managed, Coordinated, Developed, Implemented, Improved, Directed, Reduced, Increased, Trained, Resolved.

YOUR TURN

Find 3 weak phrases on your current resume. Rewrite each using a stronger action verb from the list above.

Mistake 7: Failing to Show Results

THE MISTAKE

"Trained new employees." — this tells what you did, not what happened because you did it.

THE FIX

Whenever possible, connect your actions to an outcome.

BEFORE <i>Trained new employees.</i>	AFTER (EXAMPLE) Trained 15 new hires, reducing onboarding time by 30% and improving 90-day retention.
--	---

Illustrative example only — always use numbers you can verify and explain.

YOUR TURN

Pick one bullet describing an action. Add the outcome or result that followed.

Mistake 8: Including Everything You've Ever Done

THE MISTAKE

Treating your resume like an autobiography. Older or unrelated experience can distract from your strongest qualifications.

THE FIX

Prioritize information that supports where you're going next.

YOUR TURN

List any roles or details on your current resume that no longer support your target career direction.

Mistake 9: Using Too Much Industry Jargon

THE MISTAKE

Acronyms and specialized terminology may make sense to you but mean nothing to a recruiter.

THE FIX

Translate specialized language into terminology your target employer understands.

BEFORE <i>Conducted MDMP within a BCT environment.</i>	AFTER (EXAMPLE) Led the planning process for a 1,000+ person organization, coordinating logistics and mission objectives across multiple teams.
--	---

Illustrative example only — always use numbers you can verify and explain.

YOUR TURN

List 3 acronyms or jargon terms on your resume. Write the civilian, plain-language version of each.

Mistake 10: Not Translating Military Experience

THE MISTAKE

Listing titles, acronyms, units, and military terminology without explaining the scope and business value of what you actually did. Don't erase your military experience — translate it.

THE FIX

Explain the scope and business value of your role in terms a civilian employer understands.

BEFORE <i>Platoon Sergeant, 1-1 IN</i>	AFTER (EXAMPLE) Supervised and mentored a 40-person team, overseeing training, logistics, and daily operations in high-pressure environments.
--	---

Illustrative example only — always use numbers you can verify and explain.

YOUR TURN

Translate one military title or duty from your resume into a civilian-facing description of scope and value.

Mistake 11: Ignoring the Job Description

THE MISTAKE

Not studying what the employer actually values before applying.

THE FIX

Study the required and preferred qualifications, repeated terminology, technical skills, leadership expectations, systems and tools, and major responsibilities — then make sure your resume clearly demonstrates the qualifications you genuinely possess.

YOUR TURN

Paste 5 key phrases from a job posting you're targeting. Check off which ones your resume already reflects.

Mistake 12: Missing Important Keywords

THE MISTAKE

ATS systems and recruiters look for relevant terminology — if it's missing, you may get filtered out even when qualified.

THE FIX

If a posting repeatedly references skills you have, your resume should say so naturally. Don't keyword-stuff — speak the employer's language.

YOUR TURN

List 5 keywords from a target posting that should appear naturally somewhere in your resume.

Mistake 13: Making Your Resume Hard to Scan

THE MISTAKE

Burying your current role, qualifications, skills, or dates inside dense, disorganized formatting.

THE FIX

Recruiters should be able to quickly locate your current/recent roles, major qualifications, skills, employers, dates, education, and certifications. Clear organization matters.

YOUR TURN

Have someone glance at your resume for 6 seconds. Ask them to tell you your current title and top skill — if they can't, revise the layout.

Mistake 14: Overdesigning Your Resume

THE MISTAKE

Complex graphics, excessive colors, decorative fonts, charts, and icons can distract from your qualifications — and may break some ATS systems.

THE FIX

For most traditional applications, clean beats flashy.

YOUR TURN

Review your resume for graphics, tables, or design elements that could confuse an ATS. List anything to simplify.

Mistake 15: Using Inconsistent Formatting

THE MISTAKE

Inconsistent fonts, font sizes, spacing, bullet styles, date formats, capitalization, or alignment can make a resume feel unfinished.

THE FIX

Pick one font, one date format, and one bullet style — and apply them consistently throughout.

YOUR TURN

Scan your resume top to bottom. Note any formatting inconsistencies you find.

Mistake 16: Writing Huge Blocks of Text

THE MISTAKE

Dense paragraphs force a recruiter to dig for your qualifications.

THE FIX

Use concise bullets and intentional spacing to make important information easier to find.

BEFORE <i>I was responsible for a wide range of duties including managing staff, overseeing daily operations, handling scheduling, resolving customer concerns, and ensuring all safety protocols were followed at all times.</i>	AFTER (EXAMPLE) - Managed daily operations and staff scheduling for a 15-person team - Resolved customer concerns, maintaining a 95% satisfaction rating - Enforced safety protocols across all shifts
--	--

Illustrative example only — always use numbers you can verify and explain.

YOUR TURN

Find one paragraph-style block on your resume. Break it into 3 concise bullets.

Mistake 17: Using an Unprofessional Email Address

THE MISTAKE

Your email address is part of your professional presentation.

THE FIX

Use something simple and professional — typically a variation of your name.

BEFORE coolguy87@email.com	AFTER (EXAMPLE) matthew.gomez@email.com
--------------------------------------	---

Illustrative example only.

YOUR TURN

Check your resume's email address. Is it a simple, professional variation of your name?

Mistake 18: Including Unnecessary Personal Information

THE MISTAKE

Adding age, marital status, Social Security number, full street address, or a photograph to a U.S. private-sector resume.

THE FIX

Include only contact and professional information relevant to the application.

YOUR TURN

List anything on your current resume that falls into this category and should be removed.

Mistake 19: Failing to Proofread

THE MISTAKE

Typos, missing words, inconsistent punctuation, and incorrect dates can damage an otherwise strong resume.

THE FIX

Check it more than once, then have someone else review it.

YOUR TURN

Read your resume out loud, line by line. Note anything that sounds off or unclear.

Mistake 20: Exaggerating Your Experience

THE MISTAKE

Claiming certifications, responsibilities, accomplishments, software proficiency, or results you cannot support.

THE FIX

Strong positioning is good. Inventing experience isn't. Your resume should make your experience look its best without misrepresenting it.

YOUR TURN

Review each claim on your resume. Could you confidently explain and support every one of them in an interview?

Mistake 21: Forgetting Relevant Certifications and Training

THE MISTAKE

Leaving off credentials that could strengthen your candidacy.

THE FIX

Include certifications, licenses, professional development, and specialized training when they support the target position.

YOUR TURN

List every certification, license, or credential you hold that's relevant to your target role.

Mistake 22: Using Outdated or Irrelevant Skills

THE MISTAKE

Filling valuable resume space with skills that no longer serve your career direction.

THE FIX

Prioritize current skills that employers in your target field actually need.

YOUR TURN

List 3 skills to remove from your resume, and 3 current skills to add in their place.

Mistake 23: Failing to Show Career Progression

THE MISTAKE

Listing job titles flat, without showing the growth behind them.

THE FIX

If you moved from employee → supervisor → manager, make that progression easy to see. Leadership growth is an accomplishment.

BEFORE <i>Team Member (2018) / Supervisor (2020) / Manager (2022)</i>	AFTER (EXAMPLE) Promoted twice in 4 years — from Team Member to Supervisor to Manager — based on consistent performance and leadership growth.
--	---

Illustrative example only — always use numbers you can verify and explain.

YOUR TURN

Describe your own career progression in one sentence, highlighting any promotions or expanded responsibility.

Mistake 24: Failing to Answer "Why You?"

THE MISTAKE

Leaving an employer unclear on what you do well, what problems you solve, and why you're relevant to this position.

THE FIX

After reading your resume, an employer should understand what separates you from other applicants.

YOUR TURN

In 2-3 sentences, answer: What do I do well? What problems can I solve? Why am I relevant to this role?

Mistake 25: Hitting Submit Without a Final Check

THE MISTAKE

Submitting without a last review of targeting, keywords, accomplishments, formatting, and accuracy.

THE FIX

Run through the final checklist at the end of this workbook before you apply.

YOUR TURN

Before moving on, name one change you're committing to make on your resume this week.

PART III

Putting It Into Practice

Hands-on exercises to rebuild the weak spots you just identified.

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Resume Accomplishment Builder

Turn ordinary job duties into stronger, accomplishment-focused statements. For each row, start with a duty from your current resume, then build it out.

Current Duty	Action Verb	Scope / Numbers	Result	New Accomplishment Statement

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Know Your Numbers

Identify measurable scope you can add throughout your resume.

Team size(s) I've managed or worked within: _____

Budget(s) I've been responsible for: _____

Number of locations, sites, or accounts: _____

Projects completed: _____

Customers or personnel supported: _____

Improvements or cost savings I've driven: _____

Other measurable scope: _____

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Action Verb Builder

Replace passive, overused resume language with stronger, more intentional verbs.

Weak Phrase (Current)	Stronger Action Verb	Rewritten Bullet

Strong verbs to draw from:

Led • Managed • Coordinated • Developed • Implemented • Improved • Directed • Reduced • Increased • Trained • Resolved

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Military-to-Civilian Translation Exercise

Translate titles, terminology, responsibilities, and accomplishments — without minimizing your service.

Military Title / Term	Civilian Translation	Business Value / Scope

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Job Description Decoder

Pick one job posting you're targeting and break it down.

Required qualifications: _____

Preferred qualifications: _____

Repeated terminology / keywords: _____

Tools, systems, or software mentioned:

Leadership expectations: _____

Likely business need behind this role: _____

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Keyword Matching Exercise

Compare your actual qualifications against the terminology used in the target posting.

Keyword From Posting	Do I Have This?	Where It Appears on My Resume

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Professional Summary Builder

Develop a concise summary around four building blocks:

WHO YOU ARE: _____

WHAT YOU DO WELL: _____

YOUR EXPERIENCE: _____

THE VALUE YOU BRING: _____

MY FULL PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Skills Inventory

Sort your skills into the categories below.

Technical Skills: _____

Leadership Skills: _____

Operational Skills: _____

Systems & Software: _____

Certifications: _____

Industry Knowledge: _____

Transferable Skills: _____

PART III — PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

See It In Action: A Worked Example

Meet Jordan Reyes — a fictional candidate used here to walk through the Built to Lead method from start to finish. Every detail below is illustrative only.

1. DUTY (ORIGINAL BULLET)

"Responsible for security operations at multiple sites."

2. SCOPE / NUMBERS (EXAMPLE)

Oversaw a 12-person security team across 4 sites protecting an estimated \$2M in assets. (Illustrative only.)

3. RESULT (EXAMPLE)

Reduced incident response time by 20% and improved compliance audit scores across all sites. (Illustrative only.)

4. FINAL ACCOMPLISHMENT BULLET

"Supervised a 12-person security team across 4 sites, reducing incident response time by 20% and improving compliance audit results." (Example — illustrative only.)

5. PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY LINE

"Security operations supervisor with 6+ years leading multi-site teams, specializing in risk mitigation, compliance, and staff development."

6. KEYWORD MATCH

Jordan compared this resume against a target job posting:

Keyword From Posting	Present in Resume?	Where It Appears
Team Leadership	Yes	Bullet, Summary
Multi-Site Operations	Yes	Bullet, Summary
Compliance	Yes	Bullet
Risk Mitigation	Yes	Summary

PART IV

The Built to Lead Resume Audit

Score your current resume, category by category.

PART IV — THE BUILT TO LEAD RESUME AUDIT

Resume Audit & Scorecard

Rate your current resume from 1-5 in each category:

Professional Presentation.....	_____ / 5
Professional Summary.....	_____ / 5
Target Position Alignment.....	_____ / 5
Relevant Keywords.....	_____ / 5
Accomplishment Statements.....	_____ / 5
Quantifiable Results.....	_____ / 5
Leadership & Responsibility.....	_____ / 5
Skills & Qualifications.....	_____ / 5
Formatting & Readability.....	_____ / 5
Grammar & Accuracy.....	_____ / 5
TOTAL SCORE.....	_____ / 50

WHAT YOUR SCORE MEANS

- **45-50** — Strong. Fine-tune and target for specific roles.
- **38-44** — Competitive, but needs refinement in a few key areas.
- **30-37** — Needs improvement. Revisit several sections before applying.
- **Below 30** — Rebuild recommended. Start with Part II, mistake by mistake.

MY THREE BIGGEST AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

PART V

My Resume Action Plan

Turn everything you just identified into concrete next steps.

PART V — MY RESUME ACTION PLAN

My Resume Action Plan

CHANGES I NEED TO MAKE IMMEDIATELY

INFORMATION I STILL NEED TO GATHER

ACCOMPLISHMENTS I NEED TO QUANTIFY

SKILLS OR CERTIFICATIONS I NEED TO ADD

MY TARGET POSITION

THREE QUALIFICATIONS THAT MAKE ME COMPETITIVE

BEFORE YOU SUBMIT

Final Pre-Submission Check

- ☐ Resume is targeted toward the position
- ☐ Contact information is correct
- ☐ Professional summary communicates value
- ☐ Most relevant qualifications are easy to find
- ☐ Bullets demonstrate accomplishments — not only duties
- ☐ Numbers are included where appropriate
- ☐ Specialized terminology has been translated when necessary
- ☐ Relevant keywords appear naturally
- ☐ Skills match my actual abilities
- ☐ Certifications and education are accurate
- ☐ Dates are consistent
- ☐ Formatting is clean and professional
- ☐ Spelling and grammar have been reviewed
- ☐ File name is professional
- ☐ I can confidently explain everything on this resume during an interview

THE BUILT TO LEAD RULE

Don't just list what you did.

Show the value of what you did.

Your resume isn't your entire career story.

It's the introduction.

Its job is to make an employer want to learn more about the person behind the experience.

Be accurate. Be intentional. Know your value.

And make sure the person reading your resume can see it too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR**Matthew Gomez**

Founder | Built to Lead Career Services

Matthew Gomez is a retired U.S. Army and Army National Guard leader with more than 23 years of military service and extensive experience in leadership, human resources, personnel management, operations, training, readiness, and team development.

Throughout his military career, Matthew served in leadership positions ranging from Platoon Sergeant and human resources leadership to First Sergeant, where he was responsible for developing people, managing complex personnel and operational requirements, and leading teams through demanding environments. This included 14 years as a Senior HR Manager for the California Military Department, supporting more than 14,000 personnel and helping lead the implementation of a major Army HR system transformation.

Today, Matthew continues to lead in both supervisory and entrepreneurial roles — overseeing operations in a supervisory capacity in the private sector while building and running his own veteran-owned business as a founder and CEO.

After transitioning from military service, Matthew continued working in leadership and public-facing operations while experiencing firsthand one of the challenges many veterans and experienced professionals encounter:

Knowing you have valuable experience but struggling to translate it into language employers understand.

That experience became part of the foundation for Built to Lead Career Services.

Today, Matthew uses lessons from military leadership, human resources, operations, supervision, hiring practices, career development, and his own transition experience to help others better communicate what they bring to the table.

His work focuses especially on helping veterans, first responders, security professionals, supervisors, operations leaders, career changers, and other professionals turn real-world experience into clear professional value.

Matthew is also an author and founder of Built to Lead Publishing, and volunteers annually as a mentor with Royal Family KIDS Camp, providing trauma-informed support to foster children.

His philosophy is simple:

Experience matters. Leadership matters. But you have to communicate both.

ABOUT BUILT TO LEAD CAREER SERVICES

Built to Lead Career Services

Built to Lead Career Services was created around a simple belief:

Your experience deserves to be understood — not overlooked.

We help professionals translate their experience into language employers understand while building stronger resumes, interview strategies, professional brands, and career plans.

SERVICES

- Resume Reviews & Development
- Resume Optimization
- Career Coaching
- Interview Preparation
- LinkedIn & Professional Branding
- Job Search Strategy
- Veteran Career Transition Support

LEARN MORE

BuiltToLeadCareer.com

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BEFORE YOU GO

You've completed the workbook.

Now comes the important part:

Use it.

Don't leave your notes sitting on these pages.

Update the resume. Research the position. Quantify the accomplishments.

Translate the experience. Proofread everything. Then apply.

You don't need to become someone different to compete for your next opportunity.

You need to become better at communicating the value of the experience you've already earned.

NEED ANOTHER SET OF EYES?

Built to Lead Career Services can review your completed resume and help turn what you identified in this workbook into a stronger final document.

BuiltToLeadCareer.com • Matthew@BuiltToLeadCareer.com

LEAD YOUR CAREER. BUILD YOUR FUTURE.

BUILT TO LEAD CAREER SERVICES