

“Show Me the Proof”

MINNEAPOLIS CAREER COACH'S PORTFOLIO TOOL HELPS JOB SEEKERS BACK UP THEIR RESUME AND INTERVIEW CLAIMS WITH TANGIBLE EVIDENCE

By Peter Vogt

There was a point several years ago when former corporate recruiter and now Minneapolis career coach and trainer Rick Nelles just couldn't listen to one more job candidate's hollow claims.

“After 20 years of recruiting and interviewing job candidates, I'd heard it all,” writes Nelles, president of Minneapolis-based Career Directions, in his book, *Proof of Performance: How to Build a Career Portfolio to Land a Great New Job*. “One day, this particular candidate [we'll call him Bill] was telling me the same old story I'd heard a thousand times before. He was listing great accomplishment after great accomplishment and bragging about what a great salesperson he was.”

But Nelles, like hundreds of other recruiters and company hiring managers before him, had been burned on occasion by candidates who had talked a great game in their interviews but hadn't been able to back up their words when they were actually on the job. So he made a snap decision: He wasn't going to take it anymore. And, in a scene reminiscent of Rod Tidwell's “Show me the money!” diatribe in the movie *Jerry Maguire*, Nelles interrupted the candidate he was interviewing – “before he could launch into his next

scripts, work samples, and other “proof of performance” materials – to back up the claims they were making on their resumes and in their interviews. And he knew, with his unique perspective on what hiring managers want and need from job candidates, that he could develop the career portfolio concept – through writing, group seminars, and one-on-one coaching with job hunters and career changers – in a way few others could.

That's exactly what he's done over the last five years. His *Proof of Performance* book was named best interviewing book of 2000 by nationally syndicated careers columnist Joyce Lain Kennedy, and it has helped hundreds of job seekers learn how to develop their own career portfolios. His “Proof of Performance Career Portfolio System” (which consists of the book, a high-quality portfolio binder, and instructional materials, as pictured on left) offers job seekers a “complete package” of tools intended to help them outshine their competitors and win more job offers. His newly developed seminars (the next one will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, August 6, at Southdale-Hennepin County Library, see calendar on page 14 for more info) are designed to cover, in a small-group setting, the basics of career portfolio development and usage.

And his individual coaching sessions with a variety of clients have shown them – and, often, the employers they meet with – just how valuable a career portfolio can be, both for one's job interviews and one's own self-awareness and self-confidence.

“That's really one of the beauties of the career portfolio: It's a job-hunting tool, yes, but it's also a tool that can help you identify or recognize your own skills and accomplishments,” Nelles says. “That's important, because most of us are so close to our own skills and accomplishments that we often don't even see them in ourselves. Yet we have to know what they are, and be able to document them, if we're going to have success, not only in job interviews but also

in the rest of our daily lives. Seeing – in writing – what other people say about your positive traits impacts your self-confidence, big time.”

Nelles now spends his days – and often his evenings as well – teaching people about the career portfolio concept. Most of his “students” are job seekers, naturally. But increasingly, he's finding a receptive audience among hiring managers and human resources professionals as well.

“We've been surveying employers, informally, to get a sense of how they feel about portfolios, since many job seekers who are interested in developing career portfolios naturally wonder what employers think of the concept,” Nelles says. “Most of the

WHY USE A CAREER PORTFOLIO?

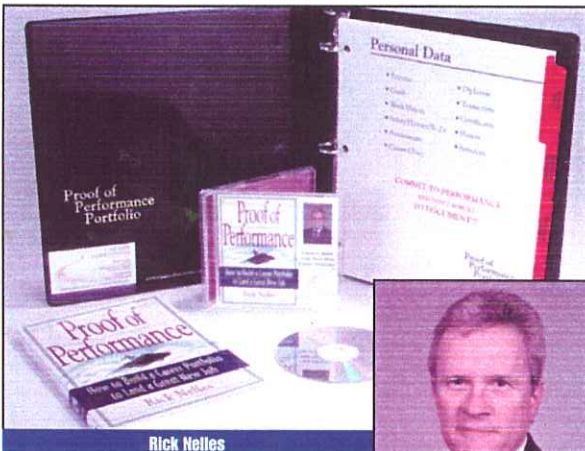
If you're looking for a job or changing careers right now, you might be wondering – rightfully so – whether it's worth your time, money, and energy to develop and use a career portfolio. The short answer is “definitely!” according to Rick Nelles, an expert on career portfolios and author of the book *Proof of Performance: How to Build a Career Portfolio to Land a Great New Job*. Nelles offers three specific ways you'll benefit from creating and using a career portfolio:

- **Examples Beat Mere Words.** “Anyone can say anything on their resume or in interviews, and hiring managers know it,” Nelles says. “If you've got a portfolio to back up what you're saying, you'll stand out from the candidates who have only words alone.”

- **You'll See What You've Done.** “Most people discount or fail to even recognize their own skills and accomplishments,” Nelles says. “By going through the process of developing a career portfolio, you'll soon begin to see just how many skills you have and how many good things you've done. And you can then communicate those skills and accomplishments to employers more effectively.”

- **You'll Have a Great Presentation Tool.** “A career portfolio is an inverted person's dream,” Nelles says. “If you struggle during presentations of any kind, it's always helpful to have a ‘prop’ or two to help guide you. Your career portfolio can be that ‘prop.’ It does the talking for you.” “And if you think using a portfolio may be too much like ‘bragging,’” Nelles stresses, “you're wrong. To paraphrase Walter Brennan: It ain't braggin' if ya done it!”

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Rick Nelles

self-aggrandizing litany” – and nearly shouted ... “Show me the proof!!!”

“Bill immediately took on the ‘deer-in-the-headlights’ look,” Nelles notes. “Stunned, he stammered, ‘Uh ... well ... I don't have any actual proof.’ His lame explanations of why he had no proof had all the validity of the old ‘my dog ate my homework’ excuse. Bill left the office, realizing his bluff had been called, and I sat back in my chair with a great sense of relief that I had not subjected my client to this impostor and liar.”

This particular interview with this particular candidate may have been a short-term failure for Nelles. But in many ways, it was the beginning of a unique new career path for him. He soon began to realize that most of the best candidates he'd ever encountered had used *career portfolios* – professional binders filled with written commendations, photographs, certificates, tran-

employers we've talked to see portfolios as valuable in several ways: They can help make interviews more efficient by giving job candidates a way to present their skills and accomplishments more concisely and effectively; they tell employers that the person who has a career portfolio is serious about his or her career and about getting the job in question; and, of course – perhaps most importantly of all from the employer's perspective – they offer at least some form of proof to back up whatever claims a job candidate is making on his or her resume or in the interview.”

Nelles finds his new work challenging at times, particularly when he talks with job candidates or employers who are completely unfamiliar with the career portfolio concept. But he says the struggles are more than outweighed by the feedback he gets from job hunters who have successfully won the jobs they've wanted, and employers who don't have to rely totally on what job candidates say on their resumes or in their interviews.

“Once people understand this idea fully – and we're reaching more of them every day through the book, the seminars, the individual coaching sessions, and our Web site (www.career-directions.com) – they see that the career portfolio is a tool whose time has definitely come,” Nelles says. “And the best part about it, for me, is that it gives me the opportunity to help people see how unique they are as they pursue their goals. There's nothing better than that.”

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