

4 Inside Secrets to Writing a Great Cover Letter

Don Goodman; November 22, 2010; careerealism.com

Let's agree you should always send a cover letter, it's just the professional thing to do. Nonetheless, statistics show 50% of employers don't read them and the others scan it in 5-10 seconds. That being said, how do you craft a cover letter that quickly captures their attention?

First of all, let's agree the ONLY purpose of the cover letter is to get someone to want to read your resume. It is NOT a recap of your resume or a short story of how you moved from job to job. Since employers spend only a few seconds glancing at your letter, it should be short, easy to read (using bullets) and compelling.

Here's a typical scenario: an employer has over 700 resumes to weed through, each with a cover letter. They pick up the next letter and it says, "I am writing in response to your advertisement #5444 regarding your Project Manager position." Pretty boring...and you just missed your chance to grab their attention. So let's look at how you can instantly make them want to know more.

Trick #1

A great trick is to start by thinking what the best candidate in the world would deliver. For example, for sales people, employers want to hear about setting sales records (over achieving quota), expanding the customer base, and earning customer loyalty. For project managers, employers want to see a consistent track record of delivering projects on time and with a high level of quality. For manufacturing, the key metrics are productivity, safety, quality and cost improvements. So tell them in your first sentence you can deliver these things.

"I have over 15 years of experience leading manufacturing operations to new heights in productivity, profitability and safety."

"Setting new sales records, growing market share and turning mediocre performers into superstars briefly describes what I can do for your firm."

"I have over 10 years of experience leading highly visible, complex projects and have earned a solid reputation for meeting aggressive deadlines and bringing internal/external customer satisfaction to new heights."

Get the idea? You just told them you can deliver exactly the results they are looking for.

Trick #2

Most people send the same basic cover letter to all firms. Employers are really impressed when you show that you know something about their organization. So demonstrate your knowledge and put in a line that shows you've done your homework.

Example: "I've followed your company for a number of years and I imagine that with your opening a new plant in Atlanta, you will need someone who is experienced in plant startups." "With your recent acquisition of XYZ, I'm sure you can benefit from someone who has extensive HR experience managing the integration of new personnel and corporate cultures."

Wow! So far, you've told them you are a star performer who can deliver exactly what they want and that you are experienced in meeting some of the specific challenges that their organization faces. Now prove it.



Trick #3

Here is where you put in 2 to 5 bullets that prove you can deliver results. Bullets make the letter easy to read and simple for you to customize by swapping some bullets in for others depending on what they want. Here, you'll want to quantify your accomplishments as much as possible.

Example: "I have been assigned to numerous turnarounds and surpassed expectations in each instance. As Plant Manager at 1 of the largest component manufacturers in the United States, I reduced overtime 30%, increased productivity 18%, grew quality 11% and slashed accidents by 33%."

"I have 12+ years of solid sales experience at such firms as IBM, Oracle and Sun Microsystems, and achieved top ranked performance in every position. My achievements include delivering as much as 440% of sales targets and ranking in the Top 5 every year for the past 8 years."

Trick #4

You've proved you are a superstar (and even if you're not, you should think like one), so now is the time to bring it home. Your closing paragraph should indicate that they should read your resume, that there is a lot more to know, and you will be calling them in a few days to find out more about the position.

There are a lot of important concepts here – yes, you will call them and no, you will not just ask them if they got your resume, but instead will demonstrate your strengths and knowledge by asking insightful questions that indicate you are truly interested in this position. Employers notice people who call and this is your opportunity to build rapport with the decision makers who hold the key to your dream job. Follow these simple tips and you will definitely make yourself stand out.