

## Cover Letters

**T**oo many job seekers spoil their chances by submitting generic “To Whom it May Concern” cover letters hastily churned from word processing templates, saying nothing more than the advertised job attracted their interest and they are enclosing their resume for consideration, anxiously awaiting a reply.

A letter like this will neither catch the recruiter’s attention nor invite the reader to flip the page and look at your resume, regardless of how exceptional your resume might be.

When submitting applications, the first thing the hiring manager sees is the cover letter - not your resume - so invest time and energy personalizing each letter to make it an eye-catching introduction and invitation to read your resume.

Here are a few tips that will help your letter stand out when compared with the hundreds of others.

- ▶ Make every effort to learn the hiring manager’s name, honorific, and title.

### NAME

If the recruiter’s name was not listed in the job posting:

- Check the company’s website.
- Call the company’s main telephone number and ask the receptionist for the hiring manager or appropriate human resource manager’s name.
- Leverage your network.

**A real name makes your application more personal and effective compared to a letter addressed to a nonspecific individual.**

When you learn the name, verify the correct spelling; don’t insult Shawn by addressing your letter to Shaun, or Karl by referring to him as Carl.

### HONORIFIC

The standard honorific of Mr. or Ms. will work for most letters, but find out if the hiring manager has any distinguishing designations. Is it Doctor, Dean, Professor, Councilman, Assemblywoman, Sergeant, or another honorific? This is especially true if you are submitting an application to an educational institution, government agency, or comparable establishment.

And if you are addressing a letter to Chris Smith and are unsure of Chris’ gender, simply write, “Dear Chris Smith.”

### TITLE

Lastly, verify the hiring manager’s title - while there may be little difference in your mind between Chief Technology Officer and Chief Information Officer - showing that you took the time to learn the company’s lingo demonstrates your interest in the hiring organization.

If all efforts fail and you must resort to the generic “*To Whom it May Concern*” salutation, consider a more direct alternative such as “*Dear Investment Banking Recruiter,*” or “*Dear Human Resources Director.*” “*Dear Hiring Manager*” also works, but leans on the nebulous side.

- ▶ While you will want to keep the letter short, finding out more about the company and including a quick aspect relevant to the position will give the hiring manager a positive impression that you are interested in the job AND the company.
- ▶ Open with a powerful statement of how the organization can achieve their goals by hiring you.

Regardless of what you think, it’s about them - NOT you.

Consider the following replies to a newly created accounting manager position to spearhead the upcoming move from GAAP to IFRS (International Financial Reporting Standards):

#### **WEAK OPENING:**

*“I am writing to apply for the IFRS Accounting Manager position I saw listed on your website.”*

#### **POWERFUL OPENING:**

*“Though U.S. corporations will not be required to switch to IFRS for another few years, your decision to create a new position now to begin analysis for the upcoming shift from GAAP is prudent. My solid experience with GAAP, together with several years of IFRS experience, can definitely help your organization assess the requirements needed for this cutover and plan this initiative in detail.”*

.....then give convincing examples about how you can help THEM.

- ▶ Use significant anecdotes to draw the reader’s attention to related achievements on your resume, or highlight qualifications pertinent to the position that may not be on your resume.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is to regurgitate their resume in their cover letter almost word-for-word.

#### **RESUME:**

*“Consistently met quarter-end close deadlines with complete balance sheet reconciliation in full compliance with GAAP and internal company policy.”*

#### **COVER LETTER:**

*“One of the strengths I will bring to your organization is my ability to design a consolidation process that will allow you to continue to meet quarter-end disclosure deadlines based on my experience with the differences between IFRS and GAAP consolidation models.”*

- ▶ Focus on how you meet the employer’s needs without overusing the word, “I.”

While you do have to mention a few of your key achievements in relation to the position, avoid starting too many sentences with “I.” This can give the perception of being insensitive to the needs of the hiring organization.

*“I did this.....I did that.....I did.....”*

- ▶ Make the connection between your skills and achievements as they relate to the core requirements of the job.

Congratulations if you consistently exceeded budget targets in each of the past ten years, but how does this relate to the primary activities in designing, planning and managing the transition from GAAP to IFRS? Leave the discussion of this accomplishment for the interview, not the cover letter.

**Cover letters are marketing tools to demonstrate that you have thought specifically about where and how your skills and experience match the CORE requirements of the job.**

- ▶ End on a polite note and, where possible, show initiative by including an action on your part.

Thank them for their consideration, but heed the wording in the job posting when tempted to close with, *“I’ll contact you in a week to follow-up and provide additional information about myself if necessary.”* Most job postings are one-way invitations, so be careful about being perceived as pushy.

© Dennis Abenanty: 2008