

The Not-So-Effective Cover Letter

Here's a newsflash: Cover letters work, plain and simple. This is why I'm intrigued by the fact that a) jobseekers rarely submit them and b) hiring managers seldom read them. As a result, I started asking questions. Specifically, "What's your problem with cover letters?" Here's what I found out.

Jobseekers claim all the pertinent information is included in the resume. Translation: "I don't know how to write an effective cover letter so I just scrap it." Hiring managers say cover letters serve no purpose. Translation: "Jobseekers don't know how to write an effective cover letter so I'd just as soon not be bothered."

Top 3 Reasons Most Cover Letters Don't Work

1. The one-size-fits-all method

Hiring managers are extremely jealous. Although they are aware you are courting other companies, they want to know that you at least care enough to hide it.

Solution: Avoid form letters. Instead, customize each letter with the hiring organization and the position in mind. Here's an example.

"With over nine years of HRIS and human resources experience, I have had the opportunity to contribute strong, sustainable improvements within the HR functions, particularly in areas of systems development, implementation, and maintenance.

When I read the job description posted on your corporate website, I was immediately drawn to the similarity between your requirements and my experience. In particular, I meet your prerequisite for an HRIS Specialist who has the ability to train end users effectively in a variety of applications and processes. From my enclosed resume, you will note that I approach end-user training with a patient, diligent manner."

2. I want, I need, I must have. Me, me, me...

That is the approach many candidates take when writing their own cover letter. This self-centered approach, without a doubt, backfires every time.

Solution: Focus the letter on how you can benefit the hiring organization. Here's an example.

"The following are examples from two different employers that illustrate my ability to integrate time and cost-saving solutions for the HRIS infrastructure:

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For XYZ, I implemented an entirely new HRIS system that affected data and records for 25,000 team members, expediting processes by converting our applications to Lawson as the company grew at a breakneck pace.

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For ABC, I eliminated a slow moving manual process and developed a system from the ground up that processed commissions for 700 people, leading to a reduction of three processing days per month."

3. Taking a "pretty please" approach

No one wants to hire a desperate jobseeker.

Solution: The tone of the cover letter must be kept on a professional level. Here's an example.

"In addition to technology and problem solving skills, what I also offer is the ability to create and maintain data tables, structures, files, interface requirements, and data integrity protocols for ongoing administration."

Cover Letters Can Win Job Interviews

Persuasive, targeted, and commercial like cover letters fare well. And that is exactly what a cover letter is - a commercial, starring your experience.