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Four Types of Cover Letters

There are four types of cover letters. The examples that follow will show you which fits your situation.

The General Cover Letter

Here is an example of a general cover letter. It has been created using the sample phrases listed earlier in this book (note the highlighted text). You, too, can write a dynamite cover letter with a word processor by using the old "cut and paste" technique. Then all you have to do is make the minor adjustments necessary to personalize each document. (This letter should be sent as a result of direct research.)

JAMES SHARPE

18 Central Park Street ♦ Anytown, NY 14788
(516) 555-1212

October 2, 19—

Jackson Bethell, V.P. Operations
DataLink Products
621 Miller Drive
Anytown, CA 01234

Dear Jackson Bethell,

Recently I have been researching the leading local companies in data communications. My search has been for companies that are respected in the field and who provide ongoing training programs. The name of DataLink Products keeps coming up as a top company.

I am an experienced voice and data communications specialist with a substantial background in IBM environments. If you have an opening for someone in this area, you will see that my resume demonstrates a person of unusual dedication, efficiency, and drive.

My experience and achievements include:

- The complete redesign of a data communications network, projected to increase efficiency company-wide some 12 percent.
- The installation and troubleshooting of a Defender II call-back security system for a dial-up network.

I enclose a copy of my resume, and look forward to examining any of the ways you feel my background and skills would benefit DataLink Products. While I prefer not to use my employer's time taking personal calls at work, with discretion I can be reached at (213) 555-1212 to initiate contact. Let's talk!

Yours truly,

Jma rfla/ /)-e

James Sharpe

The Executive Briefing

Here is a variation on the traditional cover letter. Called an executive briefing, this kind of letter gets right to the point and makes life easy for the corporate recruiter. Only those who read the *Knock 'em Dead* books know about this technique.

Why send an executive briefing? It's often the weapon of choice because:

1. The initial resume screener might have little understanding of the job or its requirements.
2. Your general resume invariably needs customizing for any specific job. (Overly broad resumes are like "one-size-fits-all" clothes—one size usually fits none.)
3. Your resume is somewhat (or more than somewhat) out of date and you have to send something out immediately to take advantage of the opportunity of a lifetime.

Also worth considering: resume screeners like people who make life a little easier for them.

Based on my extensive experience on both sides of the desk, I developed the executive briefing to increase the odds of your resume getting through to the right people.

How can the executive briefing help you through the screening and multiple interview cycle? To answer this we must begin by acknowledging a painful fact. Your resume, by definition, has drawbacks. It is usually too general to relate your qualifications to each specific job. More than one person will probably be interviewing you, and when this happens, the problems begin.

A manager says, "Spend a few minutes with this candidate and tell me what you think." Your general resume may be impressive, but the manager rarely adequately outlines the job being filled or the specific qualifications he or she is looking for. This means that other interviewers do not have any way to qualify you fairly and specifically. While the manager will be looking for specific skills relating to projects at hand, the personnel department will be trying to match your skills to the vagaries of the job-description manual, and the other interviewers will flounder because no one told them what to look for. A chain of events like this, naturally, could reduce your chances of landing a job offer.

The executive briefing, which supplements the resume, solves this problem with its layout. It looks like the following:

JAMES SHARPE

*18 Central Park Street ♦ Anytown, NY 14788
(516) 555-1212*

October 2, 19—

Dear Sir/Madam:

While my resume will provide you with a general outline of my work history, my problem-solving abilities, and some achievements, I have taken the time to list your current specific requirements and my applicable skills in those areas.

Your Requirements

1. Management of public reference, etc.
2. Supervision of 14 full-time support employees.
3. Ability to work with larger supervisory team in planning, budgeting, and policy formation.
4. ALA-accredited MLS.
5. 3 years' experience.

My Skills

1. Experience as head reference librarian at University of Smithtown.
2. Supervised support staff of 17.
3. During my last year I was responsible for budget and reformation of circulation rules.
4. ALA-accredited MLS.
5. 1 year with public library;
2 with University of Smithtown.

You will see that my attached resume provides further in-depth background. I hope this will enable you to use your time effectively today.

Sincerely,

Y Me & rk /) e

James Sharpe

An executive briefing sent with a resume provides a comprehensive picture of a thorough professional, plus a personalized, fast, and easy-to-read synopsis that details exactly how you can help with an employer's current batch of problems.

The executive briefing assures that each resume you send out addresses the job's specific needs and that every interviewer at that company will be interviewing you for the same job.

The use of an executive briefing is naturally restricted to jobs you have discovered through your own efforts or seen advertised. It is obviously not appropriate when the requirements of a specific job are unavailable.

The Broadcast Letter

The broadcast letter is a simple but effective variation on the cover letter. Much of the information will be culled from your resume, because the intent of the broadcast letter is to *replace* the resume. You would be well advised here to conduct an in-depth analysis of your background in much the same way you would for a resume (see chapter 4). A broadcast letter can often get you into a telephone conversation with a potential employer, but that employer is usually likely to request a proper resume before seeing you anyway.

You should also know that broadcast letters are most frequently used by mature, successfully established professionals.

Beware: if you don't *have* a resume, you might well have to fill out one of those dreadful application forms. This requires putting your background in the format the employer wants—not the package of your choice. Consequently, I do not advise using this kind of letter as the spearhead or sole thrust of your campaign. Rather, you should use it as an integral part of the campaign in one of these ways:

- For small, highly targeted mailings to specific high-interest companies, where it works as an effective customizing technique.
- For small, highly targeted mailings to specific high-interest jobs about which you have enough detailed knowledge that such a letter would supersede the effectiveness of your resume.
- As an initial thrust, but with the more traditional cover letter and resume already in place for a back-up second mailing. In practice, the cold-mailed broadcast letter often results in a request for a resume, and other times results in a telephone interview and subsequent invitation to a face-to-face interview—with the request that you bring a resume.
- As part of a multiple-contact approach where you are approaching a number of people within a company with personalized letters (see chapter 6).
- As a back-up approach when your cover letter and resume don't generate the response you want from individual target companies.
- To headhunters. Broadcast letters rarely get passed on to employers without your permission.

Here is what a typical broadcast letter might look like:

JANE SWIFT

*18 Central Park Street, Anytown, NY 14788
(516) 555-1212*

October 2, 19—

Dear Employer,

For the past seven years I have pursued an increasingly successful career in the sales profession. Among my accomplishments I include:

SALES

As a regional representative, I contributed \$1,500,000, or 16 percent, of my company's annual sales.

MARKETING

My marketing skills (based on a B.S. in marketing) enabled me to increase sales 25 percent in my economically stressed territory, at a time when colleagues were striving to maintain flat sales. Repeat business reached an all-time high.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Following the above successes, my regional model was adopted by the company. I trained and provided project supervision to the entire sales force. The following year, company sales showed a sales increase 12 percent above projections.

The above was based on my firmly held zero price discounting philosophy. It is difficult to summarize my work in a letter. The only way I can imagine providing you the opportunity to examine my credentials is for us to talk with each other. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Swift

Jane Swift

Employment Agencies and Executive Recruiters

You might as well know something about headhunters right from the onset. The best way to get the attention of headhunters is to give them the respect they deserve. They are, after all, the most sophisticated salespeople in the world—they and they alone sell products that talk back!

A headhunter will be only faintly amused by your exhortations "to accept the challenge" or "test your skills by finding me a job" in the moments before he or she practices hoops with the remains of your letter and the trash can. They don't have the time or inclination to indulge such whimsical ideas. So with headhunters—whether they are working for the local employment agency, contingency, or retained search firm—bear in mind these two rules and you won't go far wrong:

1. Cut to the chase.
2. Tell the truth. Answer questions truthfully and you will likely receive help. Get caught in a lie and you will have established a career-long distrust with someone who possesses a very diverse and influential list of contacts.

"I am forwarding my resume, because I understand you specialize in representing clients in the _____ field."

"Please find the enclosed resume. As a specialist in the _____ field, I felt you might be interested in the skills of a _____"

'Among your many clients may be one or two who are seeking a person for a position as a _____'

Remember that in a cover letter sent to executive search firms and employment agencies, you should mention your salary and, if appropriate, your willingness to relocate.

Here is an example of a cover letter you might send to a corporate headhunter:

JAMES SHARPE

*18 Central Park Street ♦ Anytown, NY 14788
(516) 555-1212*

December 2, 19—

Dear Mr. O'Flynn:

As you may be aware, the management structure at _____ will be reorganized in the near future. While I am enthusiastic about the future of the agency under its new leadership, I have elected to make this an opportunity for change and professional growth.

My many years of experience lend themselves to a management position in any medium-sized service firm, but I am open to other opportunities. Although I would prefer to remain in New York, I would entertain other areas of the country, if the opportunity warrants it. I am currently earning \$65,000 a year.

I have enclosed my resume for your review. Should you be conducting a search for someone with my background at the present time or in the near future, I would greatly appreciate your consideration. I would be happy to discuss my background more fully with you on the phone or in a personal interview.

Very truly yours,

2eS/criff/PAO

James Sharpe

JS
enclosures