



Essential Cover Letter Writing Tips for Senior Managers and Executive Applicants

By Yoon Cannon

Downsizing, re-orgs, and company buy-outs have affected thousands of accomplished executives who now suddenly find themselves looking for their next big career job. For many of you, ten, fifteen or even twenty years may have passed since you have had to compile your achievements into a resume or whittle them down to a few paragraphs for a cover letter. Remember that jobs don't land in your lap without a selling yourself in an interview. Your phone doesn't just ring with interviews calls without selling yourself on your resume. Most importantly, resumes don't get read without selling yourself in the cover letter. It may only be a few paragraphs, but don't overlook the cover letter's importance. Be prepared to spend some time on a well-crafted piece.



In the past 17 years I have interviewed over 15,000 applicants for a wide variety of positions to staff five different companies. That means I have read more than 25,000 cover letters. Let me share with you some pet peeves to avoid as well as strategies on how to set yourself apart as the right candidate for a senior level management or executive position.

Here are 8 key tips on writing an effective cover letter:

1. Present yourself professionally. Here is a refresher checklist on the basics:

- a. **Spell my name and the company's name correctly.** Keep in mind that the person reading your cover letter sees both names spelled correctly thousands of times a week, so when it is misspelled it shouts sloppy.
- b. **Proofread your letter.** Consider hiring someone to check your writing if spelling and grammar are not your forte.
- c. **Include all of your contact info on the cover letter.** Make it simple and easy for your contact to look up how to reach you.
- d. **Address me by name** and not "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Personnel Director". The latter is impersonal and generic.
- e. **Use quality stock resume paper.** Presentation is always valued.
- f. **Use standard fonts.** Stick with Times Roman font or Arial. Keep you letter in 12 pt. Any other font style or size makes your letter more difficult to read.
- g. **Don't forget the John Hancock.** Sometimes people do actually forget to sign their names on the cover letter.

2. Be brief. I don't have time to read essays. Get to the

point in a few sentences.

3. **Tell me what job posting you are applying for.** Don't make me have to read through and guess which of my openings your resume is intended for. I'll either toss the resume or I'll guess with great annoyance.
4. **Present your best strengths and accomplishments as they pertain to the job opening.** Tell me in your cover letter why you would be the best candidate for the job. Draw attention to a specific accomplishment or skill you have that my company would be interested in. Think in terms of the position you are applying for.
5. **Set yourself apart.** Remarkably, these four simple ideas have not been routinely included in the 25,000+ cover letters I've read.
 - a. **Avoid overused terminology.** If I had a dollar for every time I read the same adjectives I would be a quarter million dollars richer. Overused terms are phrases like: team builder, goal-oriented, results driven, and team player. Although they are all good qualities to have these adjectives won't help you stand out since they are the same ones every one else is using.
 - b. **Compliment something specific about my company.** I want to fill positions with people who are fans of our company's products, services, accomplishments, philosophies, leadership, culture and values. Choose something specific that you are genuinely impressed with. If you want someone to like you, you should express why you like them first.
 - c. **Appeal to what you can do for us.** I have often tossed resumes because the cover letters had a tone of high demands and high expectations. I want workers and key players who add value to our company. I don't need the divas.



Executive Career Feature

d. **Tell me why you are interested in our company.** I don't want the highest qualified candidates if they show up to work with indifference. I want people who want to be here. Attitude matters.

6. Don't embellish. Present your best strengths in factual terms. Don't exaggerate the truth. I don't appreciate having to translate the fluffy language into what the text really means.

7. Don't devalue your achievements. Embellishing would be serving up McDonald's Big Macs on pristine, ivory Lenox dishes centered onto shiny, gold charter plates. On the flip side, devaluing yourself would be serving exquisitely prepared filet mignon on a child's Sesame Street paper plate. Strike a balance with your wordsmithing. Your accomplishments required a unique blend of your special gifts, talent, skill, training and experience. Your cover letter needs to communicate how your one-of-a-kind product (you) is what their company needs.

8. Don't use a one-size-fits-all cover letter approach. Make sure your letters are tailored to the specific position and company you are applying for. Often times, applicants will write their cover letter positioned to the first job opening they apply for. Then they will go and use that same letter for

the subsequent 20+ submissions. However, much of the time the language in the first cover letter doesn't necessarily flow with all of the other job postings from different companies. If you choose to make your cover letter generic enough to be written once and used often then it will never be specific enough to stand out and get noticed.

About the Author:

Yoon Cannon is President and CEO of Paramount Business Coach. Ms. Cannon specializes in working with entrepreneurs and executives who want to take their companies beyond the Million Dollar Milestone. Prior to PBC, Ms. Cannon has successfully started 4 other companies, 3 of which were sold in a thriving and profitable condition. Throughout her career she has personally interviewed over 15,000 applicants, trained 4,000+ people, and developed over 30 upper level managers. Yoon works one-on-one with clients, conducts E-courses, tele-seminars, live seminars, workshops and speaks at conferences. She has delivered over 650 business workshops and has been the speaker for 475+ motivational speeches. Ms. Cannon first began business coaching in 1992 and now offers consulting services to help entrepreneurs and executives grow their bottom line, grow their organizations and grow their people. For more info visit: www.paramountbusinesscoach.com

EmploymentCrossing is the largest collection of active jobs in the world.

We continuously monitor the hiring needs of more than 250,000 employers, including virtually every corporation and organization in the United States. We do not charge employers to post their jobs and we aggressively contact and investigate thousands of employers each day to learn of new positions. No one works harder than EmploymentCrossing.

Let EmploymentCrossing go to work for you.