

Articles That Can Assist You in the Job Search

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▶ Cover Letters that Sell

COVER LETTERS THAT SELL... Generate More Calls for Job Interviews

The importance of a strong cover letter cannot be over emphasized, especially in today's very competitive economic climate. It is critical that the letter be focused and show to an employer what you are looking for, what you can offer to the organization, your knowledge of the organization and what the organization can offer to you, in other words why you have chosen them specifically.

Some steps in constructing your cover letter:

Research Before You Write.

The more you know about the employer's needs, the more compelling your letter can be. Review company Web sites, brochures, sales flyers and other promotional materials to glean pertinent information. If possible, speak with current employees to get the inside scoop. Search newspaper archives, public libraries and career-center resources. Do a keyword search using the company name and see what turns up.

Determine Your Unique Selling Points.

With the knowledge that you have about the employer, how would you help achieve organizational goals? Set yourself apart: If there are 100 other applicants vying for the same position, why should the hiring manager take a chance on you? Write a list of the top five reasons why you're an excellent candidate.

Constructing Your Letter

Heading/Date/Inside Address If you are writing a traditional (not email) letter, select a standard business-letter format such as block style. Your letter's design should match your resume in style and choice of paper.

Salutation

It's best to address your letter to a specific person (e.g., "Dear Mr. Srinivas"), and there is almost always a way to find a name if you are resourceful! But, in those cases that you simply cannot find a name, it is good to use a title such as "Dear Hiring Manager" or use "Dear Search Committee:" if the decision will be made by committee. Avoid stale salutations such as "Dear Sir/Madam:" and "To Whom it May Concern."

Opening Paragraph

People in the position of hiring are busy and do not care to wade through fluff. Your opening paragraph should clearly state the position for which you're applying. Include a reference code if requested and the referral source (e.g., recommendation from a current employee, Monster, etc.). Your opening may also include a synopsis of why you are a top candidate for the position.

Body

Your letter's body contains the sales pitch. This is your chance to outline the top reasons why you're worthy of an interview. When writing the body text, keep in mind that hiring managers are self-centered -- they want to know what you can do for them, not learn about your life story. Demonstrate how your credentials, motivation and track record would benefit their operation. Review your top five selling factors (the ones you jotted down when doing your company research) and weave them into the body of the message. Back up achievements with specific examples of how your performance benefited current and former employers. Keep your letter positive and upbeat. This is not the place to write a sob story about your employment situation. Put yourself in the hiring manager's shoes -- would you call yourself in for an interview?

Closing Paragraph

Your final paragraph should generate a call for action, so express your strong interest in an interview and state that you will follow up soon to confirm your resume was received and discuss the possibility of meeting face-to-face.

Complimentary Close and Your Name

End with a professional close such as "Best regards," "Sincerely" or "Respectfully yours"

 **Electronic Resume Tips****Sending via Email****1. Read the listing carefully to make sure you are responding as requested!**

If you email the person who sent the listing, when the job or internship announcement says to email or call or fax someone else, this is a sure way to get labeled as someone who is not careful, doesn't pay attention to detail, and cannot follow directions! The person who receives this errant email is likely to quickly and simply delete your message.

2. ASCII format.

When sending your resume via email, you need to have it in ASCII format. Make sure it doesn't wrap oddly or have unsupported characters (i.e. bullets and others). Best to keep the width to 65 characters wide . To make information stand out, use CAPITAL LETTERS, *surround it with asteriks*, or *+ Add a "+" or "*" before a phrase that would otherwise be bulleted.

3. Send in text of email, not as an attachment.

Recruiters may not take the time to go get your attachment. Also, some systems don't handle attachments well. Lastly, some organizations are refusing to accept attachments because of the danger of viruses.

4. Include a cover letter.

Send cover letter and resume in one file.

5. An objective and highlights of qualifications section on resume can help the reader get the most important information quickly.

6. Use the advertised job title and/or job number as the subject of the email message.**▶ 10 Cover Letter "Don'ts" to Avoid**

Your cover letter is the first thing employers see when they open your materials. Avoid these 10 mistakes, and make your first impression a lasting one.

Don't Overuse "I."

Your cover letter is not your autobiography. The focus should be on how you meet an employer's needs, not on your life story. Avoid the perception of being self-centered by minimizing your use of the word "I," especially at the beginning of your sentences.

Don't Use a Weak Opening.

Job seekers frequently struggle with how to begin a cover letter. What results is often a feeble introduction lacking punch and failing to grab the reader's interest. It is critical to "speak" to the potential employer and let them know that you are very much in touch with who they are, what they actually do, and how you see yourself fitting in to the fray. It's a "selfish" industry in that every employer when reading a cover letter & resume will ask themselves "how does this benefit me?"

Don't Omit Your Top Selling Points.

A cover letter is a sales letter that sells you as a candidate. Just like the resume, it should be compelling and give the main reasons why you should be called for an interview. Winning cover letter strategies include emphasizing your top accomplishments, your understanding of the organization and what you are offering for them.

Don't Make It Too Long or Too Short.

If your cover letter is only one or two short paragraphs, it probably doesn't contain enough key information to sell you effectively. If it exceeds one page, you may be putting readers to sleep. Keep it concise but compelling, and be respectful of readers' time.

Don't Repeat Your Resume Word-for-Word.

Your cover letter shouldn't just regurgitate what's on your resume. Reword your cover letter statements to avoid dulling your resume's impact. Consider using the letter to tell the potential employer something they do not know about you and your connection with their organization and the position within. Be personal and be concise.

Don't Be Vague.

If you're replying to an advertised opening, reference the specific job title in your cover letter if one is mentioned. The person reading your letter may be reviewing hundreds of letters for dozens of different positions. Make sure all the content in your letter supports how you will meet the employer's specific needs and that there is a strong intentionality behind your application.

Don't Forget to Customize.

If you're applying to a number of similar positions, chances are you're tweaking one letter and using it for multiple openings. That's not the first recommendation we would offer as it is critical that you are customizing each one. When using a "template" or some common form among many letters remember to not forget to update the organization, job, and contact information -- if Mr. Srinivas is addressed as Mrs. Sriram, they won't be impressed!

Don't End on a Passive Note.

Put your future in your own hands by being proactive and with a promise to follow up. Instead of asking readers to call you, try a statement like: "I will follow up with you in a few days to answer any preliminary questions you may have." In the meantime, you may reach me at (040)-(0000000).

Don't Be Rude.

Remember that someone is reading your letter, if they do choose to actually do so, at the expense of doing something else so your cover letter should thank the reader for their time and consideration.

Don't Forget to Sign the Letter.

It is proper business etiquette (and shows attention to detail) to sign your letter, preferably in black pen. However, if you are sending your cover letter and resume via email or the Web, a signature isn't necessary.

▶ Recruiters' Top 10 Resume Pet Peeves

Here are the top 10 pet peeves from organizational recruiters and some advice in effectively helping towards eliminating them from your resume:

1. Spelling Errors, Typos and Poor Grammar

Of course, you want to use spell check, but that won't catch every mistake. "Manger" is a correctly spelled word, but it means something very different from "manager." Be sure to pay close attention to those buzzwords related to your field. Read and re-read your resume many times and give it to a friend to read as a fresh set of eyes may catch something you have missed over and over.

2. Too Duty-Oriented

"If you're using the company's job description, you're missing the point of your resume," says Paul Schmitz of Hufford Associates. Recruiters already know what the job is; your resume should highlight your accomplishments in that position. Schmitz advises you show what you've really done by outlining the process, outcomes and results that are specific to you.

3. Inaccurate Dates or None at All

Recruiters need to know when you worked where to get a better understanding of your working history and to use the dates for background checks. Missing dates or gaps, especially for long periods of time, could send up a red flag, and the resume may be discarded as a result. Include specific ranges in months and years for every position. If you do have gaps, explain them either in your cover letter or introduction, but not in

your resume. It always helps to continue your education and training and to list any volunteer work during a slow period. Listing these under education or volunteer work should explain some of the gaps.

4. Inaccurate or Missing Contact Information

You create a resume for one reason: To get a phone call for an interview. How can someone contact you if the phone number is missing a digit or your email address is incorrect? Be sure every resume you send has your correct contact information, including name, phone number, email address and street address. This needs to be easy for recruiters as they will not look you up or chase you down but instead, simply move on to the next candidate... especially in this economic climate where the competition is strong.

5. Poor Formatting

Different typefaces, underlines, boxes, italics, etc... may look nice on paper, but if the resume needs to be scanned, they can cause confusion. Recruiters suggest keeping your resume in plain text and keeping the frills to a minimum. The content is the important factor in getting you the interview!

6. Functional or Chronological Resumes

Whenever possible, recruiters advise you go with a chronological resume and focus on the skills and accomplishments that pertain to the job you're seeking. But if you're concerned about a past or recent layoff, be assured that as unemployment is quite prevalent, recruiters regard it quite differently today and with less of a stigma as they have in recent years past. Most people in "slower" times find it is helpful to do something to keep their work [skills] going. This learning of new tools and information is useful to help fill in the gaps and it may benefit in the networking arena too...!

7. Long Resumes and...

8. Long Paragraphs

Most recruiters and hiring managers are bombarded with applications and solicitations. Many will simply say they do not have the time to read them thus it has to be an easy read, focused and with relevance to the potential employer. Focus on the skills and accomplishments that directly apply to the job you're trying to get. Every word counts so don't dwell on the specifics of each job, but rather the highlights specific to you and their transferability.

9. Unqualified Candidates

You may want a job, but if you don't have the skills and experience needed, recruiters will feel you're wasting their time. Look at the job description. Be sure to highlight the skills they are looking for with the text or descriptions of events from your past.

10. Personal Information Unrelated to the Job

With the limited time recruiters spend on your resume, you don't want to distract them with your age, height, weight and interests unless they're directly related to the work you want to do. You need to make the link between what a recruiter needs and what you bring to the table. Anything personal that is not directly linked to the position takes away from the point of the resume.

▶ 6 Tips to Optimize Your Resume

1. Renew Often.

If you are using an online resume service such as Monster or eExperience it is important to keep it up to speed by proofreading and refreshing every month or so. One of the most popular ways hiring managers search or store resumes is by the date they were posted. Keep your resume updated by renewing it at least once every 30 days. Having outdated information can be erroneous or obsolete in terms of relevance for a position being applied for.

2. Target Your Resume.

When a resume is received by a hiring manager if the resume is vague or lacking in direct focus it will be at a disadvantage. It is important to "speak" the language of the organization and industry in the text and descriptions. You want to make sure you are speaking TO the potential employer and connecting your past with their goals and mission. Some resumes by necessity will need an objective or a "headline statement." This is basically a one sentence statement making your intentions evident. Typically this can be done when a resume is asked for exclusive of a cover letter.

3. Maximize Your Keywords.

One of the best ways to increase the number of hits your resume receives is to include an abundance of industry keywords. Do some research on keywords that might be used to find someone with your talents. Search jobs on Monster or some other search engine or job posting board to get an idea of what credentials hiring managers value. Then look for places in your resume where you could incorporate these keywords. The Skills section is a great place to include keywords that don't appear elsewhere in the document.

4. Show that You Care About a potential Employers' Needs.

If you have outlined your wants and needs, revise your objective to show the benefits you offer potential employers. Speak in the language that makes it very evident to your potential employer that you understand where THEY are coming from and what is important in their world. Make it known you understand their challenges and what they do for a business and/or service.

5. Proofread.

Employers are immediately turned off by resumes with typos. Many employers will discard a resume that contains even one error, so thoroughly proofread your resume. Email it to yourself and open the file in a program with good spell-check capabilities. Then show your resume to a writer, teacher or colleague with excellent proofreading skills to make sure it is perfect. Show it to anyone that can distance themselves and will be able to pick up on an error that may be obvious to a new reader, but "hidden" to you as you have been writing the document and have read right over it many times.

6. Invest in Your Resume.

Yes, spending a little money on your resume can improve it. Make sure it is sent through a laser printer and on a quality resume paper (available at most stationary or College stores). Remember that anywhere in the process you may try to cut a corner, the next applicant may have not and then they are at an advantage and no matter how you try to get around the fact, this is a VERY competitive process.

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Job search

▶ Building a Successful Job Search

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL JOB SEARCH CAMPAIGN

1. Clarify Your Focus

Analyze your interests, values and skills in order to determine positions or careers that incorporate them. (Attend a workshop, meet with a career counselor, visit our website, take self-assessment tests, etc). This is the single most important thing you can do! Identify what skills you are 'marketing' and what skills you want to develop. Thoroughly research the careers and industries to which you are applying. Determine the direction your search will take.

2. Apply Directly to Relevant Employers

Be sure to obtain the name, title and telephone number of the person most likely to be doing the hiring- i.e. the manager of a department or president of a small company (CareerSearch is very effective for this). Learn all that you can about that company (product/service, performance, hiring policies, etc).

Remember, most employers do not recruit on college campuses. Different industries recruit at different times of the year, and may use a variety of strategies. Many expect you to contact them directly, but it is important that you clearly articulate what type of work you are seeking and what you can offer the employer.

3. Look into Small Businesses

Small companies are where most new jobs are being created. Nine out of 10 jobs will be in companies who haven't carved out a market niche, are globally competitive and rarely recruit on campus. Look for firms where the rate of growth and profitability is 40% or more and that have long-term market prospects. Find mutual funds that are included in the "Aggressive Growth" category, and look for companies in your field of interest.

4. Consider Temporary Employment

Your exposure to various work responsibilities, work environments, and career professionals can assist you in defining your interests/career choices. Temp agencies can be a good way to get experience and network an area or region for future employment possibilities. These experiences also give you exposure that could lead to full-time employment. A Successful Job Search = Clarity, Confidence, and Connection

▶ Networking In 10 Easy Steps

For many, the mention of the word "networking" conjures up unsettling images of uncomfortable situations where hundreds of people are exchanging business cards, making small talk and angling for a chance to ask that all-important question: "So, who do you know in my field?"

Even the most extraverted people may not get excited about this process, but it's especially painful for those that may be less comfortable with the whole ordeal of making contacts. Many who prefer to talk to people one on one and are more sensitive about personal boundaries. But the good news is it's possible to network in a more comfortable and structured way that's respectful of people.

Is networking crucial?

Yes. Networking is crucial for your career, but it doesn't have to mean cold calls or awkward conversations with strangers. Here are some tips that will come in handy, whether you're exploring a new field of interest, researching an organization or looking for references that might help propel your chances: Start with friends and family: Make a long list of friends, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors, coworkers, your daughter's basketball coach, etc. Assess the list and prioritize whom you'll contact.

Try setting up informational interviews with friends of friends:

The friend in common will be a good topic for an icebreaker when you meet or speak on the phone.

Do your research:

Interviews and screening conversations are less stressful if you're prepared. Make sure you do your homework on a company before you meet with one of its executives to find out about the business or opportunities. You will not be at a loss for what to say, you will feel more confident, and the more prepared you are, the more likely the meeting will be productive.

Use the contacts you didn't realize you already had:

Perhaps you already belong to a group, whether it's a volunteer organization or a book club, and you can start to build contacts there. You never know what contacts may be just a conversation away from you already.

Take advantage of local networking events:

Some organizations, like local Chamber of Commerce groups, offer breakfast meetings or other structured networking events that provide a more relaxing and comfortable environment in which to connect. It's easier to enter a room for the purpose of networking when you know everyone else is doing the same thing.

10 Easy Steps to networking:**1.) Telephone Calls**

Every day, you call people. You call friends and family so naturally, you don't even recognize you're networking with them. Next time you call friends or colleagues, realize you're not wasting valuable time -- you're networking. Exploit it.

2.) Snail Mail

Daily mail crosses your desk, yet rarely do you think of it as networking. Gathering information is part of networking. Newspapers, magazines, newsletters, flyers, etc., are there to keep you updated on activities, trends and issues in your field. These publications are resources to tap for hidden job markets. In between the lines of articles are the names of individuals, organizations and new opportunities you can't find in

want ads. Next time you're tempted to toss a company newsletter, take time to read it. You may be surprised by the contacts and leads you can harvest from it.

3.) Email

It's so much a part of everyone's routines, no one really thinks about it. You begin your days responding to clients, coworkers or friends. Email is a great way to stay in touch and tap people for information, favors and even jokes. Take time out for email, just as you do for phone calls. It's a great way to say hello and network with colleagues. Make a point to ask what's going on in their organization or field. Drop a hint about your plans or thoughts.

4.) The Internet

You might not think of the Internet as a networking tool. Just as the mail brings information, the Internet links you to both information and organizations. And it's one of the low-risk places to start networking. You needn't talk, just learn. You can research companies, job opportunities and salaries. Even if you're not job hunting, go online to find out about the competition, like which organizations are hiring and for what.

5.) Message Boards and Chat Groups

While you're logged on, it's an easy step to join message boards and chats. These types of resources are another low-risk way to network. Sign on anonymously and ask about specific concerns. Lots of people find support this way, and they also find comfort in the anonymity. If you're out there looking but don't want your boss to know, this is a great way to get leads and contacts without revealing your identity.

6.) Professional Associations

If you're not a member of a professional group, you should be because it's a great place to start networking. It will happen easily as you meet your peers at functions. You'll also discover the added bonus of drawing people to you. This happens naturally as you participate, run for office, accept leadership roles, serve on committees or give presentations. Greater visibility not only makes networking comfortable but also draws people to you, adding to your career development and stature.

7.) Religious Affiliations

Similarly, religious affiliations work like professional groups and provide the advantage of working with people who share your values. Religious activities also provide opportunities for visibility, leadership and peer mentoring.

8.) Continuing Education

Taking courses in your field or special interests is a great way to meet peers and leaders in your discipline. Here's another opportunity to expand your network. All it takes is a little time before or after class to chat with classmates and professors. Or stay in touch by email.

9.) Social/Leisure-Time Groups

Lots of people fail to look at social events as opportunities to network. They'll often turn down invitations to holiday parties, celebrations or fund-raising dinners, thinking they are wastes of time. Instead, these functions prove to be the best networking opportunities, because people are relaxed and in festive moods. They'll often be more

likely to respond to you in these types of situations. Next time, accept that invitation and nurture your relationships with people.

10.) Political Groups

Nobody networks like politicians. When all else fails, remember who pays your representatives' and senators' salaries. You do. So why not tap their staffs for the information you need? Generally they'll respond within 72 hours.

Comfortable networking means connecting with people who know and care about you or want to get to know you. Once you recognize this, your work and social activities will prove to be an integral part of your networking efforts. As you pay attention to everyday opportunities, you'll take time to say hello to coworkers and keep in touch with former professors and classmates, as well as folks you've met at professional meetings and conferences. In the process, networking will become part of your comfortable routine rather than some dreaded task for job hunters.

▶ 10 Commandments of the Job Search

A Successful job searcher is a thoroughly prepared job searcher and this is what can effectively provide for an effective job search. Two of the most important outcomes of the job search is not simply finding employment, but finding employment you are satisfied with. Follow the straight and narrow of these ten commandments and you just might find yourself on the path to employment that you actually enjoy.

1. Thou Shalt Maintain a Positive Frame of Mind

Nothing is gained by a defeatist attitude except getting nervous. RELAX.

2. Thou Shalt Decide on the Type of Job Desired

Decide on some basic prerequisites before applying. Identify the type of job desired, location, salary range, etc. Never sell yourself short. Have confidence in your abilities. Apply for all jobs you await and jobs for which you are qualified, as well as some whose stated qualification may be at a slightly higher level than yours.

3. Thou Shalt Develop a Resume and Credentials

A good resume is the key to making a successful first contact.

4. Thou Shalt Be Efficient

Keep all correspondence sorted and readily accessible through use of a check list or file system.

5. Thou Shalt Send Personalized Letters

Show your interest in that particular job opportunity. Use specific names. Gear the letter to the interests of that firm/organization.

6. Thou Shalt Use Thy Contacts

Contact everyone who might be aware of job openings and is in a position to help you. This includes family friends, former employers, administrators, professors and students. People are willing to help, but first they must be asked.

7. Thou Shalt Make Full Use of Career Services

Visit the Career Development Center. We have many resources to help you in constructing your materials, identifying interests, developing your approach and getting connected. You may also think about accessing alumnae through the Alumnae Association.

8. Thou Shalt Use Professional Organizations

Every professional position usually is associated with a professional organization. These organizations have conferences and in many instances placement services or positions being posted for job hunters. Use them.

9. Thou Shalt Leave NO Stone Unturned

Make use of every conceivable source for finding job vacancies and assistance. Write to people and organizations. Visit libraries. Read periodicals and company literature. Visit work sites, take advantage of internships and lecture series.

10. Thou Shalt Go Back to Commandment #1

Believe in yourself. You are a person with definite competencies and with a uniqueness to offer the world. Without this positive attitude, the rest of the commandments are, in the first analysis, meaningless. Let the world know you are ready after years of schooling and preparation to take on challenges and responsibility. This is an exciting time of your life. Relax and enjoy the learning and adventure of the search!

Interview preparation

▶ Do Your Homework Before the Interview

With employers controlling the labor market, candidates have to give it their all when preparing for interviews. And that includes mounting a broad and deep search for relevant information about the position, the organization, the industry and even the interviewer. Luckily for you, diverse resources, many of them free or cheap and available on the Internet, enable you to achieve that competitive edge if you're willing to put your nose to the grindstone -- or computer monitor.

Employers' Web Sites

Your prospective employer's corporate Web site is the best place to see the company as it wants to be seen. Do check out that annual report, but also look for a "press room" or "company news" page that links to recent news releases. As you mull all this information, consider how the open position, as detailed in the job posting, relates to the organization's mission. But don't stop there. Use the company site's search facility to query the names of the hiring manager and any others on your interview dance card. You may retrieve bio pages or press releases that give you insight into their most visible activities at the company. "Learning about the interviewer is probably the most valuable thing you can do," says Ron Fry, author of 101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions.

Research Sources

Next, get some vital statistics and independent perspectives on your prospective employer. Hoover's Online, for one, provides capsule descriptions, financial data and a list of competitors for thousands of large corporations. Your 401k or mutual fund account with a major broker likely provides more detailed research on publicly traded companies and industries, free of charge.

News Sources

Now broaden your perspective and see what general-interest and business publications and Web sites are writing about the employer and its industry. You can find a wide range of media outlets at NewsLink or magazines such as Business Week. Search national publications for news on major organizations; use hometown newspapers to learn about small businesses and how big businesses interact with their local communities.

Trade Journals

You can find an incredible amount of relevant information in various trade journals related to the industry of choice. You can target and learn about the context of an organization and its place within its industry by looking at trade journals and other specialized publications. It helps to get a few months of the relevant trade journals and brush up on recent history of the industry. You're going to find out about new products, services and "word on the street" about where the organization is within its industry. You may find hard copies of trade journals at university or public libraries. Some journals are available for free or by subscription through their own Web sites; the full text of thousands more is available through periodical databases 1.

Industry Directories

By now, you've probably got some very specific issues regarding the employer and your potential role there. Go directly to the grapevine by making contact with other workers at your target organization or elsewhere in the industry. If you yourself belong to a professional organization, go to its directory to learn more. If you don't belong, consider joining a professional organization or association that is related to your interests.

Google/Yahoo/Alta Vista, etc...

Finally, if you hope to have a company wanting you, you have to wow them first. Researching various search engines you just might come up with a nugget you would have missed otherwise. While you're at it, make sure you and the interviewer are on the same page in that you need to be prepared to talk about yourself and everything on your resume. If your potential employer is savvy, they'll be doing everything they can to get all the information on you as you are hopefully doing on them.

▶ Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing is a largely overlooked process, because it is misunderstood. In an informational interview, you are seeking leads and information regarding an industry, a career path or an employer by talking to people you know or who have been referred to you. Informational interviews are very effective as they are a way to meet an employer with nothing on the line and really show them you are interested and with great initiative. But before you run out and begin informational interviewing, you have to do your homework. Follow these 10 tips to prepare:

1. Identify the Information You Want.

Deciding which position, company or industry you want to learn about will depend on what you want to do with your life and career. You should have a sense of what is important to you and what you want.

2. Make a List of People You Know.

Choose those who can help you with sources within a company or an industry. Since this is part of networking, you will want to include anyone and everyone you know, from your barber to your sister-in-law.

3. Make the Appointment.

Set up a 15 to 30-minute interview with the person identified, regarding his specialty. Most people will be more than happy to help you. Don't get discouraged if you find some people are just too busy to give you an appointment.

4. Plan an Agenda for the Session.

This is your meeting. Don't assume the person will give you the information you need unless you ask the right questions. Select questions that will give you the most information. Be efficient and do not overstay your welcome.

5. Conduct Yourself as a Professional.

Dress and act the role of the position you are seeking. Know as much as possible about the company before the interview so you can ask informed questions.

6. Show Interest.

A little flattery goes a long way. Say something like, "Mary gave me your name and told me you're considered to be an expert in your field. How did you get started?"

7. Be Prepared to Answer Questions About What You're Looking For.

Have a short personal statement prepared that you can present if you're asked about your job search. Bring a resume, but don't offer it unless requested. Remember, the purpose of this interview is to obtain information.

8. Get Names.

Ask for other contacts in the field. If no names are suggested, be grateful for information or suggestions obtained.

9. Send Thank-You and Follow-Up Letters.

Thank the person at the conclusion of the interview, but also send a letter stating your gratitude for the time given. Stay in touch with your contacts by writing notes or emails, informing the person how helpful his suggestions have been to you.

10. Take Advantage of Any Referrals You Receive.

In this process, you will have to take risks and stretch beyond your comfort zone. Each step will take you closer to that job offer.

The informational interview is a source of power you can use to your advantage. With preparation, listening and follow-through, you will find the power of people helping each other.

▶ Second Interviews and What to Expect

Good news: You've been invited back for a second interview! You did well on your first interview and hopefully followed up with a well thought-out thank-you letter. The second interview invitation is a very strong step in that usually it is indicative that they think you are quite qualified for the position with the second round being more an opportunity for them (and yourself) to clarify the "fit."

Many times the second round involve going to "their house" and walking the halls of the very culture you may be entering. Do you feel you've already covered everything in the first interview? How will this interview be different? How can you prepare for the second round?

What to Expect

This means you are considered an excellent candidate for the position. Bear in mind that second round interviews can and will vary greatly with each organization. Since you're most likely going to be meeting with different people, you can expect to be asked a multitude of questions but some of the questions as you are "doing the rounds" can be similar if not the same, for example; "tell me a little about yourself?"

They now know you have the skills and will be looking at your personality and the cultural fit. Just go in there and sell yourself while all along measuring the fit of the organization for your needs. The first interview focuses on whether you are right for the

company, and the second tends more to determine if you are the best candidate for the position and if the fit is harmonious for both parties. The questions may be more specific to the job and you may also get some behavioral type of questions such as "what would you do if the situation were...?"

What to Ask

The second round interview is an excellent chance to get an insider's view of the organization and to find out about working for this organization, first hand -- the pros and cons. Ask questions like, "What is the best thing about working for this organization?" "What qualities does it take to succeed in this position?" How is my potential supervisor to work with?" And remember you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you. It is just as important for you to determine that this organization is right for you, and they want it to be right for you too as that will be a much more effective situation for all involved. It is a good idea to go to the interview with five to 10 questions to ask about the organization. Many good questions come from the information you may hear them talking about in various discussions as you make the rounds. It is a good idea to take notes while they are talking so you can remember important questions or points to cover.

What to Wear

Rarely will you ever be received in a negative way for over dressing! If unsure as to what the culture expects in terms of attire, plan to go business professional, i.e. a suit. A good suit is an important investment and even if you can't afford more than one suit, try a different shirt/blouse or tie with the same suit to mix things up if need be. Continue to dress to impress. After all, you are not one of them yet. Even if it means wearing the same outfit, look sharp. It's important to feel good about yourself to have a more comfortable time during the interview.

Since "fit" is an incredibly important factor in the hiring process for both the organization and yourself, you should carefully compare your qualifications with the position description -- from the organization's standpoint as well as your own. Do some research on salary and some thinking about your benefits requirements as well. Sure, this is a VERY competitive job market, and you will have to sell yourself aggressively, but no matter how competitive, if you are the best fit for the position whether you are one of 10 or one of 100 candidates, you will be the chosen one if deemed the "best fit!" All of this preparation will certainly make you more confident in the process as you wade through.

Thank you notes

▶ Thank You Notes and Their Importance

It seems amazing, but it's true: A simple thank you note after a job interview can wield considerable power and influence, and reflect very favorably on your candidacy for the position.

Why? Several reasons:

1. By sending a thank you note, you show your interviewer common courtesy and respect.

Unfortunately, in our busy and often impolite world, we simply don't acknowledge each other's time, efforts and commitments. So in sending a thank you note, you tell your interviewer in no uncertain terms that you appreciate the time s/he has given you. After all, s/he had to give up part or all of the day to be with you, and expend effort learning more about you and what you have to offer.

2. So few job applicants send thank you notes that you automatically stand out if you do send one.

It's shocking, but the majority of job applicants fail to send thank you notes after their interviews. Why? Who knows? But the bottom line is that you wind up in a position to shine simply by putting forth the effort of sending a note. Strange, but true.

3. A thank you note gives you opportunity to reiterate points made during your interview.

Have you ever left an interview wishing you'd more strongly emphasized a certain skill or experience the employer seemed to be looking for? A thank you note gives you the chance to do just that. After using the first paragraph of your note to thank your interviewer, you can use a brief second paragraph to touch again upon the key points you made in your interview. You can also use a similar strategy to clean up any interview rough spots you might have had -- i.e., to expand upon or clarify responses you felt were weak or shaky.

4. A thank you note lets you make points you forgot to make in your interview.

Sometimes after an interview, as you walk out to your car, you smack yourself on the forehead and say to yourself, "Why didn't I talk about _____?" Frustrating? You bet. But you can take care of the problem to some degree in your thank you note. Again, perhaps in the second paragraph, you can say something to the effect of "After our discussion, it occurred to me that I forgot to tell you about _____."

5. A thank you note demonstrates your written communication skills.

In receiving and reading your thank you notes, your interviewer will see firsthand how you handle yourself on paper. You'll be using similar skills every day with the company's potential clients, customers and vendors -- so the interviewer will be reading carefully to see how you come across in print.

Writing thank you notes isn't terribly difficult or time-consuming. It can make a much bigger difference than you might think -- perhaps even the difference between the job going to you or someone else.

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