

MY NUMBER 1 COVER LETTER TIP

by Ronnie Ann ~ January 6th, 2009

I WAS ASKED TO BE PART OF A PONGO RESUME BLOG POST ABOUT RESUME COVER LETTERS. Various experts (their word not mine) offer their best job search cover letter tips. Since Pongo only included a sample of what each person's response, here in full is my answer for the best cover letter tip to help you get a job interview:

QUESTION: "If you could offer job seekers just one cover letter tip, what would it be?"

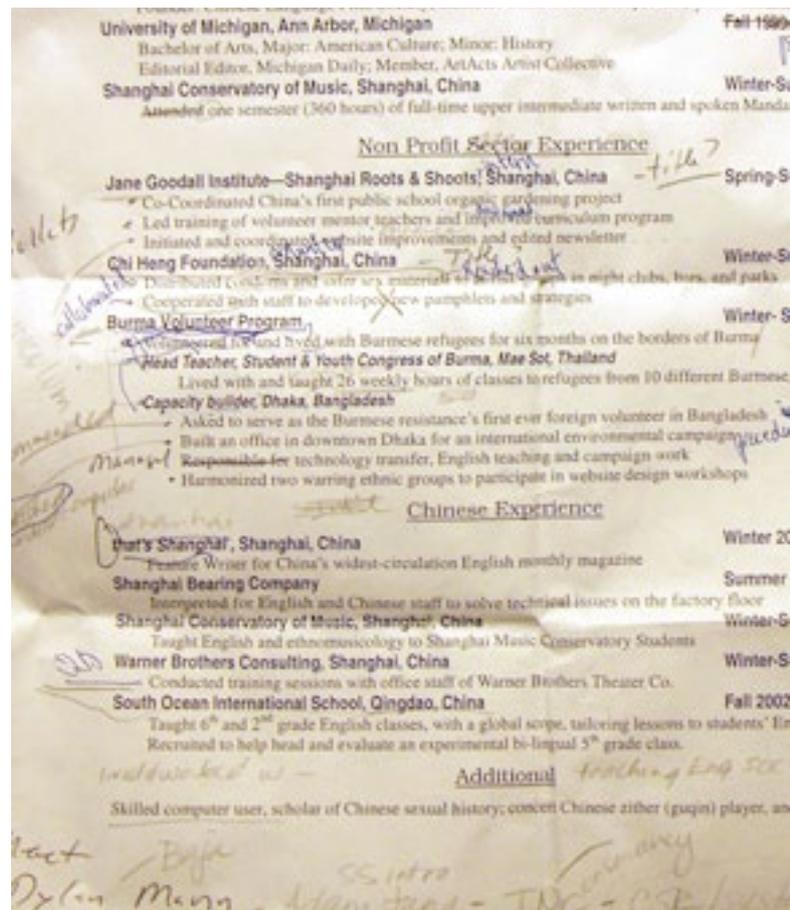
MY RESPONSE: When I screen resumes, I often get to read long, heartfelt cover letters from people who tell me their life stories or focus on some aspect of who they are as a person. All this to get me to pick their resume for a job. In one recent cover letter (someone I'll call Mary Z) went on and on about what a great learner she is and how much she loves to learn. As interesting as that may be, a good cover letter is mostly about what you can do for the company. She forgot to even mention that. So my number one cover letter tip is:

WRITE SO RESUME SCREENERS QUICKLY SEE YOU ARE PERFECT FOR THE JOB

A screener only has a few seconds to look through each cover letter and resume and make the all-important decision. Your job is to grab their attention by tailoring your letter to their specific needs (rather than using some generic cover letter that's usually a waste of the stamp you put on it.) Use the job requirements mentioned in the ad and show me where they intersect with your own job experience. The purpose of your cover letter is to help me see that intersection easily!

MATCH YOUR JOB SKILLS TO WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING FOR

After the basic intro paragraph, put together 2 or 3 concise fascinating sentences (or bullet points), zeroing in on those points in a way that will get me to stop in my tracks and take a longer look at your resume – maybe even for the second time if my first quick glance didn't wow me. (Sometimes we do really quick screens.)



YOUR COVER LETTER MARKETS YOU TO THE COMPANY

Your cover letter is your best chance to sell yourself to the company. On average, you have about 8 seconds to get someone to decide whether to spend more time looking at what you have to offer. In the case of Mary Z, "the great learner" (whose resume got her into my "maybe" pile in the first pass), while love of learning is an admirable quality and might make a good point for her interview, nowhere in her heartfelt cover letter did she take time to let me know she was actually thinking about the company's needs. Instead, she left me the impression she thought we would be thrilled simply to know she likes to learn and the company's needs don't really matter. We weren't and they do. (Makes a potential employer think that's how she'll be as an employee.)

Now don't get me wrong. Employers want their employees to be open to learning, but we're not paying anyone just to learn; we need someone who has drive and knows how to make things happen. What Mary didn't tell me is what she already knows and how well that fits in with the company's needs. And that's exactly what your cover letter should do if you want to make it past the initial screening.

So, as briefly and clearly as possible, use your cover letter to present yourself as someone dynamic who has precisely the experience the company is looking for. And save the other stuff – as interesting as it may be – for the interview, ok?