

Successful Communication

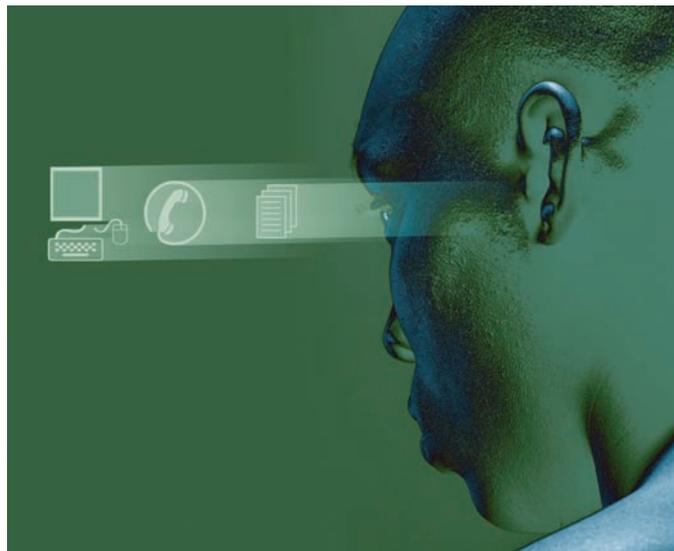
By Barbara Kofman & Kaitlin Eckler

This is the fifth article in our Career Zone job search series. “Know Yourself” (September), “Digging for Data-Narrowing Your Options” (October) and “Goal Setting” (November).

When you are job searching, effective communication can be a deal maker or breaker. The axiom “You only get one opportunity to make a first impression” is ignored at your peril. When you interact with someone how you communicate and the way you choose to present yourself makes a lasting impact. In the job search arena, it's how you write your resume, cover and thank you letters, that short e-mail you send confirming a meeting, and the way you appear for the job or information interview, that count.

A dynamic cover letter should always accompany your resume when responding to a job posting. Few employers will seriously consider you if you haven't taken the time to include one. It should be written in a professional manner, with a suitable heading, and be addressed to the appropriate person (call the company and find out who that is). It must encourage the reader to progress to your resume by describing your suitability for a specific role and detailing your qualifications as they match the targeted job and requirements of the company. A cover letter usually consists of four paragraphs.¹ The first grabs the reader's attention and explains the purpose, the second details your competencies and experiences as they relate to the job, the third expands on your personal attributes without repeating your resume, and the last thanks the employer, asks for an interview and makes clear your follow up plan. A direct ending means you don't have to wait to hear from the employer and provides you with the opportunity to take the next step.

Always write a thank you note after you have met with someone whether for an interview or to gain insight into your job target. While this may seem obvious, it's surprising how few people bother to do this. Begin by thanking the individual for taking the time to meet with you and point to something of importance that was learned during the exchange about the company and/or the job. If you are writing in response to a job interview, reinforce your



suitability for and interest in the position and take this opportunity to correct any perceived interview mistakes or shortcomings. End by presuming further communication will take place. If you met with more than one person, send letters separately to each interviewer. These days thank you notes are often sent via e-mail, but depending on the culture of the organization and timing, mail may be more appropriate.

How you appear, when meeting with a potential employer also communicates messages. Research suggests that 55 percent of the impression you leave relates to how you present yourself.² Typically, whether for an information or job interview, it's advisable to dress in business attire. Dressing appropriately visually transforms you from being a student to a professional. Always wear clean, well-pressed and stylish clothes. For men this means either a suit or dark pants and a sports-jacket with a plain shirt and traditional tie. For women, a conservative suit jacket with pants or a knee length skirt, stockings and shoes with a practical heel. Jewelry and hair are best kept conventional. Skip the cologne or perfume. Check yourself in a full-length mirror to ensure all is in order, and that you're sure to produce a great first impression.

Taking the time to write powerful letters and making certain that when you meet an employer you come across positively will go a long way towards convincing them that you just may be the person to meet their needs. jD

¹ See below for “Tips on How to Write Your Cover Letter”

² Our next column will focus on “Acing the Interview” and the value of succinct oral communication and the importance of “how you say it” not just “what you say”.

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Here are some questions to ask yourself when reviewing your written communication:

- What’s in this for the reader?
 - Have you been concise, consistent and kept it to one page?
 - Is it free of typos, spelling and grammatical mistakes?
 - Has someone else proofread it and provided suggestions for improvement?
 - Have you tailored it to the organization and the job?
 - Is it addressed to the correct individual? (Not to “Dear Sir/Madam”)
 - When responding to an ad, have you checked to ensure you’ve referenced all major requirements?
 - Have you identified a compelling reason why you should be considered?
 - Is it high-quality – something you’re proud to send?
 - Does it make a positive impact?
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Tips on How to Write Your Cover Letter:

First Paragraph: Connect yourself to the company by linking your interest in the role to the organization’s reputation, product, or service. Do your homework – show that you know something about the organization.

Second Paragraph: Describe your academic and work-related qualifications as they relate to the company’s needs. If responding to an ad, tailor this paragraph to the specific requirements. Think about doing this in column format using point form.

***Third Paragraph:** Add information regarding why you should be considered. Convey your strengths. Never tell the employer what you’re looking for. Focus instead on what you can do for them.

Fourth Paragraph: Request an interview appointment, and let them know you will be in touch. Follow-up is crucial, so be prepared to do it. **

*You may choose to do your cover letter in three paragraphs. If so, be sure your 2nd paragraph states all your qualifications for the job including competencies, attributes, and experience.

**A sample of a cover letter is posted on our website at: www.jobpostings.net <<http://www.jobpostings.net>>