



Use Your Cover Letter to Set Yourself Apart

We find that many PGA Professionals who are seeking a new position focus most of their time and attention on writing the “perfect” resume. While the resume plays a big part in a successful job search, the cover letter is also an equally important component in getting the attention of the employer and separating yourself from other applicants. In fact, research indicates that many employers eliminate candidates from consideration based solely on the quality of their cover letter. In essence, the cover letter is your sales pitch – it allows you to describe why your unique background makes you the perfect fit for the position and why you should be hired beyond the list of qualifications on your resume.

First, it goes without saying that typos in the cover letter, no matter how minor, can quickly sink even the most qualified applicant, and a letter riddled with numerous errors and incorrect grammar is a sure-fire way to get eliminated from consideration. Even more damaging is misspelling the employer’s name or including the wrong facility name in the body of the letter (which can easily happen if you are applying for a number of positions at the same time). Here are some tips on avoiding this:

- Don’t rely only on spell check and grammar check on your computer – there are many words that can be spelled different ways depending on the usage, and spell check may not catch them.
- Print a copy for proofreading – it’s easy to overlook errors when staring at a computer screen.
- Have another pair of eyes proofread your cover letter and resume.
- Put it down and come back to it later with your own fresh eyes.
- Read it aloud to make sure it says what you are intending.

Next, never address the cover letter to “To Whom it May Concern” or “Dear Sir/Madam.” Do your research and get the name of the recipient or key decision maker so you can address the letter specifically to them with their title, facility or business name, and address. Use their name in the greeting, such as “Dear Mr. Jones” or “Dear Ms. Smith.” Avoid using a first name greeting (“Dear Steve”) unless you are very well acquainted or have already established a “first name” relationship.

Even though it is obvious, the opening paragraph should convey the purpose of the letter and give the employer a compelling reason to continue reading. For example, if you are notified by PGA CareerLinks about a position, an opening paragraph might read something like this:

“I have been notified by PGA CareerLinks that my qualifications match your criteria for the Head Golf Professional position at ABC Golf Club, and I have attached my resume for your review. I am confident that my proven record of managing golf operations, developing successful programs, and providing outstanding customer service makes me an ideal fit for the position.”

Some job applicants may try to grab the reader’s interest with a clever opening paragraph, by being overly confident or bragging about their abilities, or by using lengthy sentences with big (but meaningless) words. While this may work with some employers, many are put off by it and you can run the risk of a quick elimination. The tone of your cover letter should be professional, and while it’s OK to be assertive about your qualifications, you don’t want to sound egotistical or have your letter read like it was written by an attorney.

An effective cover letter should be written with the employer’s needs in mind, and not your own. Don’t describe what you want and how the job will benefit your career. Instead, focus on what you can do for the employer and how you will solve their problems. Take the time to customize the cover letter to fit the employer’s requirements and priorities for the position. This can take some digging but can pay dividends if you are able to touch on the employer’s “hot buttons.” Before you start writing, review the criteria for the position and make a list of what the employer is looking for. This might include certain areas of expertise, personality traits, technical knowledge, experience managing specific areas, a record of producing results, etc. Then incorporate these items into your letter and demonstrate by providing specific examples of accomplishments and quantifiable results.

If you have difficulty coming up with examples of your accomplishments, ask yourself “How is my facility better off because I have worked here?” and use that as a basis for writing your cover letter.

There is also no need to waste space in the cover letter repeating the basic information in your resume, such as past job titles and dates of employment, unless there is something pertinent that you want to call attention to. Your goal should be to sell yourself as uniquely qualified for the position and give the employer a compelling reason to read your resume.

Finally, close by restating your ability to make a positive contribution, requesting an opportunity to meet for an interview, and thanking them for their time and consideration.

For additional cover letter tips, visit the PGA Employment homepage of PGALinks and click on “Job Hunter’s Tool Kit.”

GOLF 2.0

By now you are likely becoming familiar with Golf 2.0, the PGA of America’s strategic plan to substantially increase participation in the game by incorporating three core strategies, nine consumer groups, and 12 strategic initiatives. I would encourage you to visit the new Golf 2.0 website at www.golf20.net to learn more about this important initiative and what you can do now to help.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me by phone or e-mail if you would like assistance with any PGA employment programs or services.

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