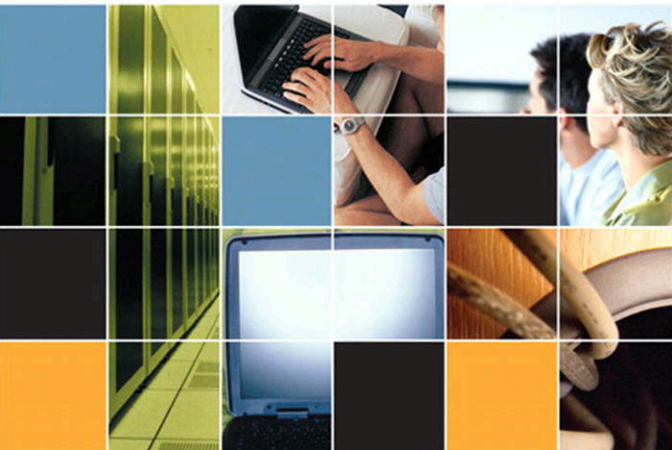


MATTHEW MORAN

# BUILDING YOUR **I.T. CAREER**

A COMPLETE TOOLKIT  
FOR A DYNAMIC CAREER  
IN ANY ECONOMY

SECOND EDITION



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## The Human Side of Career Development

Your personality, your likes and dislikes, and your views and opinions will become apparent when you're working for a company. The makeup of a company—its culture—represents an important factor in your ability to have an enjoyable time and an effective career experience.

Your cover letter should represent, to some extent, your personality. It allows both you and your perspective employer to have a clear understanding of each other.

The cover letter, more than your resumé, is a chance to convey the type of employee that you will be. It is one part information and one part marketing.

## CHAPTER 9

# The Cover Letter

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Whereas your resumé serves as an ambassador to potential employers, your cover letter serves as a vital introduction to both your resumé and you as a person. Your resumé is a summary of skills and talents, a list of facts that provides little insight as to your personality, attitude, or likes and dislikes. Your cover letter, however, should introduce you and your resumé in a way that conveys more about you, the person.

This chapter explains the role of your cover letter. You learn how to create one that is both effective and exciting and discover the key elements to be conveyed.

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## The Purpose of Your Cover Letter

Your cover letter is meant to augment your resumé. It should not simply restate what your resumé already states. In fact, if crafted properly, your cover letter should provide a reason for the prospective employer to look more closely at and regard with more credibility your resumé.

In your cover letter, you are attempting to demonstrate how the skills and experience in your resumé are part of a larger, more complete picture. Not only do you have value and skill, but you also have a professional attitude that will benefit this company. In effect, your cover letter serves as a bridge between your resumé and a specific opportunity.

Your cover letter also provides a place for you to do a little bragging. You might remember the adage “If you don’t toot your own horn, nobody will.” This is certainly true, but you must handle it with tact.

Some might disagree, but I am a big believer in self-promotion. Proclaiming your successes can work to convey a sense of pride in what you do. Although you do not

want to appear arrogant or conceited, confidence in your ability to achieve can go a long way toward helping a potential employer become comfortable with you.

Every time an employer hires someone, he is taking a chance. During the hiring process, from the initial contact with your cover letter and resumé, and through the interviews, you must work to make the employer believe that giving you a job is a good idea. The employer will not get to that point unless he is confident that you can do the job.

Your own confidence helps the employer gain confidence. Imagine a prospective employee being asked why hiring him would be better than hiring the next guy. If you are the prospective employee in this case, it would serve you well to have an answer that exudes confidence.

Remember the first tool in your toolkit: the attitude that you have something valuable to offer. Your cover letter is the first place where you get to use that tool.

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## Three Vital Ingredients in Your Cover Letter

The cover letter has three vital ingredients:

- Gratitude for the opportunity
- A significant accomplishment
- Your interest in becoming a producer

You will find in Part III of this book, “Putting Your Toolkit to Use,” that I believe in constructing as generic a letter as possible. As you meet people during your job search, you can provide customized elements. However, these three ingredients should be conveyed in each letter.

### Gratitude for the Opportunity

Although you come to your job search with an attitude that says “I have something valuable,” the fact remains that the employer is taking time to give you an audience. Even if that means simply reading your cover letter and looking over your resumé, you should remember that the employer’s attention requires many other tasks.

Your cover letter should be succinct. Whenever possible, keep it to one page.

Although I have seen some good letters that break the one-page rule, you do so at your own risk. It's time-consuming to read lengthy cover letters. A single-page letter is adequate for conveying the most important ideas about you as a potential employee.

## **A Significant Accomplishment**

Here is the section of the cover letter where you get to brag a little bit. This section might be difficult for some people to write. As a culture, we are taught to be humble. During the job search, however, you need to provide your prospective employer with reasons why you are the right person for the job. You must be willing to promote yourself and your accomplishments. You can rest assured that someone else looking for the job will be promoting his accomplishments.

The significant accomplishment is not a pass/fail type of item. For some, the accomplishment might be management of a multimillion-dollar project. For others, it might be the completion of a particular task. This section of the cover letter should reflect an accomplishment that represents the level of competency you have achieved. It should also convey some idea of your ability to succeed in your desired role with that particular organization.

I have met some new technologists who have a difficult time with this one. They believe, in error, that the accomplishment must always be technical in nature. However, I know many employers who would be happy with someone extolling the fact that they never missed class or that they passed all their courses for the past 2 years.

Employers respond to confidence. Your willingness to consider something that you've done significant enough to mention on your cover letter will go a long way by itself. As your experience grows, so, too, will the level of accomplishment.

## **Your Interest in Becoming a Producer**

For many people whom I counsel, the single-most damaging mistake they make is not asking for what they want. They go through life frustrated, waiting for their employer to recognize what they want to do and then help them get there.

The same is true in your cover letter. You should clearly identify what you would like and how you are going to help that happen. In your cover letter, you should identify what you would like to do. This section can replace the objective on your resumé.

For example:

It is my plan to work for a company locally in both a support and network engineering role. I would love to speak with you further about how I might be able to assist your company in this capacity. I will follow up with you in 2 to 5 days. However, if you have any questions you would like me to answer, please feel free to call the number I've listed.

Note two things here:

1. You were specific in letting the employer know your intentions.
2. You want a job with this particular company.

Number 2 is important. You have informed the employer that you will be following up in a few days. This is critical. Many job seekers have relegated themselves to a wait-and-see type of mentality. They get their resumé out the door and then watch helplessly for their phones to ring. The mental anguish with this approach can be devastating.

I advocate a much more direct approach. Although I don't want to appear pushy, I do want the employer to know that I am on a timetable to make a decision about my job. It's not wise to make contact with a company and then simply wait.

You must understand that people run companies and people make mistakes. People get busy. They forget. In a perfect world, the company could make contact with all potential employees to let them know the status of their resumé and the job in question. However, in the real world, the employees who are charged with reviewing your resumé might have dozens, if not hundreds, of resumés on their desk. Add to this their own primary job responsibilities, and it is unlikely that a call is forthcoming.

A more direct and proactive approach is more effective for another reason: It gives you a better sense of what is happening at a company. You might find that although the primary job was filled, the employer is looking for someone to fill a similar position. You would be surprised at how many times a different job, similar to the first, opens up, but the company starts its employee search from scratch.

Your follow-up calls to the company should be designed to acquire the following important information:

- Has a decision been made?
- Is there a time frame for the decision?
- Are other, similar jobs open now, or will there be in the future?
- If you're not selected for an interview, can the employer give you specific advice on improving your chances elsewhere or for that company in the future?

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## Conclusion

The cover letter is the human side of your marketing collateral. When you are unable to be there in person to shake someone's hand while you give them your resumé, your cover letter is your best first impression. Make your cover letter professional, yet human. Your cover letter should convey a sense of who you are.

It is best to be real here. You don't want to convey an image of stoic professionalism if you are a bubbly and gregarious personality (and vice versa). You're better off not being hired for a position where your personality will create conflict or will not mesh well with the company culture.

### Note

If the problem with your personality or attitude is you, you had better adjust it quickly. Most companies can and do hire a broad spectrum of individual personalities, but virtually none can afford an abrasive and difficult person.

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## Actions & Ideas

1. Create an outline for a generic cover letter.
  - a. What is your most significant accomplishment?
  - b. What role would you like with the company?
2. Review some of the sample cover letters included with this book's accompanying material online.
3. Write a cover letter and have a mentor or honest peer review it. Let this person know that you want feedback on whether your letter will generate interest in you as a person and in your resumé.
4. If you have recently or will be sending your cover letter to some companies, make sure you include a specific date for following up with those companies.



### EXPAND YOUR TOOLKIT

Remember to visit the book's website at <http://www.ITCareerToolkit.com> for supplemental and ongoing advice, tips, and data relevant to this chapter.