

## **Cover Letter Tips For Lawyers**

*By Claire Bellon*

A well-written cover letter is meant to complement your resume, not duplicate it. The purpose of the cover letter is to make the link between your skills and experience and the requirements of the position you are applying for. In other words, the cover letter is an opportunity to make your case to an employer as to why you are the right candidate for the position. The cover letter should not only highlight your strengths and/or minimize the weaknesses that appear of your resume, but also demonstrate your interest by adding that personal touch that only a cover letter can do.

Here are some cover letter tips for lawyers to follow when creating a cover letter:

- Keep it short
- Keep it simple
- Make it persuasive
- Make it perfect

### **Keep It Short.**

Your cover letter should be written concisely and not exceed one page. The challenge of drafting an effective cover letter is to make your case regarding your interest in the position and organization, and identify your most relevant skills or experiences as they relate to the specific opportunity, in about 500 words or less. That exercise requires thinking about your skills and experience ahead of time, and demonstrating a certain amount of knowledge about the position and the organization. In other words, before putting pen to paper, you need to conduct some research, and make a list of skills that are relevant to the position.

### **Keep It Simple.**

The temptation that lawyers tend to give into when drafting their cover letter is to include more information than is necessary. The “less is more” approach should be taken when drafting your cover letter. It does not mean that the cover letter should be a two-paragraph fluff piece, but rather a one-page document focused on one primary theme. You have to determine what your most persuasive argument is, and then focus your cover letter accordingly. Keeping it simple means providing the reader with an overarching theme that is well developed and supported, rather than throwing in the kitchen sink and hoping that something will stick.

### **Make It Persuasive.**

Once you have determined what traits, skills, and or experiences you want to highlight on your cover letter, you need to distinguish yourself from other applicants. The best way to do this is to write a persuasive cover letter. Writing a

persuasive cover letter is often mistaken for reciting long lists of qualities, skills and attributes. Just saying that you are “business savvy” or “detail oriented” doesn’t make it so. To make your cover letter persuasive, you need to back up your claims with concrete examples. These examples will be unique to your experience, and therefore help differentiate your cover letter from those of other applicants. For example, instead of simply writing “result-oriented litigator,” think about writing “result-oriented litigator that successfully settled 48 out of 50 civil cases in the last quarter of 2008, obtaining in excess of \$20M in plaintiff settlement together with attorney’s fees.”

### **Make It Perfect.**

Your cover letter should be perfect. It should not contain any grammar or punctuation errors, and no typos. While lawyers are trained to write, review, and analyze documents, when it comes to their resumes and cover letters, many are far from perfect. This is a problem that affects lawyers and non-lawyers alike. Spend enough time on one document, and for some reason you will no longer see the mistakes or errors that could be plaguing your document. While proofreading your cover letter can help you catch many of these potential errors; that is often not enough. Be sure to give your cover letter to a friend or colleague to review. Sometimes a fresh pair of eyes might detect what yours are no longer seeing. You may also want to consider sending your cover letter to a resume professional to review. Whatever method you choose, you have to make sure that your cover letter is perfect. Submitting a cover letter to an employer that is less than perfect could make the difference between getting an interview and getting a rejection letter.