If Your Resume Is The Cake, Your Cover Letter Is The Icing.

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Cover letter writing is almost as important a skill for a job seeker to learn as resume writing. The cover letter accompanies the resume at all times as the primary support document. Whether you use traditional mail, email, faxing, or another type of electronic submission, this should always be sent with the resume. There are, of course, other tools you'll use when job seeking. Your cover letter and resume come first of course, followed by follow-up letters, thank-you letters...

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Your goal in this is to get the attention of the hiring manager, just as it is with resume writing. The method and format are a little different however. Your resume will cover all, or most of your professional career, and will be from one to two pages. Your cover letter will be a very brief page serving as an introduction to the resume. Cover letter writing style must be direct, to the point, and able to grab the attention of the reader quickly, with a goal of making the reader want to read the attached resume.

Many people, when engaged in this type of writing, have a tendency to say too much. Good cover letter writing is short and punchy, and will take two or three key points from the resume and emphasize them. The old adage "tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them" holds true in both resume writing and cover letter writing.

As an example, let's assume that you are a materials handling manager for a defense contractor, seeking another position. In your line of work the buzz words are MRP, lean manufacturing, ISO 9000, and cost savings. Your writing efforts should reflect these buzz words to show your value to your current employer and any future employers. Your resume will go into more detail about how you accomplished these goals. The cover letter will simply point out to the hiring manager that you accomplished them. An example of this would be two bulleted paragraphs in the body of the letter that say….

• Experienced in quality assurance and quality control, MRP, ISO 9000, QS 9000, and Lean Manufacturing.

• Demonstrated results in saving significant money for employers through cost savings, inventory level reductions, and on-time supplier delivery.

The hiring manager, according to many surveys, devotes only about fifteen seconds to each resume and cover letter he or she reviews. With that in mind your writing skills need to be top notch to get this person to look at your resume. Your resume writing skills need to be just as good to get the reader to want to grant you an interview. In turn, your interviewing skills need to be excellent to get the hiring manager to offer you the position. This long, and hopefully positive chain of events begins with good cover letter writing skills and ends with job satisfaction and a nice paycheck.