

The truth about cover letters

If you're in pursuit of an outstanding entry level position, you need to know the truth about cover letters. Contrary to some of the more fashionable books on job search, no one ever got a job because of a spiffy or perfect cover letter. Cover letters are extremely limited in value, even when used properly.



So take everything you've ever heard, read, or seen about cover letters and throw it out. That's right, 99.4 percent of the information about cover letters is useless.

Why? Three reasons. First, most people assume that the cover letter is actually read before the resume. Wrong. Just ask anyone who reviews resumes—they go straight to the resume, if it's read at all and only look at the cover letter if they're still interested. In my review of more than 20,000 resumes, I've probably read only 4,000 cover letters, and that was done only after finding strong interest in the resume.

It's actually rather amusing to watch a hiring manager reading his mail. The cover letter and resume are pulled from the envelope, the cover letter is immediately placed behind the resume, and the resume is reviewed. It's usually scanned first, then read. And you know there is interest if they finally make their way back to the cover letter.

Second, most people assume that the cover letter should be about you. Wrong again. It should be about the company, your prospect, your target. Your resume will tell them the basics that they need to know about you, if it's well written.

Third, and most important, many college students end up using the cover letter/resume mass mailing as a crutch to fool themselves into believing they're actually doing something to further their job search. In reality, all you're doing is generating rejection letters. Mass mailing of your cover

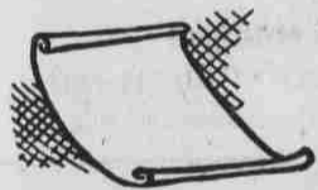
letter and resume does not work in today's job market.

Understand that at the entry level a resume and cover letter on their own do little good. Most larger companies have established college recruiting programs that serve as the focal point of entry level hiring. Therefore, most entry level resumes are ignored. Most medium and small companies don't have the resources to train entry level hires, so the entry level resume will again be ignored. The best you can hope for in a blind mailing campaign is that you will be filed away in hopes of being miraculously resurrected at some future date. Very unlikely.

So when should you use a cover letter? Only as part of a limited, targeted campaign to reach potential employers. Take the time to research and understand a company before committing yourself on paper as their next potential employee. If you have no idea what a company does, don't just send your resume and cover letter in blind hope of making a potential match. If you're not willing to invest the time and energy to find out whether a match is possible, why do you expect the hiring manager to do so?

When a cover letter is used, it should be specific and personal. It should be clean, clear laser copy, yet not mass generated. Each letter should refer to a specific person at a specific company and provide a specific next step of action that you will be taking. Don't expect the employer to make the first step. If you wait for them to call you, your odds of contact decrease dramatically. It typically requires a proactive response on your part to move the process forward

See Resume, pg. 6



UNLV loses key player

BY HEATHER SUBRAN
STAFF FEATURES WRITER

A campus consists of more than grass and bricks; it takes strong people to lay the foundation. One of those people at UNLV has been Ann Alu, who retires today after 21 years of service to the university.

Alu, who has been the assistant to the vice president of student services for 10 years, is a shy, humble, yet strong woman, and peers contend she has been the key to keeping the campus machine running smoothly since 1975.

Reva Giles, manager of career services, worked with Alu for more than five years, and maintains you couldn't ask for a better person to work for.

Joseph Reynolds, a student worker in Alu's office, echoes that sentiment, and said, "She is very wise and wonderful to work for."

Yet another co-worker, Stephanie Ware said, "If there was ever a problem or a question, all you had to do was ask Ann."

And, says Alu's boss, Robert Ackerman, "Ann can get things done around here. She can work that informal system very well."

Alu began her career with UNLV as a management assistant with the first residence hall, Tonopah Hall, and has seen major growth at UNLV during her tenure.

When Alu began her service at UNLV there were fewer than 6,000 students and five buildings on campus. When asked how her routine has changed over the years, Alu said, "I don't think I've ever had one routine. I've always had a variety of duties."

Although she has had a variety of duties over the years, in her most recent job Alu has been principally in charge of



PHOTO BY HYUN-HO HAN

Ann Alu retires today after 21 years of watching UNLV grow.

maintaining financial records and accounts of the vice president, organizing personnel documents and compiling annual reports.

She has been in the Las Vegas area since 1973, and has witnessed many changes to valley. "Some (of the changes) are good, some are bad. I think the growth creates problems and I don't think we have the funds to keep up. I don't think they fund the school district enough."

The use of computers and the advancement of technology has made Alu's UNLV life much easier.

"First of all, after starting out with typewriters and having to make lots of carbon cop-

ies, now with computers and Xerox machines I can do so much more," Alu said, and maintains she has never been intimidated by the technology. "I've always gone into using the computers with the attitude that if I blew it up the university would have to buy me another one," Alu said.

Alu's position will be filled by Barbara Shelton, who expressed her apprehension at filling Alu's shoes. "I think Ann is great and I'm excited to fill that position, and also a little nervous. She will be hard to replace," Shelton said.

"She's earned her right to retire even though it makes me sad to see her go," said Ackerman.

Delta Airlines offers extra credit

BY RICK APPIN
FEATURES EDITOR

If you're planning traveling any time between now and the end of March and want to save a bundle, consider taking advantage of Delta Airlines Student Selective Savings Certificate.

Delta is offering "Extra Credit" fares, which means major savings in airfares. Consider paying \$198 round-trip to travel between Atlanta and New York or to Salt Lake City, New York or Boston for \$318.

You can benefit from this deal if you purchase tickets before Mar. 4.

An added bonus is that you can take two, not just one but two, of your friends with you for the same price. If you're scheduling graduate school interviews around this time, especially on the East Coast, you can select more than one city for the same price.

As all special deals have a catch, the one for this offer stipulates that you must purchase the ticket by Mar. 4. However, Delta says it will

continue to sell the special fares as long as supplies last beyond that date.

Tickets are non-refundable and you must travel before Mar. 31. You can only purchase one certificate and you must give the name of the college you attend, your major and student identification number. On the date you travel you will have to provide a valid student ID to the ticketing agent.

For more information and reservations, call 1-800-933-5826.

Fabulous Sputnik Man

BY NICK TIMINSKAS

