

# WINNING COVER LETTERS

SECOND EDITION

**ROBIN RYAN**



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.





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COVER  
LETTERS**



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*My family is my most precious possession in this world.  
This book is dedicated to all of them: Steven, Jack, Rich, Dave,  
Sophie, Jordan, Lillie, Mom, and Dad.*



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So many employers offered their expertise to aid me with this book. I thank everyone who took the time to do our survey and call, fax, or write me with their insights and observations.

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**WINNING  
COVER  
LETTERS**



**A GREAT COVER LETTER****IS A KEY ELEMENT  
IN LANDING THE  
PERFECT JOB****1**

**I** got the job! I can't believe it—I *got the job!* I only sent out this one resumé and cover letter—and I got it!" Mary was ecstatic as she called to tell me her dream had come true. "Four hundred and five people applied and they picked me—*me!*" Her elation over landing a great new job was passionate. Cindy, another client, called to say: "They hired me. This is a dream job—more money, better hours. It's perfect. I knew I needed to write a good resumé and cover letter. All it took was one. I never sent another. From just that first one, I got the call. I start in two weeks. I would never have believed it could be this easy. This will change my whole life. After 20 years, I'm finally moving on to the perfect job for me. Hard to believe, but it's true."

Phone calls, letters, notes—they all say the same thing: "I got the job!" "Thank you for your help, that *cover letter* did the trick. I've got the interview." No one was more thrilled than Sam. He sent me an expensive bouquet of flowers with a letter that said: "No one had even looked at me before I worked with you. Taking three years off from my career was proving to be the professional suicide my friends warned me it would be; but you helped me put together a strategy, reworked my resumé, and improved my cover letters. You had me focus on what I had accomplished—to really market my strengths and talents. I've just landed a senior management position my colleagues will be envious of."

These clients, like all the others in this book, had great success using The Power Impact Technique™ to write their cover letters. That is the technique you'll learn in the upcoming pages to ensure you put your absolute best on paper. These letters made the difference.



**96% of the hiring managers surveyed preferred The Power Impact Technique to write a cover letter.**

Extensive research was conducted to offer you *the most effective* job hunting techniques available. An exclusive hiring managers' survey was conducted so you can learn exactly *what* employers want when they hire. Successful cover letters that real people used to land their dream jobs are included; and most important, you'll learn The Power Impact Technique to write the best cover letter possible.

## *The Importance of Cover Letters*

The cover letter is the very first thing the employer sees when you apply for a job. In the course of conducting research to write this book, I confirmed one very important fact—hiring managers and personnel people all stressed the need to write a great cover letter that is targeted to their needs. The candidates who stood out to employers used short but powerful evidence as they wrote sentence after sentence on their past achievements and the talents and contributions they'd bring to the new employer. Your letters must concisely outline your talents and abilities to meet the employer's specific job needs. You'll be able to do that with ease once you start using The Power Impact Technique.

To learn exactly what employers wanted, I developed a survey about cover letters that was sent to 600 hiring managers. The results, coupled with other research based on years of working with career counseling clients, plus my own extensive hiring background, is what formulated the recommendations you'll learn using this book. A significant distinction from other books is that I conducted a hiring survey exclusively for this book. The pages are laced with the results.

*Hiring managers will be advising you on what impresses them in a cover letter and what makes them dismiss a candidate in less than 10 seconds.*

Human resources manager Barbara Baker tells us: "In my experience I've hired over 1,200 people. I've seen so many mistakes—too long, too short, general, nonspecific content, some even state the reasons they were fired. It boils down to this—a simple, direct letter that mentions how their skills relate to performing the position applied for."

Sounds simple, doesn't it? Yet as we received our hiring surveys back from employers all over the country, we kept hearing the same message:

*Most people write a terrible cover letter, so they never get an interview and they never land the job.*

## ***Our Hiring Managers' Survey Results***

Little research has been done on cover letters. One study confirmed that indeed cover letters *are* important. I felt it was warranted to create a survey to get more specifics about the effectiveness (or lack thereof) from a job candidate's cover letter. I wanted to learn what hiring managers considered the biggest mistakes people make and also what were the best ways to impress them and get the employer's attention.

Therefore, we sent our hiring survey to a random sampling of 600 human resource managers, CEOs, vice presidents, senior executives, and recruiters to determine their preferences. Of these, 38% were in human resources and the other 62% were hiring managers. Everyone in the study had done extensive and recent hiring. Almost all of the HR managers had hired over 200 people, some as many as 1,000. They worked in all different fields: manufacturing, nonprofits, state and federal governments, education, retail, healthcare, service and high tech, to cite a few. Our managers held positions as program directors, vice presidents, senior management, presidents, and CEOs. They had, on average, hired 80 people each. Most senior executives and those at large organizations typically had hired over 100 managers and professionals for their organization.

The survey targeted professional, executive, and managerial positions, with a few questions targeted toward staff jobs. These hiring managers (the person who decides if you get the job) worked for the Fortune 500—some of the best and most prominent companies and organizations in the United States. Others were employed with medium-sized or smaller companies. We covered a wide range of fields and every state in the union to get the real facts on what it takes to get hired today.

The conclusions from this hiring survey will be revealed as you use this book to land your perfect job:

- ✓ Cover letters are important and necessary.
- ✓ A good cover can sail to the top of the stack and get an interview.  
Likewise, a terrific candidate with a general letter will go unnoticed in a stack of hundreds of others vying for the opportunity.
- ✓ Cover letters serve as a sample of your communication skills.

- ✓ Succinct points that clearly outline the abilities to perform the needed tasks of the job get noticed.
- ✓ Of the employers surveyed, 96% selected The Power Impact Technique as their preferred way to write a letter.

In addition to this survey, let me summarize my background. I've been a career counselor for over 15 years. Helping people find good jobs is my passion—the mission that drives my life. I've personally hired over 300 people and teach seminars on hiring to employers. I'm constantly working with job hunters, having seen tens of thousands of participants in my job search seminars. In addition, I conduct hundreds of career counseling sessions with individual clients every year. I wrote this book for one reason and one reason only: The Power Impact Technique enables job hunters to write more effective cover letters that employers notice and respond to. My clients have proved this over and over again, day after day.

We asked our hiring managers in the survey what was the best way to write a cover letter—*96% selected The Power Impact Technique*. That's the best reason I can give you to use this book—it works! Every cover letter in this book is that of a client I've coached with who got the interview and, in most cases, went on to land a terrific job.

## *Why Use The Power Impact Technique™?*

Employers told us:

**"Clearly tell me how you can do the job."** —CEO

**"Show me how you used your skills."** —Department manager

**"What contributions did you make before."** —Vice president

**"Tell me what you can offer my company that makes you special."** —President

**"Tell me why should I select you for an interview."**  
—Human resource manager

**"Be specific."** —Personnel director

**"Give clear examples of past success."** —Executive director

**"Relate your background to the job's needs and articulate how you'll meet them."** —Senior vice president

All these employers are stating exactly how to impress them and get their attention.

I developed The Power Impact Technique over a dozen years ago to help myself get a job. The job market was so competitive, and starting out each letter saying “I’m applying for the job I saw in Sunday’s paper” was getting me nowhere. So I created a new writing style. My letter opened with a powerful first sentence that quickly demonstrated to the employer the background and skills I’d bring to the job. My letters began to sail to the top: While hundreds of others missed out, I got the employer’s all-important phone call to come in for an interview.

It worked so well for me I started sharing this technique with friends. In 1986, I started leading job search seminars and began teaching this technique to job hunters. I received tremendous positive feedback that this technique was an easy-to-use formula that saved people hours and hours of time spent writing ineffective letters employers never noticed.

Just as I’ve taught others over the years, now I’ll show you how to analyze a job, target a special company, and portray your top strengths using this technique. You’ll read employers’ comments and insights that will aid you in getting hired *faster* as you look for a new and better job.

You’ll find that The Power Impact Technique is both easy-to-use and highly effective to write cover letters employers notice.

You won’t find tricks, gimmicks, or shenanigans that don’t work. You’ll find only letters with a proven success record that you’ll get from my years of research on hiring, plus specific employer insights that will enable you to succeed in no time.

## ***Acknowledged Difficulties in Getting Employers’ Attention***

If you’ve been in the job market for more than five minutes lately, you’ll be the first one to admit it’s a challenging time. The competition for each job can draw hundreds of probable candidates . . . *hundreds*. Employers told us the cover letter gets only a few seconds’ glance unless, as HR manager Tim Smith said, “I see the skills jumping off the page. It’s really hard to read boring letter after boring letter. Or those bragging ones claiming they can do the job. It’s rare to break out of the monotony and find a person who took some extra time and crafted a letter that clearly addressed the job’s needs as they outlined their abilities and skills. Those rare letters—I notice. Usually those are the ones I hire.” Tim works for one of the Fortune 500 companies where they get over 500 letters every week. As he said, “I’ve seen it all.”



***Our hiring survey results determined that cover letters receive only a 10-second glance during the initial reading by employers.***

You have *only seconds* to capture the employer's attention and keep him or her reading. Good jobs (those that are interesting and pay well) are hard to find. You *must* put together the best possible package to advertise your skills. The bottom line is that *the cover letter is the first thing an employer sees. It must be great!* No ifs, ands, or buts. You need to be better than the competition—you must outsmart them. And you will when you start writing The Power Impact Technique letters.

## ***A Guarantee***

This book will improve your ability to write better cover letters. You'll gain insight into what employers are really looking for. Certainly a cover letter alone doesn't get you hired. Rather, it's the letter-writing process you'll learn that means the difference between landing the job or just getting left in the stack. This process includes the job analysis, the insights from the hiring manager's perspective, developing succinct sound bites on your skills, and summarizing the results and contributions you make. This is what you'll be learning and carrying through on your resumé and throughout your interview.

You will read dozens of proven, market-tested letters and success stories that clearly illustrate how to apply The Power Impact Technique yourself. You'll save time and effort while you zero in on a great job you are qualified for with succinct evidence and statements that cause employers to start calling you!

## ***What's Ahead***

You'll learn a huge amount of information and insight once you've read through the big mistakes employers pointed out that you *must avoid* to get hired!

You'll see examples of people just like you—others who faced the challenge, the fears, and the rejections. The result: They are now enjoying terrific jobs. You'll benefit from reading their stories and seeing exactly how we wrote their cover letters. These cover letters are the exact ones they used—only their names have been changed to ensure their

confidentiality. Most books just give samples, but samples only encourage you to copy and not apply the writing skill. That's the difference *Winning Cover Letters* makes. You'll learn The Power Impact Technique. It's an easy writing formula that you'll be able to apply and use to improve your cover letters and your success.

Let's get started. A better job is out there, just waiting for you to find it.



**COVER LETTER MISTAKES****HIRING MANAGERS  
SAY TO AVOID****2**

**T**he best way for someone to impress us is to address how all of the qualifications in the opening will be met by the candidate. Spell it out for me succinctly!” says Kirk Beyer, a human resources director.

Concise evidence—that’s what employers want. You must tell them exactly how you can do the job! The Power Impact Technique that I’m going to teach you in this book will show you exactly how to write cover letters that hiring managers such as Kirk love to receive. They are specific. They are concise. They address the employer’s needs and focus the entire letter on demonstrating skills, experiences, and past accomplishments to excel at the job the employer needs done.

To provide you with the very best strategic advantage possible, I decided to conduct a massive survey to underscore the best ways to write a cover letter and find a job. Little research has been done on cover letters prior to this book. One recent survey’s purpose was to determine whether cover letters were even needed at all. The results: Surprisingly, 60% of the 1,000 employers surveyed stated cover letters were “*as important as or more important*” than resumés. That was important, significant data—every resumé needs to have a cover letter. But I wanted more facts on what impresses employers and facts on what people do wrong. So I developed a new survey that asked those questions. We sent 600 surveys to human resource managers, CEOs, VPs, managers, executive recruiters, and department heads—a random cross-sampling nationwide. I wanted people who make hiring decisions from various fields and industries as well as different geographical locations for an accurate representation. I’ve based this book on the results of this survey, the years