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Dear Lalli

By

Wendy Lalli

Dear Lalli,

I've been asked to submit a resume prior to a face-to-face interview with an employer I very much want to work for. The resume request came from the executive director of the company who is a good friend of a friend of mine. (Proving, as you have so often pointed out, that networking really works!) Since the resume I'm sending the employer already reflects my experience in the areas mentioned in the job description, what could I possibly add in the cover letter? Should I even send a cover letter or just e-mail the resume with a brief message? Your advice please!

Networking in Norwood Park

Dear Networking,

Glad to hear that you're experiencing the benefits of networking. I'm also happy to learn that you've apparently geared your resume to the job you're applying for rather than simply listing your work history. Now I'd like to encourage you to write a cover letter designed to do what the resume doesn't. Namely, talk about the personal reasons why you're a good fit for this job.

You see, if your resume is the rational side of a persuasive presentation on why someone should hire you, the cover letter is an opportunity to make an emotional connection with the interviewer. In this case, you can start off by mentioning the mutual friend who originally interceded for you. Tell the interviewer how you met him or her and, ideally, describe a project that you worked on together that has some relevance to the job you're interviewing for. This will reinforce the fact that while you and the interviewer have never met, you still have a lot in common.

Then you can talk about why you want to work for the company. Perhaps mention a positive experience you've had with the company's products or services. Or just describe your interest in their history and philosophy. (I'm assuming that you've already done some pretty heavy research about the company and are well versed in these areas.) This will show that you: (1) are savvy about your industry, (2) understand the company's culture and (3) have given some thought to whether that culture is a good fit for you.

Finally, close by saying how much you're looking forward to meeting the interviewer in person. Written this way, your cover letter serves as a warm up session for your first interview and should assure you'll be warmly welcomed the minute you walk in the door.

One more thing: anyone can write a half-decent resume. But a good cover letter is a clear and powerful demonstration of your communication skills. Whatever job you do, being able to express yourself well to internal and external customers, your colleagues and your supervisors is always considered important. A cover letter is as an opportunity to shine before you even shake the interviewer's hand.

Good luck!

Wendy

Dear Lalli,

My boss recently lost his brother. I suffered a similar loss myself six months ago and sympathize with him. I want to send him a card but am not sure if this would be considered appropriate. My colleague says it would be "sucking up." What do you think?

Grieving Myself in Garfield Ridge

Dear Grieving,

First, I'm sorry to hear about your own loss. As you obviously know, losing a family member is difficult and painful and I understand and applaud your desire to make this time a little easier for your boss. I think that a tasteful card would be a gracious gesture and would be appreciated as such by your boss and his family.

As for the reaction of your colleague – I couldn't disagree more! Showing empathy toward another person, whether he or she is your supervisor, your teammate or someone who reports to you is not only appropriate, it's what makes us human. Personally, I think neglecting to send a card and/or express sympathy verbally at such a time borders on boorishness. I congratulate you on your sensitivity and your manners. And again, please accept my sincerest sympathy on the loss of your loved one.

Wendy

Dear Lalli,

I recently read an article that said bragging at work was "in" and modesty was "out." This seems rather rude to me but maybe that's because I'm almost 50 and not, as my kids say, "with it." I tend to stay in the background at management meetings and rarely take personal credit for the work done by the team I manage. Although I always use the pronoun "we" when describing our projects with my boss, I often stay late to finish the team's work myself so I can make sure that all of our deadlines are met. How can I get more credit for my work without actually bragging?

Middle Manager in Montclare

Dear Middle,

With all due respect to the article you read – “bragging” about anything (with the possible exception of your grandchildren) is unattractive. I think the answer isn’t to brag but rather to enhance your communication with your boss and your colleagues.

Begin by increasing your participation in the meetings you have with your manager and others. To build up your self-confidence, plan what you’re going to say beforehand. Maybe you can make a suggestion on how your team – or the whole department – can do things more efficiently or less expensively. Research this suggestion first, so you have facts and figures to back it up. Or perhaps you can update your boss and colleagues on a project your team is working on that’s going particularly well. By the way, your report on your team should be just that – an objective description of what they’ve been asked to accomplish and why they’re succeeding at it. That’s not bragging. That’s just telling it like it is to keep everyone else in the department up to date.

Remember, as a manager your main job is to help the members of your team do their work more successfully. So talking in terms of “we” is perfectly acceptable. However, doing the team’s work yourself is not. If you’re working overtime because your people are turning in inferior work you have two options. The first is to make sure they have the tools, guidance and motivation needed to improve their performance. The second is to replace them with better people if, even with help, their work is still unacceptable. Of course, it could be your team is so buried with projects that they can’t meet their deadlines unless you pitch in. In this case, you should talk to your manager about adding to your staff or changing the due dates so your team can meet them without the need for you to do double duty.

As far as what’s “in” and “what’s not,” here’s my two cents. Treating others as you would like to be treated yourself is always a good idea. I’ve found that people who follow this philosophy don’t have to brag about themselves to be appreciated by others.

Good luck,

Wendy