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This article was initially published on March 9, 2009, on the Quintessential Careers site that was sold to Live Career in 2015 and eventually deleted from that site. The article is also published at [http://astoriedcareer.com/with\\_my\\_new\\_book\\_tell](http://astoriedcareer.com/with_my_new_book_tell), but links in it are inoperable.

### **Surefire Cover-Letter Technique: Incorporating Stories**

With my new book,

[\*Tell Me About Yourself: Storytelling to Get Jobs and Propel Your Career\*](#), about to be released (April 1, no foolin'), I thought I'd run this excerpt that also appeared on Quintessential Careers:

#### **Why would you want to employ storytelling in cover letters — or indeed in any part of your job search?**

Cover letters offer job-seekers great latitude to tell stories because letters are quite compatible with the narrative form. Learn more in the article, [\*Tell Me About Yourself: Storytelling that Propels Careers\*](#).

In a cover letter, you can engage the employer, make an emotional connection, show results, and become instantly memorable by including at least one paragraph in the form of a powerful story.

Not all employers read cover letters (about a third don't), but those who read, do truly read the letter, unlike the resume, which they almost always skim.

This article details the types of stories you can tell in a cover letter and provides examples of how to tell them. The article is excerpted from [\*Tell Me About Yourself: Storytelling to Get Jobs and Propel Your Career\*](#).

#### **Types of stories you can tell in a cover letter:**

- *Stories of early interest in your career path and determination to reach your career goal.*
  - One of my most profound memories as a young child was the day I first flew on an airplane. I was traveling with my family to California, and I still remember the feeling of excitement as I held my mother's hand and climbed the stairs into the immense red, white, and blue plane. That was my first of many flights on Delta, and I have never forgotten it. I am interested in fostering that same excitement in others by working for Delta as a training instructor.
- *Stories that depict your motivation, enthusiasm, and passion for the job you seek.*
  - Every morning I kick off the sheets and leap out of bed – thrilled to greet my new day and eager to engage all the challenges I will encounter. I can imagine the many challenges you face as the market leader that could benefit from my performance-management expertise as your Product Support and Training Manager.
- *Stories describing specific projects you've led or collaborated on, including results.*

- More than five years of high performance in retail banking and the direct-investment industry in a recently emerging market – Vietnam – has provided me with exceptional experiences and strong connections with decision-making officials in the private and public sectors. Leading a small team to reorganize a Vietnamese bank virtually from scratch, I was apprehensive about the overwhelming challenges, yet excited to exercise my leadership skills. The result exceeded all expectations; not only did we stabilize the bank, but we also managed to raise \$2 million in equity. After completing the successful reorganization, I earned a promotion to deputy managing director, the youngest manager in the Vietnamese banking industry.
- *Stories detailing problems you've solved for your employers.*
  - My analytical skills have contributed to my ability to solve challenging problems. At FoodAmerica, for example, sales quotas were not tied to financial objectives. I applied my creativity to devising a sales-forecasting system in which order files could be integrated with shipments and invoicing files, and SAS reports could be prepared each morning. I arranged for SAS reports to be e-mailed to each sales unit so all parties could see the sales status daily, ensured that the system tied sales quotas to financial objectives, and added a trend-projection expert system to forecast which products would not make their objectives. This report contributed significantly to the successful startup of the Mighty Macaroni product line.
- *Stories describing other accomplishments and successes.*
  - I have proven my ability to attract and keep customers through the excellent feedback and comments I've received from guests, many of whom have come back and requested me as their server. I've also demonstrated my ability to up-sell by producing total meal sales 15 percent higher than 80 percent of servers and increasing my sales by 20 percent in the past three months. I also won an award for highest beverage sales for a server.
- *Stories that reveal your personality.*
  - I am a builder. I don't mean with hammer and nails, although I enjoy that kind of building, too. At my last employer, I built three organizations that filled specific niches within the parent company. I defined the departments' roles, hired and trained more than 300 team members, and then built the capability. I found it equally rewarding to improve those organizations by adding systems and processes so the teams were recognized for their contribution. I applied my creativity, leadership and ability to navigate complex and abstract problems.
- *Stories describing long-term interest in, knowledge of, and admiration for the organization you're targeting.*
  - As a seasoned cruise traveler and worker in the hospitality industry, I am well aware of your company's outstanding status as an industry leader. My education and experience in marketing, customer service, sales, information systems, Spanish language, and worldwide travel equip me to enhance the success of Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines.

- *Stories that describe how well you fit in with the organization's culture, values, and mission.*
  - I've spent considerable time researching companies by talking to happy employees. From that research, I know that Stocks Unlimited is a great company to work for, with a friendly environment. It's an organization in which I know I can contribute my skills and talents to their full potential to benefit the firm. I am impressed with your company values; you treat customers the same way you would want to be treated, and I would be proud to part of your team.
- *Stories — for new graduates — of how your education has prepared you for the targeted job.*
  - My recent experience and my classroom knowledge as an accounting major will benefit your company. As director of finance for an organization of 60 individuals, I functioned independently to reconcile bank statements and accounts receivable, billing accounts receivable, prepare accrual journal entries, generate financial statements, create an incentive program, and establish a computerized accounting system. Just as I achieved these goals effectively, I will be productive, proficient, and accurate for your company as well.
- *Stories that touch the heartstrings.*
  - I can make a valuable contribution to Maplewood Children's Hospital, based on my past experiences. As a child I spent a lot of time in hospitals, and I vividly remember my feelings in response to the environment. I would like to ensure that children feel as comfortable as possible in an otherwise scary situation.
- *Stories to back up your claims about yourself.*
  - Six years in restaurant management have taught me every facet of the industry. Through these years our family-owned and operated company has expanded from a single unit to a nine-restaurant chain. Having been brought up in the business, I've dealt with a diverse array of individuals. I have developed, among other attributes, strong entrepreneurial, interpersonal, and motivational skills, which will contribute to a fruitful and profitable partnership with your company.
- *Stories that tell how you are uniquely qualified for the targeted job.*
  - I've played semi-professional tennis for many years, so I am aware that the equipment a tennis player uses is extremely important. Through my international experience, I have learned that – like the game itself – the tennis industry is highly competitive industry. Improvements can give a company an edge over its competitors. I am convinced I can provide that quality and competitive advantage because I've done the same during my current position as Marketing Director. I knew that the quality of my employer's marketing department drove the firm's success, so I ensured top-notch performance.
- *Stories that capitalize on networking contacts.*
  - I enjoyed your recent informative presentation at St. Leo College and was so impressed with your knowledge of trends in pharmaceutical sales. Your talk inspired me to research Hoechst Marion Roussel further. I discovered that my professional demeanor and sales talents would be an excellent match for the

world's third-largest drug company. Noticing that Hoechst streamlined its labor force in 2008 demonstrates to me that you emphasize quality rather than quantity, a philosophy that aligns directly with my characteristics. I'd love to tell you more about how my solid academic performance, work ethic, drive, organizational skills, and strong interest in the pharmaceutical industry demonstrate my ability to attain outstanding results for your company.

- *Stories to explain unusual or potentially negative situations.*
  - When I took maternity leave from my high-powered consulting job with Accenture, I expected to be gone for just a few months. Little did I know that giving birth to a child with autism would not only take me out of the workforce for six years to attend to my son's special needs, but that it would inspire a whole new career passion as a special-education teacher. Now returning to the workforce with an education degree, I want to combine the communication skills honed through my past consulting experience with the knowledge I've gained as the mother of a special-needs child. I'm well prepared to design and deliver instruction, meet each child's special needs, and ensure that my students reach their full learning potential.
- *Stories to explain a career change.*
  - At the very instant I read your ad for a Merchandising Specialist, everything clicked. The description of the job became one with my passion, and I knew the match between me and this job was perfect. I'm ready to make my contribution in an environment where excellence is a given. I accept your challenge; I know I have what it takes, can prove it, and am poised to take my mark and go.
- *Future stories that address employer needs and challenges and tell how you would address those issues.*
  - When I interviewed Ms. Tranter six months ago to obtain information about a career in yoga instruction, she mentioned that the studio would like to establish a Web presence. I'd like to combine my interest in yoga with my knowledge of Web-page design and HTML programming to help you create a Webmaster position in your studio. I've even sketched out some preliminary ideas on what your Web page might look like, and I'd love to get together and show them to you.