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**MANAGING YOUR CAREER**

By JOANN LUBLIN



## Notes to Interviewers Should Go Beyond A Simple Thank You

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Everyone knows they should express their gratitude in writing following a job interview. Yet most applicants spend scant time writing such letters. Dashing off a perfunctory note blows a great opportunity to gain a competitive edge and, possibly, to seal the deal.

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A thoughtful follow-up carries as much clout as a cover letter, many experts say. Nearly nine out of 10 senior executives consider a written thank you influential in evaluating candidates, according to a 2007 survey of 150 respondents by Accountemps, a professional staffing service.

Your post-interview correspondence should deliver a sales pitch far more compelling than a simple thanks. "Put a spin on it that acts in your favor," recommends Kate Wendleton, president of the Five O'Clock Club, a career-counseling network in New York.


"An effective thank-you letter should hit every one of an employer's hot buttons," concurs Wendy Enelow, an author, trainer and career consultant in Coleman Falls, Va.

You can hit those buttons by linking your skills to solving specific workplace problems that you learned about during interviews. Doing so helped one prospect win a top post at a New York nonprofit group last month.

Her thank-you letter proposed numerous concrete ideas akin to free consulting, recalls Marilyn Machlowitz, the New York executive recruiter involved. "She knew how to translate her experience and expertise to fit their needs."

To bolster your chances further, make sure your letter describes relevant achievements and potential contributions beyond those you cited in person. "We didn't even talk about the fact that I am also a professional techie," an aspiring saleswoman noted in her post-interview letter to Inspirica, a small tutoring concern in New York.

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"She took another job before we could grab her," laments Lisa Jacobson, the company's chief executive.

A well-crafted letter also may overcome a hiring manager's initial qualms about you. "You can address any issues that may have not gone your way in the interview," suggests Gary Calvaneso, an executive vice president for a West Coast defense contractor.

He learned this lesson when he sought a divisional marketing vice presidency at a medical-devices company several years ago. "Where do you see yourself in five years?" the head of the company asked during their interview. Mr. Calvaneso outlined a long-term marketing plan rather than his personal ambitions, however.

"Is that what you were looking for?" Mr. Calvaneso wondered.

"Not exactly," the CEO stiffly replied.

Worried that he had ruined his chances, Mr. Calvaneso sought advice from Brad Remillard, the recruiter handling the search. Mr. Remillard, president of Impact Hiring Solutions, urged him to correct his mistake immediately with a follow-up letter.

Mr. Calvaneso spent 30 minutes crafting his letter's most important sentence. "I am not sure that I communicated the response to your question about the next five years exactly as you intended," he wrote. He then explained why he hoped to work for a business where he could grow. The letter "opened the door again," he says. He got the job.

In applying to his current employer, Mr. Calvaneso took no chances. His thank-you letter strengthened points he raised during interviews about why the defense contractor should pick an industry novice. He argued that he offered a fresh perspective and transferable marketing know-how.

Every key interviewer deserves a personalized thank-you letter, focused on his or her unique interests. You should collect business cards, duck into the bathroom between sessions and jot down details about the individual you just met.

Career coaches, recruiters and human-resource managers disagree about the format for a follow-up, however. Email often makes the most sense when a hiring decision looms. But an informal electronic message could offend a high-level executive at a tradition-bound business. And corporate spam filters may kill your instant communication before he sees it.

On the other hand, a hard-copy document sent via overnight carrier keeps "the job seeker in the immediate consciousness of the interviewer," Ms. Enelow points out.

A handwritten message in flawless penmanship can leave an indelible impression -- especially if you use simple stationery, minus any flowers or animals. More than half of the respondents to Accountemps's survey prefer that approach. "Handwritten notes are a lost art," says Arnon Geshuri, Google's director of recruiting. Applicants "can go a long way" by taking this extra step to brand themselves, he adds.

Last year, a strong contender for a Google account-executive position delivered a handwritten thank you to an internal recruiter -- along with cupcakes for the recruiter and five other officials

who also interviewed him. One letter of the Google name appeared atop each pastry. His gesture "was just icing on the cake," Mr. Geshuri quips. The Internet company hired the candidate.

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