



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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# The Stepping Stone

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# 10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job (Part 3)

by John West Hadley

*Editor's Note: Catch up on Parts 1-2 of "10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job" in the January and April 2008 issues of The Stepping Stone, and watch for the conclusion in the October 2008 issue.*

## 6. Use E-mails and Letters as Marketing Weapons

The term **Cover Letter** sounds like something superfluous, a wrapper to be torn off to get at what's inside. And if you approach cover letters that way, then they are a waste of time!

On the other hand, if you approach a cover letter as a **Marketing Letter**, it can be a powerful weapon in your arsenal. **Sure, not everyone will bother to read a cover letter, but I can guarantee they notice whether or not there is one included with your résumé!** And since the cover letter will become a part of your application file, often shared with all of the people you will meet during your interview, a powerfully written letter will have much more of an impact than it might appear on the surface.

Think of the marketing pieces you've received in the mail. What's your opinion of a brochure that arrives with no letter, just stuck in an envelope by itself? Doesn't it look like a mass mailing on which the sender has expended no effort? Unless the cover of the brochure jumps out and gets my attention, it's going straight into the circular file.

What about a brochure that arrives with a very generic or poorly written cover letter? That's almost worse, isn't it? Now even if the brochure is well-done, I'm likely to conclude that it was prepared professionally, and the letter is the true example of the quality of the sender's work. Now I'm wondering if he/she is capable of the level of quality service I seek.

**Now what is your reaction if the brochure is accompanied by a compelling, persuasive,**

**personalized letter?** Aren't you much more likely to be interested in the sender's services? Aren't you starting to draw the conclusion that the sender is a true professional, who really cares about doing business with you? Someone who actually put some effort into this mailing?

One final scenario: What if all that is in the envelope is that compelling, persuasive, personalized letter, and no brochure at all? When you open the envelope and see a brochure, you immediately think the purpose is to sell you something. Without the brochure, aren't you that much more likely to at least scan the letter? If I'm a hiring manager, and a letter arrives with a résumé attached, it's very likely that I (or my administrative assistant, who has instructions to screen out résumés), will just mark it "Human Resources" and forward it on.

Obviously, if you are writing to apply for a specific job, you have no choice but to include your résumé to be considered. In other situations, I believe that a powerful letter **with no résumé attached** is the strongest possible approach.

So, from now on **don't send cover letters, send marketing letters!** Approach each cover letter, thank-you letter or e-mail, and networking follow-up note as a marketing presentation of why the reader should be excited about talking with you.

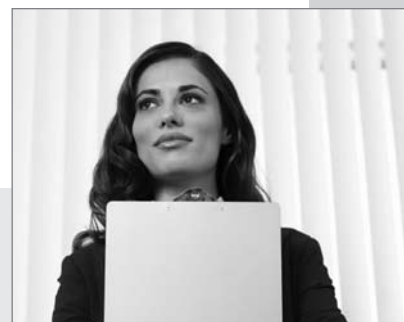
## 7. Build Your Network

Make sure everyone knows that you are in a career search, what you seek and why you would be an outstanding candidate.

(continued on page 14)



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However, never do this by sending a blast e-mail to everyone about your search, or by handing out your résumé to everyone you know or meet.

**Be particularly careful NOT to come across as asking for help in finding a job.** If you do, you will lose most of what makes the contacts helpful, because:

- You are asking for a big favor that often turns contacts off, and makes them hesitant to refer you to others, as they presume you will impose on them in the same way.
- You are putting them on the spot, so that even if they sincerely want to help you, pretty soon they may start to feel awkward and may even become hesitant to return your phone calls.
- It puts blinders on what they seek to provide you, focusing their brainstorming squarely on contacts who they believe can help you further your search in very specific ways, mostly those who they believe have openings. You miss out on all of the other potentially influential contacts who can help you build a powerful spider web of connections that starts catching interesting opportunities for you.

**When networking with your friends, the temptation is to assume they know what you bring to the table, and this can be a fatal mistake.** Often friends or past co-workers have a mental image they've built up based on your past history with them, and you need to make sure that image is what will be most helpful to you. Start from the context in which they know you and acknowledge that, but then draw them a clear picture of the rest of the package you bring to the table.

Don't let people get off the hook by offering to send your résumé to HR or the hiring manager.

Thank them for the offer, but then try to get them to actually introduce you to someone else you can talk to. **Focus on building that spider web of connections, instead of having your résumé handed off, often into a black hole.**

### **8. Network the Right Way**

Many people confuse being open to networking opportunities with always being 'on stage.' They are constantly in a 'selling' mode, trying hard to shake as many hands as possible, and actually turn off many people in the process. I remember one recruiter who wandered around an SOA conference in a dumpy suit carrying a shopping bag, and sticking pens in everyone's hands. While I kept the pen, his name on it only served as a continual reminder of one headhunter with whom I would never work. This is similar to the person who runs around networking events handing everyone in sight their business card. That is NOT networking. That's giving out a lot of cards that are mostly going to wind up in the trash. **Networking is about building relationships**, and that takes time and effort.

I've met many people who try to go to a wide variety of networking events, constantly meeting lots of new people. However, simply attending the events doesn't accomplish all that much. It's the meetings, e-mails and phone calls in between events that build and ripen the relationships into meaningful opportunities. And if you spend too much time going to networking events, you don't have time to do the follow up that bears the real fruit! As a result, I've severely limited my memberships in networking groups. Last year I was invited to a new networking group that met biweekly, and enjoyed the people in it and the 'feel' of the group. Afterward, I considered joining.

On reflection, I concluded that I could only participate meaningfully in that group if I was prepared to drop out of at least one other group I was in.

**Do a lot of networking, but be selective about it.** Think about which networking events are most likely to help you develop the relationships you are seeking, or to provide you the long-term visibility your search requires. **Then make sure you are allocating the time and**

**energy to build on those events instead of just attending them.**

**And never ask about openings. If you have a compelling marketing message that describes your package and gets me excited about it, I will volunteer those.** Focus on getting referrals to other people you can talk to in similar jobs to what you seek, in your target companies, or who might be able to advise or help you in different ways. □

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# Let Your Voice Be Heard!

THE SOA 2008 ELECTIONS ARE JUST AROUND THE CORNER! POLLS OPEN ON AUGUST 7 AND CLOSE ON SEPTEMBER 10 AT 11:45 A.M. CENTRAL TIME. ONLINE VOTING FOR THE ELECTION WILL BE OPEN 24 HOURS A DAY.

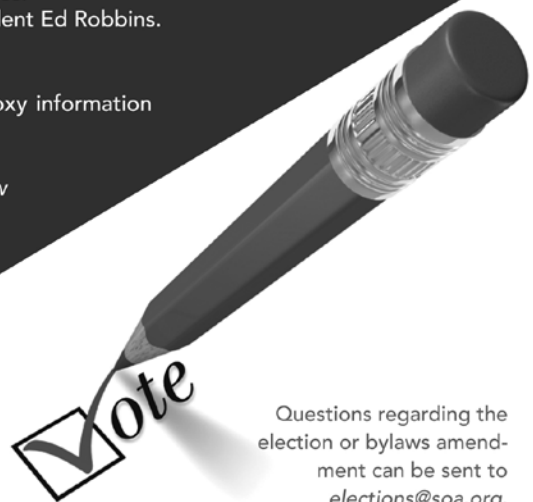
Visit the SOA Web site at <http://www.soa.org/elections> to learn more about the candidates. You'll find:

- Video recorded campaign speeches by President-Elect candidates.
- President-Elect roundtable discussion moderated by Past President Ed Robbins.
- Photographs and biographies of Board Candidates.
- Biographies of Section Council candidates.
- Entire ballots including the Board, Bylaws amendment and proxy information and Section Council candidates.

*This election has a SOA Bylaws amendment proxy to allow Associates—who have been members of the Society for five years or more—to vote in elections for President-Elect, Vice Presidents and elected Board of Directors. Remember: all information—including the suggested Bylaws amendment—can be found at <http://www.soa.org/elections>.*

Let your voice be heard! Please vote!

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Questions regarding the election or bylaws amendment can be sent to [elections@soa.org](mailto:elections@soa.org).