

KSGFOA Newsletter

Kansas Government Finance Officers Association



Quarterly Newsletter of the Kansas Government Finance Officers Association • 2005, No. 4

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President's Message

Dennis Howard • Director of Finance and Administration for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, Johnson County

Thanks to all who made our 6th Annual Fall Professional Conference a great event. Congratulations to Chris Chronis for a very successful year in 2005.

It is now time to turn our attention to 2006 and two important areas that I want to concentrate on during the year. We need to increase our membership and even more important, increase the member involvement in this organization.

If we are to “Promote Excellence in Financial Management” we need to reach out to all Finance Professionals in Kansas. This is done by bringing in new members, renewing memberships of those who have dropped and having our members better promote the KSGFOA in their own organizations. We as members need to look both inside and outside our organization and see if we can do more. This answer should be “YES” in most cases.

This organization has made great strides within the last five years. The contributions from the members that have held the office of President of the Association is one of the reasons for our success. The time and effort that is needed to go through a year is sizable. I applaud the sacrifice that each person has made. However, we can not afford to lose that leadership. I will be requesting that the new Board create a Past Presidents Committee. I would like this group to help our current board in obtaining significant increases in both membership and involvement in our organization.

I look forward to 2006 and the challenges it will bring. KSGFOA is a great organization. By working together, this organization can make great things happen.



Your Career Action Plan for the New Year

by Deborah Walker

People make New Year's resolutions with the best intentions, but they often fail for lack of a solid action plan. If you've resolved for 2006 to move your career forward into a new industry, occupation or level of responsibility, increase your chances of success with this three-part action plan focused on results.

1. Know your career objective
2. Update your resume and cover letters
3. Update your network and networking skills

1. Know your career objective

Knowing your career objective may sound obvious and easy. If, however, you are dissatisfied with your current position, it can be difficult to sort out the good from the bad. You may not fully understand the target of your dissatisfaction: Is it your job or your employer; your company's culture or your supervisor? Analyzing what you want in a job is a good start in determining the best new job for you.

If you are uncertain what type of position to focus on, start by identifying the transferable skills you enjoy(ed) using in your current or past positions. A professional career coach can be helpful in sorting out what you want to keep and, more importantly, what you want to avoid in your next position.

2. Update your resume and cover letters

If it has been a while since your last job search, your resume may no longer reflect your current career direction. Don't forget the most important elements of a strong resume: solid achievements that illustrate your transferable skills, and key words and phrases to capture employers' attention and interest.

Cover letters can make the difference between a warm reception or a cold shoulder. While it's true that not all resume screeners read cover letters, those who do are never impressed—and are often put off by cover letters that sound phony or mass-produced. If you are uncertain of your resume writing skills, a professional resume writer can transform your so-so resume & cover letters into true selling tools.

3. Update your network and networking skills

A good job-search network consists of all those persons who can provide information about future or current career opportunities. You say you don't have a network? You probably do, but you just haven't thought about people who could fit this category. Start by identifying groups of people that you are in contact with on a regular basis, such as professional associations, church, college alumni groups, and neighborhood associations. Then identify the individuals within those groups with whom you feel comfortable and who could help you learn of job leads.

Many of my resume and coaching clients lament their poor networking skills. I always tell them not to

worry; they are in good company because most people feel inadequate when it comes to networking. Before you dismiss the value of a strong network, remember: In securing all-important job interviews, it's very often not what you know, but who you know. There are many resources available for learning how to build and utilize a network to your job-search advantage: books, online articles, workshops, and career coaches trained in the most effective networking techniques.

Once you've put your job-search action plan into practice, you'll be on your way to a better job and a better life.

Deborah Walker is a Career Coach and Resume Writer for AlphaAdvantage. Walker can be contacted by e-mail at Deb@AlphaAdvantage.com

Avoid the Top Three Cover Letter Mistakes!

by Deborah Walker

As a career coach and professional resume writer, I'm often asked "How important are cover letters to my job search?" My answer is, "It depends on how long you want to search for your next job." If you are in no hurry to get interviews, then don't worry about your cover letter.

The fact is I've never met a job searcher who wants to have a painfully slow job search. The whole point of sending out resumes is to get multiple interviews as quickly as possible. But many job seekers still unwittingly sabotage their efforts by using substandard cover letters.

Instead of helping you, your cover letter may actually be hurting your job search. For fast job search results, make sure to avoid these top three cover letter mistakes:

1. Not understanding the hiring motives of your audience
2. Repeating rather than introducing your resume
3. Overuse of the word "I"

1. Not understanding the hiring motives of your audience

There are three basic audiences that a job seeker sends his/her resume to: executive decision-makers, resume screeners, and third-party recruiters. Each of these groups has its own hiring motives.

•**Executive decision-makers** are looking for candidates who will have a significant impact on bottom-line initiatives, such as time saved, income generated, revenue built, etc.

•**Resume screeners** are searching for candidates who directly match the lists of qualifications in the job description.

•**Third-party recruiters** are looking for selling points to help position you as a top candidate. Knowing these hiring motives will help you craft your cover letter specifically to catch the attention of your particular hiring audience. By appealing directly to the reader, you are creating an immediate bond that will make you a stronger candidate.

2. Repeating rather than introducing your resume

Repeating the exact same things you wrote in your resume is one of the most common cover letter mistakes. No one wants to read the same thing twice. By the time most people have finished writing their resume, they feel that they have run out of ideas and just cut and paste to create a cover letter.

Instead, the cover letter should be what sells the reader on your skills. Like the jacket-cover introduction to a good book, the cover letter should give the reader a taste of the great things to come and encourage them to read more.

If you don't have any idea what your top skills are and how they will help the company, neither will your reader. Take the time to craft the right words and statements to make your skills shine.

3. Overuse of the word "I"

A cover letter that begins nearly every sentence with "I" is as boring as a conversation with someone who only talks about himself. That kind of person one avoids at all costs. Is that the way you want your reader to see you?

Focusing all the attention on yourself may seem like a good way to sell your skills. But it can also reflect lack of interest in the company, in the job, and in making a real contribution to that workplace. There's a good balance to be drawn between selling yourself and selling what you can do for the company.

Creating variety in the sentences of your cover letter is an easy way to show your interest without being self-centered. By shifting the emphasis to the recipient/company—and away from yourself—you can prove that your main interest is not just in winning the job but also in doing it effectively. Try to rewrite sentences that start with "I," "me," or "my," to start with "You," or "Your." Show how you can make a difference for them.

A cover letter that is poorly written may cause your resume to be ignored. But a well-crafted cover letter will invite and encourage the reader to take a closer look at your resume. You'll make a positive first impression before your resume is even opened. Rather than making your cover letter an afterthought, take the time to really consider the type of presentation your cover letter will make. If your resume isn't winning you job interviews, consider hiring a professional resume writer to help. It's true what they say: You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.

Deborah Walker is a Career Coach and Resume Writer for AlphaAdvantage. Walker can be contacted by e-mail at Deb@AlphaAdvantage.com

KSGFOA Listserv Started

With technical support from the League of Kansas Municipalities, KSGFOA has created a listserv to facilitate communications and the sharing of solutions among its full members.

In just the first few weeks of operation, members have used the listserv to announce the availability of positions and to seek answers to questions about investment policies, economic development incentive policies, car allowances and mileage reimbursement practices, utility billing procedures, and the use of external auditors for budget preparation.

Any full member of KSGFOA can register for the listserv. Full members are those who work for a governmental entity or for a university. To participate, each member must take affirmative action to sign up. To ensure privacy, the roster of members participating in the listserv is kept confidential by the listserv administrator at the League of Kansas Municipalities.

To sign up, send an e-mail to webmaster@lkm.org with the subject of "Subscribe KSGFOA", and put your e-mail address in the body of the e-mail. You will get a confirmation e-mail once you have been successfully added to the list. If you have any problems subscribing or any questions regarding the listserv please contact Mark Tomb at mtomb@lkm.org, or (785) 354-9565.

KSGFOA Conference Draws Ninety-Five Participants

Ninety-five public finance professionals from Kansas and Missouri attended the 2005 KSGFOA Fall Conference in Overland Park on October 19-21. The program featured two pre-conference seminars, *Intermediate Governmental Accounting*, and *Financing "Tools" for Economic Development in Kansas and Missouri*. The opening keynote address was *New Horizons for the Heartland Economy*, by Jason Henderson, Economist for the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City.

A variety of conference workshop sessions were held on such topics as GFOA – Best Practices, Financial & ERP System Acquisition & Implementation, Risk Management, Funding and Reporting for OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits), and the presentation of a variety of useful spreadsheets, word templates, and project models developed by KSGFOA members. As an added feature, vendor exhibits and hourly software demonstrations were available for conference attendees.

At the Chapter's annual meeting on October 20, 2005, the following KSGFOA officers for 2006 were elected:

•**President**—Dennis Howard, Director of Finance and Administration for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, Johnson County

•**Vice President**—Maureen Rogers, Director of Finance, City of Merriam

•**Secretary**—Ron Ahsmuhs, Finance Director/City Clerk, City of Newton

•**Treasurer**—Linda Wood, City Controller, City of Topeka

Comments on the KSGFOA Fall Conference

I really appreciated Tom Singleton and Brad Scafe's presentation on GASB 45. It forced me to sit for an hour-and-a-half and consider a subject I've been avoiding! These two gentlemen probably felt like messengers being shot, but they did a great job helping us understand that every government has at least a possibility of liability under GASB 45.

I also found Jason Henderson's keynote address very interesting. I hadn't really thought about local rural economies competing on a global scale, and the steps that are being taken to regionalize the local agricultural economy and adapt it to new types of products.

As your KSGFOA Vice President for 2006, I welcome any suggestions any of you have as to the content of the 2006 Fall Conference. The KSGFOA Board wants these conferences to have something to offer for different sizes of governments, as well as different levels of positions that attendees may have in their governments. Personally, I want the conference to be "meaty" in terms of educational content, but it needs to be fun, too! Thanks to those of you who have already been contributing suggestions. Also, if any of you have suggestions for the one-day spring and summer conferences for 2006, we welcome those as well.

—Maureen Rogers, KSGFOA Vice President

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I would like to particularly thank Dave MacGillvary of Springsted for his help with the pre-conference. We were constantly working with late cancellations or additions. Without his assistance I never would have been able to keep the program together. With his help and the help of Joe Norton of Gilmore & Bell, we were able to put together a great deal of technical data that should provide good reference material to the diehard finance officer. Dave and Joe have been so supportive of KSGFOA over the years; it is certainly appreciated!

I also was very impressed with the keynote speaker, Jason Henderson. I heard him speak at a seminar in Manhattan several years ago and felt he had really good information to share. His comments and economic data on the region and on sustainable economic development were very thought-provoking and relevant. His overall presentation was very insightful, and his support of KSGFOA is also very much appreciated.

—Debra Daily, Director of Finance for the City of Gladstone

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KSGFOA is appreciative of the following firms for being exhibitors and/or sponsors of our Fall 2005 Conference, and we are grateful to many individuals associated with these firms for sharing their expertise with our members in Conference sessions. Please take the time to acknowledge and thank these partners personally, as you have the opportunity.

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