ASK ELLEN – including info re: availability for an interview, in the cover letter

3/27/13

(This is another one of those times when I’ve been asked similar questions by multiple people within a few weeks…)

Q: I am job hunting and because I am currently employed, I am limited in when I can be available for an interview. Should I let employers know this right up front in my cover letter?

A: While it may seem that including such information is being helpful, it is actually “jumping the gun” and may be a turnoff to the reader of the letter. The cover letter is not the place to be addressing specifics of your availability for an interview; it’s too soon. The employer has not yet shown any interest in meeting with you. Including that information may make you seem overconfident or high-maintenance or even pushy, or that you don’t understand how interviews work.

In general you should focus in the cover letter on how well you match the requirements of the job and why you feel you are a strong candidate for the position, and include only the information and documents that are requested. It is best to focus on the employer’s needs at this early point in the hiring process, especially as the cover letter (and resume) are usually your introduction to that hiring manager. You’ll make a better initial impression if you leave out any requirements of your own. Wait until after you’ve been contacted to set up an interview to discuss when you can meet.

A parallel to this is not asking about salary or benefits, or bringing up anything you might need or want from the employer (such as a flexible schedule, or certain days off), until you have been offered the job. The employer should take the lead in discussing those things too.

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Thank you and good luck!

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