

How to Turn Bad News into Positive
Candidate Engagement

Rejection Letter Cheatsheet



Introduction

After investing time and energy in the hiring process, most people want to hear why they didn't get a job. But very few get satisfactory answers. Why is this the case, when saying no is such a powerful opportunity to engage candidates and maintain relationships for the future?

56%

of applicants who have positive experiences during the application process say they'd consider seeking employment with that company again.¹

In this cheatsheet, you'll learn how to take the sting out of [rejection letters](#) by humanizing them, so you can turn the act of delivering bad news into a vehicle for engagement. Along the way, you'll find tips, links, and more to help your company close the loop with candidates for success.

1. CareerBuilder, Study of more than 3,900 U.S. workers conducted online by Harris Interactive© from November 1 to November 30, 2012.

The Difference Between Traditional and Human Rejection Letters

Traditional Rejection Letters:

Sound like they're from a robot

Use a generic response that is not tailored to the recipient

Leave the candidate feeling sad, confused, angry, and disinclined to apply to the company again

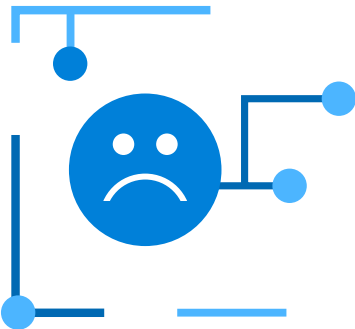
vs.

Human Rejection Letters:

Sound like they're from a human

Take the time to call out details specific to the candidate

Leave the candidate feeling satisfied on why they didn't get the job and open to future roles at the company



A Checklist for Writing Human-Sounding Rejection Letters

Is your letter relevant to the candidate's stage in your process?

Make sure your rejection is tailored to the stage at which an applicant receives news in your process. For example, your message to a candidate who didn't make it to the screening stage would be much shorter and less detailed than a final round candidate.

Are you following up in a timely fashion?

As soon as you know a candidate is rejected, send an email. It's stressful waiting to hear back, especially the more invested somebody is in an opportunity, and it makes everybody happier when they know where they stand.

Did you personalize the email to the candidate?

Taking the time to use a candidate's first name in the salutation should be standard practice at your company, but you can go beyond this baseline by calling out one of the candidate's strengths that your team was impressed by during the interview rounds.

Is Your “Thank You” Authentic?

Instead of sounding rote or mechanical, try to be polite and convey genuine appreciation. It’s a compliment when a candidate chooses to apply and consider your company for their next career move — let them know that you think so!

Traditional Rejection Letters:



vs.

Human Rejection Letters:



Thank you for applying to the <POSITION> at <COMPANY>.

We really appreciate that you took the time to consider us. We know there are a lot of companies out there that are hiring.

Did you leave the door open?

Many rejection letters vaguely hint at a “future position” or provide a link to a jobs page telling the candidate to “stay informed,” but everyone knows those are empty words. Instead, ask their permission to be in touch in the future, which is much more respectful.

Traditional Rejection Letters:



vs.

Human Rejection Letters:



We’ll keep your application on file should a position become available.

We hope you don’t mind if we reach out to you in the future.

Will they understand why they didn't get the job?

If you went with another candidate, tell them why the other candidate was more qualified. If they're underqualified, explain why. It's easier for candidates to accept that they've been turned down when you help them understand your company's needs and the type of candidate who can best fulfill those needs.

Traditional Rejection Letters:



vs.

Human Rejection Letters:



We were impressed with your experience, but...

The team was really impressed with your ability to get things done — such as when you built out the entire ecommerce and payment solution at [previous company]. However we decided to go with another candidate with a bit more experience...

Craft Your Next Rejection Letter with Ease

Keeping candidates in the loop sounds easy, but many employers struggle with communication — nearly 60% of job seekers have had a poor candidate experience.² Crafting human-sounding rejection letters and sending them promptly is just one of the many ways you can improve the candidate experience and boost your employer brand in today's competitive market.

2. Future Workplace, "The Candidate Experience Study," June 2016

For more tips on making every touch point count, check out our guide, [4 Templates to Humanize Candidate Rejection Letters](#) and our video, [5 Steps to Mastering Candidate Communications](#).



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