



THE SIGNAL BRIEF / DECISION QUALITY

Sharper, Not Different

In one reported two-run test, a letter explained the family decision behind an eight-month gap. The advice got more useful; its core diagnosis held.

Don Long · Founder, SummitMark · Helping people and organizations become capable with AI



An illustrative still life; the candidate and documents are anonymized.

More context made the advice sharper, not different. The story changed; the evidence did not.



01 / WHAT THE RESUME COULD SUPPORT

A real story. Mixed signals.

Read without the letter, the resume had substance: financial-services operations, loan and credit workflows, compliance, KPI tracking, and an Excel automation win the candidate said reduced follow-up call time by 15 percent. Earlier experience included a data-analyst internship, alongside a computer-engineering degree, a Canadian analytics diploma, recent certificates, and independent projects.

It also sent mixed signals. Operations, data analysis, financial analysis, and AI building each had some evidence behind them; none made the candidate's positioning feel focused. Long says the first AI response saw the clearest case in financial-services operations and Excel automation. It advised narrowing the story, preparing targeted resumes, and making project evidence easier to inspect.

SAME RESUME / ONE ADDED INPUT

RUN A / RESUME ONLY

The diagnosis: operations and Excel automation were better supported than conventional financial or data analyst roles. Recommendation: narrow the positioning and strengthen proof.

RUN B / RESUME + LETTER

The core assessment held. The response added honest project dates and calm interview language for the move home and training period.

The practical framing improved. The market-facing case remained the same.

WHAT THAT DOES - AND DOES NOT - MEAN

This is not a judgment of the candidate's worth or potential. It is a reading of the evidence presented for particular roles. Context can explain what happened and help someone discuss it; it cannot turn a certificate into demonstrated skill or an independent project into production experience.



02 / WHAT THE LETTER CHANGED

A better answer can still be candid.

There is a risk on both sides. Without context, an advisor may misread a caregiving period as drift and give advice that is needlessly cold. With context, an advisor may feel pressure to soften a diagnosis, inflate the projects, or build the entire strategy around a moving story when employers will still look for proof.

A good answer can make room for both. Context tells an advisor what happened and how to discuss it. Evidence tells the advisor what the candidate can currently demonstrate. One should not impersonate the other.

The letter changed the story. It did not change the core diagnosis.

THE TEST HAS A NARROW REACH

This is one reported comparison, not evidence about all career advice or hiring. The underlying resume and paired AI responses are not reproduced here for independent review. The account does not establish that the gap caused rejections, that screening software filtered the candidate out, or that explaining family circumstances helps with hiring. It also does not prove that the certificates and projects close the skills case.

Long says the two runs used the same model, reasoning setting, prompt style, and no web access, with the letter as the only changed input. That is a useful control as described. Without the full prompts and outputs, readers cannot evaluate the comparison or know whether another reviewer would read the resume the same way.

THE CAREFUL CONCLUSION

In this author-reported test, added context appears to have improved the specificity and humanity of the advice without changing its central assessment. That is a result to test again, not a law about AI.



03 / THE NEXT TEST

Put context in a useful shape.

Long's proposed Context Addendum gives an AI advisor the missing facts without asking the story to stand in for proof. It has five fields:

01**WHAT CHANGED**

The factual event, in one sentence.

02**WHY IT CHANGED**

The reason, stated without apology.

03**WHAT I DID**

Activities during the gap, with dates.

04**WHAT I CAN PROVE**

Links, artifacts, or numbers that can be checked.

05**WHAT I NEED NEXT**

The decision the AI should help with.

This is not a fix, and it has not been shown to outperform a letter or avoid its own distortions. It is a tool under audit.

ONE QUESTION FOR THE NEXT ISSUE

What should top career advice?

A

The candidate's stated goals.

B

Long-term family and financial obligations.

C

What the candidate can prove right now.

Pick one and tell us why. Reply with A, B, or C; the winning answer will be tested in the next issue.

SOURCE: Don Long's public LinkedIn article. The account and comparison are attributed to the author; the underlying materials were not independently available. This issue does not establish hiring outcomes or a general result about AI career advice.
