

Reference Checking

Many job candidates carry a series of reference letters with them or submit photocopies with their resume. Although some information can be obtained from this source, little weight should be given to written references because most employers will make reasonably good comments about an ex-employee regardless of job performance. The tendency is to say favorable things, even about people who are fired because there is a desire on the part of most employers to help people, rather than to hurt them.

When calling references, allow plenty of time to discuss the individual. If necessary, call back. Take good notes and use the reference's own words.

When recording remarks:

1. Identify yourself immediately by title and company name and tell the person that the candidate has given that person as a reference with permission to call.
2. Verify dates and actual duties that the person performed while working there. How did the candidate compare to other work effort.
3. See how the department was organized and the structure of the organization and how the position fits into the organization. How long has the person known the candidate?
4. Tell the person the position you are attempting to fill.
5. Tell them the principal duties and responsibilities.

Some suggested questions to ask:

1. Does the reference feel the person would do well in this position?
2. What areas does the reference feel the person may be strong?
3. What areas does the reference feel the person may need some training?
4. What areas does the reference feel the person may be weak?
5. What does the reference feel are the persons (5) major strengths?
6. What does the reference feel could be a possible weakness in the candidate?
7. Did the candidate receive any promotions? Did the candidate get turned down for a promotion? Did the candidate turn down a promotion?
8. How closely was he/she supervised in his/her job?

9. Did he/she supervise others? How many people reported to him/her? How would you rate him/her as a supervisor?
10. How did he/she get along with his/her supervisor?
11. Was he/she difficult to motivate?
12. Why did he/she leave the company?
13. Did family trouble, financial worries, drinking, drugs, or other personal problems interfere with his/her work?
14. What kind of job would you think is best suited to his/her abilities?
15. Would the reference rehire the person?
16. Would the reference recommend the candidate for the position?
17. Would the reference have any concerns about the applicant working alone with or around children?

At the conclusion of the reference check, thank the person and again give him/her your name, company and telephone number and tell them if you can ever help them in any way to let you know.

Sometimes in checking a reference you will find former employers who are particularly violent or emotional in their criticisms. In such cases, it is important to check the details closely. Occasionally, a weak executive may have been fearful of the former employee because he or she challenged the executive's authority, stepped on toes, or refused to comply with the boss's domineering style.

First of all, always respect a person's confidence and never check references with an applicant's present employer without permission. Every person should have the privilege of changing employers and this privilege should be respected by all concerned.

Once you have decided to employ the candidate, you might agree that you will give them the job provided references from the present employer are satisfactory. Alternatively, the candidate might give you the name of a friend with the same company who knows he or she is changing jobs. In this way, you could get more information. Otherwise, you must depend on references from previous employers or personal references until the candidate has actually resigned.