

# **P**ROVIDING REFERENCES

This handout will provide an overview of why references are important, how to find, choose and prepare your contacts and have them be a part of your success team.

## Why do Employers Check Your References?

- ✓ They want to know that you have the experience you presented on your resume.
- ✓ Employers have a duty to provide a safe workplace, or to show that they have done some background checking to avoid "negligent hiring": someone with a history of violence who could harm someone in the workplace.
- ✓ To hear more about past performance and accomplishments.
- ✓ To learn more about the candidate works in a particular position or environment, the best kind of manager and management style for the candidate. To get feedback on how to help the person succeed in the job.
- ✓ We listen to what is said...and what isn't said. When the reference pauses, that's the time to listen and follow up with a question.
- ✓ Sometimes we recruit the references!

## Choose References Wisely

Choose your references carefully: a bad reference can cost you a job, but a great one can seal the deal!

## How Many References?

Prepare a list of 6-8 people you can call upon as references and tailor your reference list for the job.

## Selecting Your References

Your reference list should include former managers, a few peers, some direct reports, and can include outside vendors and business associates. References should be from your most recent positions, but if you did a particularly stellar job for a manager a few years ago, you should include that person, too.

Your references should be familiar with your performance, responsibilities, work habits and communication style.

## Contact Your References Before You Put Them on Your List

1. Call your possible references and let them know you're looking for a job. Ask if they would serve as a reference.
2. Confirm their contact information: home, work and cell phone numbers, email addresses and best ways to contact them.

3. Ask if they would like a copy of your current resume, as it would refresh their memory of what you've accomplished.
4. Don't forget your references are also part of your network, so ask if they could keep you in mind for upcoming positions.

## Check Your References

It may be worthwhile to have someone call and check your references. You want to be sure they really will make themselves available and what they'll say about your strengths and weaknesses.

Most employers have policies stating they will only provide verification of employment: dates of employment, title and salary. They may or may not respond when asked if you are eligible for rehire.

## If You Just Graduated

Your references include teachers, classmates, anyone with knowledge of volunteer activities or extra-curricular activities. These people can speak about your ability to learn new things, your determination, industriousness, and your teamwork skills.

## You've Lost Track of Former Colleagues

This is an important point: keep track of your former bosses and colleagues. Go to professional meetings and keep in touch regularly. You can use LinkedIn to find many contacts. Let's say the whole company or division closed. Some people put together "alumni" mailing lists - check Google and Yahoo Groups. Go to the former employer's website if they closed or downsized your division and see if there is an Alumni outreach. Look people up on Google or call former vendors and let them know you're looking for people. You're only a few degrees away from anyone, so you should be able to track them down.

## You Have References but They Aren't Saying Great Things

If you have had a negative employment experience, call your manager and talk with him/her. Explain that you're looking for work and although things did not work out well at that company, mention your positive traits or contributions and ask if they would feel comfortable discussing that. Be sure to let him or her know what you learned from the experience and thank him/her for their time and help. It takes courage to do this but you've nothing to lose. This doesn't always work but it's worth trying!

## When to Provide References to a Potential Employer

1. If you have a resume on a website or job board, don't upload your reference names and numbers. You don't want them to be overwhelmed with calls.
2. You can bring a list of references to the interview to provide if pressed, but it's better to say: "I'd like to be sure there is mutual interest before providing my references, and if there is, I can provide you with several names at that time. Would that be alright?" or "My references sometimes travel for business purposes and I'd like to be sure they're in town. May I call or email you later today or tomorrow once I've confirmed their availability?"

## When Not to Provide References

If you do not have interest in the job/company, do not provide references: be respectful of your references' time.

Some agencies will request your references (before you hear of any job openings) in order to fill up their databases and fish for business with your references. If you are interviewing for executive level positions, it is appropriate for the agency to check your references. If you're interviewing for any other position, some agencies do the reference checking for the client company, but you can confirm this with the hiring manager or HR.

Don't abuse your references: be protective of them.

## Coaching Your References

1. Following your interview, if there is mutual interest and the employer wants your references, review your interview notes, determine what seemed to be most important to the company, and tailor your reference list around that. For example, if there is a lot of frantic activity and a difficult workload, use a reference that has seen you remain calm and organized and complete your projects on time.
2. Describe the position you've interviewed for and review why you are a good match. This is a good time to remind them of similar projects or duties and your previous successes.
3. Remind them why you're looking for a job (layoff, change of business needs, new opportunities), and what you're seeking in a new position.
4. Discuss a weakness. Everyone has them, you're usually asked in an interview, and your references will be asked. If they had in mind a particular weakness from a few years ago, for example, you did not know a particular computer program or language but you've taken classes or had experience - let them know!
5. Thank them and offer help in return.

## Utilizing LinkedIn References

Even when companies have policies not to provide references, many people will help you on LinkedIn. You can ask for recommendations and write them, too. Some employers do not pay attention to this while others do. One candidate whose company would not provide references had several recommendations on LinkedIn. She printed them out and provided a copy at interviews.

## After the Decision

- If you were offered the position, let your references know, and be sure to let them know that their support and recommendations were a valuable part of the process and you appreciate their time and efforts.
- If you were not offered the position, call your references to update them, again thanking them for their support.
- Always thank your references and remember to ask if there is anything you can do for them. Keep in touch so there are no surprises or embarrassment if you need to ask for help.
- Ask if there is anything you can do to help them.
- Thank them!

## BEST OF LUCK!

**MARCIA STEIN, PHR** has worked in the Silicon Valley since 1989 and owns a Human Resources Consulting practice. She is experienced as a Recruiter, Staffing Manager and Human Resources Director and regular job seeker. Marcia presents to organizations, corporations and job search groups. She is the founder of Silicon Valley Women in Human Resources...and Friends, a networking, mentoring and educational group for professional women with over 1,500 members. She is the author of [\*Recruiters on Recruiting\*](#), a look into the career paths of different types of recruiters, their tips for job seekers and new recruiters. Her second book is [\*Strained Relations: Help for Struggling Parents of Troubled Teens\*](#). She has also released a booklet, [\*Top Tips From Recruiters for Job Seekers\*](#). See [www.tellmeaboutyourself.info](http://www.tellmeaboutyourself.info) for more information.

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