

FIND THE RIGHT REFERENCES

Your chances of getting a job are higher with a solid list of references

IN TODAY'S competitive job market, job seekers need to do everything they can to distinguish themselves from the competition. A less than glowing reference can set you apart in the wrong way.

When specialist financial recruitment firm Robert Half surveyed executives to describe the most unusual reference checks they had conducted, the responses included a job candidate whose mother had recommended her for the position and one whose reference said the applicant did not like the industry in which she was trying to get a job.

Hiring managers need to hear honest, positive feedback from people who have witnessed your technical and soft skills in the environment you have worked to get a true assessment and understanding of your capability.

Below are some suggestions for assembling a reference list that works for you:

Do not ambush your contacts

Make sure the people you list as your references are comfortable speaking on your behalf. Giving your references ample notice will allow them enough time to build a strong and convincing case for you when the prospective employer calls. On the other hand, catching your references by surprise can certainly backfire. For example, one hiring manager talked to a reference who could not believe



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he was listed as a referral. Another person listed as a reference had never heard of the job candidate he was asked to comment on. You do not want hiring managers to be greeted with such responses. Before you submit a reference list to a prospective employer, prime your references. Provide each contact with your updated resumé, describe the company and position you have applied for, as well as the name of the person

who is likely to call. Contacting your references beforehand will also ensure that each individual is enthusiastic about your request. Those who quickly return phone calls and are excited to speak about your capabilities make the best impressions on hiring managers.

2 Choose wisely

It is important to choose carefully and make sure you have useful references who can further

your job-seeking cause. Consider which of your references can best discuss the traits and qualities you possess that are directly related to the job.

Such individuals should be able to provide relevant feedback on your experience and achievements, and they may not necessarily possess the most impressive job titles.

If you are applying for a management position, for example, it is helpful to provide references from a previous supervisor, a fellow peer and someone you managed.

3 Remember, it's a small world

Some employers may go the extra mile to learn more about you, and social media sites make such detective work easier. Avoid burning bridges with former colleagues and be selective about who is in your online network, since a hiring manager could easily contact these individuals. You may consider relying on different services for your personal and professional networks, such as using LinkedIn for business purposes and Facebook and Twitter for personal ones, and keeping the two groups separate.

4 Go the extra mile

Make it easy for an employer to speak to your references by providing clear contact information for each individual, including the person's name,

phone number, e-mail address, and even the best time of the day to reach him.

5 Tell the truth

One of the hiring managers surveyed spoke to a reference who said the job candidate did not do the work he claimed he had during the interview. Another reference told a hiring manager that the applicant did not work for the firm she listed in her employment history. Hiring managers are bound to find out if you stretched the truth during the hiring process, so resist any temptation to be less than honest about your prior experience and make sure your references are forthright too.

6 Say thanks

Even if a reference does not end up speaking to a hiring manager on your behalf, thank that person and keep him updated on the status of your search. If you are hired, be sure to send a note of appreciation. Remember also to not let the relationships go dormant until you are on the job hunt again. Keeping in touch regularly with your references can help you maintain a solid network of professionals to assist you in various ways throughout your career. - Source: ST/ANN

■ Article by Tim Hird, managing director of Robert Half International, Singapore.