



# References

BY - ANDRENA CLARK, EVENT RECRUITMENT

Recruitment-resumes, interviews and references immediately come to mind. Sometimes references are a worry. Fearing legal implications employers are increasingly reluctant to provide references. Nevertheless, they remain a critical part of the recruitment process. Here are some tips for applicants, referees and employers to help avoid the angst.

## Applicants - Improving Your Job References

There is a tendency to take job departures and criticisms personally and an unpleasant departure won't be easily forgotten and will equate to unpleasant references. So... when deciding to leave a company, make the transition as smooth as possible and avoid burning bridges. Choose a time to depart that doesn't fall directly before a major event or at the peak of the busy period. Give at least two weeks notice, inform your supervisor of the reason for your departure and try to avoid criticising your job, the company or your superiors.

Once you have left, send a note to your supervisor and the owners (your referees) thanking them for their guidance and mentoring. Stay in touch by emailing or dropping a note to them every six months or so.

When choosing referees, select three to five employers or other professionals who have extensive, first-hand knowledge of your background and experience. Personal references are also acceptable, but they have less impact. Your referees should be well informed of your work habits and career successes and be able to speak with some authority to your prospective employer.

Before submitting your references to a prospective employer it's a good idea to check with your referee to confirm that contact details are still the same. That way you remind them who you are, and it gives you the opportunity to reinforce your positive image before they are contacted by your new employer. It's also good manners. If it has been some time since you worked for that company, chances are they may have forgotten you and may give a less than stellar job reference without your courtesy call.

## Employers - Providing References

Providing employee information in references can expose employers to a host of legal problems, such as discrimination, slander and invasion of privacy. Normally, it is recognised that an employer has a legitimate reason to disclose information about former employees and as such, employers providing job references generally are immune from liability.

It is worth keeping in mind however, that the reference should be provided in good faith without malice or untruthfulness. Try to limit the information to that which is job related without volunteering additional information and be as accurate as possible. Always verify the reference checker's identity (this can easily be done via a return phone call).

Basic precautions to reduce the potential for legal ramifications include asking all your current employees to sign a consent and release form acknowledging your right to respond truthfully to any future employer's enquiries. Assign responsibility for answering reference enquiries to one person in your company, preferably a human resource representative trained in the legalities of reference giving. Instruct other staff who are not designated to handle enquiries not to make any comments or to respond to any questions about another employee's performance.

## Employers - Checking Applicant References

Once you've narrowed down your list of applicants the final step prior to making the job offer is to check references. These will provide further insight into an applicant and verify that the resume hasn't been creatively enhanced or that the person isn't wanted on criminal charges (it happens). We suggest that you talk to at least three former employers.

Keep in mind what you can and cannot check for legally. Basically if you are checking facts that directly relate to the job that's fine. If you are employing a receptionist, you don't need to check driving records, but for a Business Development Manager (who's on the road all the time) you might.

It's a good idea to have a list of questions ready to ask - saving you time and ensuring you get exactly the information you need. Ask the same job related questions to each referee you contact. If the referee seems cagey or unwilling to answer a question, this may be a red flag. Listen for hesitations and subject changes. Sometimes silence is a telling answer. While references can cause potential worries, employing without checking them can cause even more.