

# RAISING THE BAR ON REFERENCES

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The importance of references during the job search process is often underestimated. In many cases, an employer with two or more candidates may base their final decision on the reference's responses.

It is important to be strategic in who is asked to act as a reference. The general rule of thumb is to provide the potential employer with three references; however providing a fourth reference doesn't hurt in the case they cannot get a hold of one.

## Who Do I Ask?

To start, create a list of people that have interacted with you in a number of situations and know you well. Think about people from work, professors/faculty, advisors, mentors, community members, and club/organization affiliates. You want this list to include professional contacts—your college roommate, grandma or best friend aren't good choices!

Past managers make good references if departures from the position were amicable and you feel they will provide positive input. If you are unemployed and no references are listed from your most recent employer that can be a red flag to a potential employer. Ask yourself if there is a colleague that may provide a good reference for you if your previous manager is not a smart choice. If currently employed, a trusted colleague can be a good option if you are uncomfortable listing your manager, or leave off a contact from your current employer completely.

From the list, begin to narrow the

field by asking yourself who could speak to your work ethic, personal attributes, and experiences that relate to the types of job you may be seeking. For example, if you are looking at a customer service position, the manager from your high school part-time job at the local restaurant might be a good reference choice. They could speak first-hand about your ability to interact with customers and how you dealt with difficult customer situations.

## How Do I Ask?

Once you have narrowed the list down it is time to start making contact to see if they will act as a reference for you. This is an important step—you should ALWAYS seek permission to list someone as a reference before doing so. Provide the person with an update regarding the types of jobs you are interested in and reasons why you feel they may be a good reference for you.

You might even remind them of some of the positive accomplishments or characteristics that you hope to bring to an organization. You can approach this by asking questions, such as, 'Do you think I'd be a good fit for this type of job? Why?', or 'Is there anything you can think of that I should focus on sharing during my interview?'. Not only is this a good reminder, it allows you to gauge how they may respond to the questions asked by a potential employer. If you aren't getting a good vibe from their responses, you may want to rethink utilizing them as a reference.

If they agree to be a reference, be sure to verify their correct name (spelling

especially), company/organization name, title and best phone number and email to list. Ask that they let you know if any of those details change so your reference sheet can be updated accordingly throughout the process. It is also helpful to supply a recent copy of your resume to the reference.

It is very important to keep in touch with your references throughout the job search process and let them know how it is going. At these check-in points check that all contact information is still accurate.

After you have completed your job search process, be sure to reach out to your references to let them know you've taken a job. They will be happy to know and share in the excitement with you! Don't forget to thank them for their assistance.

## REFERENCES ON RESUMES?

There isn't a need to include a statement on your resume stating references available upon request. Instead, utilize that valuable space on your resume selling yourself!

Rather, have your references listed out neatly on a separate document that contains the header from your resume and is printed on the same paper type. Have your reference sheet available and ready to share at your interview.

References can be the determining factor between you and another candidate. Spending the time and effort to maintain a strong and strategic references network can be one of the most valuable assets to your job search.