

A Word About References

References remain a vital component of every well-planned and carefully considered job search. What is your approach to finding and sharing reference names? Is there more you could do? Do you need to choose new references? Is it even necessary to worry about it? Lots to consider in this oft-neglected topic.

Choose Wisely

Research shows that references are checked over 90 percent of the time. Who you recruit to serve in your "rah rah" team is important. Three references are the accepted standard: one should be someone senior to you at your current or last position; the other two should be workplace colleagues or direct reports. If you need to substitute with someone from your personal life, keep in mind that this type of reference should ideally be a person with a professional title who will speak with some authority about your character.

Prep Strategically

Preparing your reference can make the difference between a powerful or damaging reference. Remove that element of surprise by forewarning and arming your reference with a copy of the job posting or details of the position's requirements; and remind him of how you contributed to a couple of projects' successes (choose projects in which you played roles relevant to the position applied to). Avoid choosing people who would likely provide inadequate or vague responses that could eliminate you from the short list.

Share Selectively

If your references are now listed at the end of your resume delete them immediately and for good reasons. First of all, as a courtesy to your references. The information included often extends to home phone numbers and personal and workplace emails—not the kind of information you should be sharing in this day of stolen identities.

Secondly, it can actually be a self-sabotaging move! Offering your supervisor's contact info is tempting information that recruiters might use to skip your application altogether in favour of someone with better credentials.

The Future

There are rumours that fewer people are agreeing to provide a reference. Some companies prohibit staff from responding to such calls citing possible legal repercussions. These prefer to hand over a letter of reference that usually simply restates your accountabilities, without addressing your performance.

As for new trends, here's one from AskTheHeadHunter.com: the preemptive reference.

"Your most powerful reference is the one who calls an employer before the employer calls him. A preemptive reference speaks up for you, not about you. Actually, this is not a reference at all, but a recommendation or a referral.

The best preemptive reference is when a reputable person in your field refers you to another employer. In other words, the referrer sends you -- they used to say transmits you -- to his peer and asks him to hire you. Who needs a resume when you've got that? This is beyond even a professional courtesy; it's an endorsement. It carries enormous weight."

We'll see where these trends lead. In the meantime, choose your references wisely, give them a heads-up, and remind them of some of the great work you contributed to.

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