

Ask the Career Coach: Obtaining and Maintaining References

Who should you ask to be a reference? How should you present them to a perspective employer?

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Dear Career Coach Lisa,

How do I handle requests for references when interviewing? Is it actually legal for companies to provide personal references?

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References are typically requested when you are a final candidate. It is important to understand who in your network would be best to provide a reference for you. When selecting a reference provider, think about the relationship you had with the individual, what role he/she had when you worked together and what role they presently have now. Ensure they are comfortable providing the reference by asking permission before you offer their contact information to the prospective employer.

Make sure your reference provider can provide appropriate information about you. Consider sharing your present resume, information about the job you are being considered for and the name of the individual or company that may contact them for the reference check. This will enable them to watch out for the call, email or fax request.

It is important to have a few references that are willing to speak on your behalf. You may want to consider having more than the typical two or three so if one is away on vacation you can still be covered in a timely manner. Some companies accept LinkedIn recommendations as references. A nice way to present your LinkedIn recommendations is to copy and paste them into a word document with your name and contact information along with a header "Recommendations from LinkedIn."

Keep in mind that strong references can help you land the offer. References are typically from former bosses, co-workers, clients, vendors and colleagues. Depending on the job, former professors and/or teachers are very helpful. If you're just starting out or returning to the workforce, consider a character reference from a friend or from a volunteer organization that you were involved with. They should be able to speak about your skills, abilities and work style.

Many companies have adopted policies regarding references. Some employers will not provide personal references but rather provide last position title, salary and dates of employment. If this is the situation with your past employers, use alternative reference providers, such as vendors, clients, volunteer organizational peers who are willing to speak to your qualifications.

After you tap your references to let them know they will be receiving a call, be sure to follow up. Let them know the outcome and thank them for helping you! This will help maintain your network and your reference for the future. Keeping your network informed of your activities allows them to tap you as they need you as well.

"Ask the Career Coach" is a column dedicated to those who may be in transition or wrestling with a career dilemma by providing a forum for advice. We welcome your questions. Please send them to CareerCoachLisa@gmail.com.

Lisa Chenofsky Singer is a Millburn-Short Hills resident and the founder of Chenofsky Singer & Associates LLC. She offers Executive and Career Management Coaching and Human Resources Consulting, writes and speaks on job search and career-related topics. Her web site is www.ChenofskySinger.com.