

The Importance of References

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Recently, I was advising a job seeker on how to develop and execute an effective job search strategy. During this conversation, we discussed which job board websites to use, industries to target, and networking. While completing a sample job application, we ran into a stumbling block the references section. The application requested three professional references. The job seeker did not have anyone in mind to list.

During the pre-employment screening process, before a job offer is made, companies will contact references in addition to verifying previous employment. References attest to a candidate's character, skills and work ethic. Candidates with strong references can have their candidacy strengthened. Career seekers that are looking to increase their candidacy should not take the power of a strong reference for granted. If an employer has interviewed two equally strong candidates for the same position, the next obvious step to be taken is to contact references to determine if the candidate's words can be backed up by someone else.

Career seekers must think smart and strategically when deciding who to list as references. I recommend listing a direct supervisor who monitored and assessed your work or a co-worker who you worked on a team with to complete projects and exceed goals. Other good candidates to serve as a reference include professors from college, teachers from vocational trade school, someone you volunteered with on a community project or someone who worked at another company you regularly communicated with for business. For young job seekers with little to no experience, references should be a teacher, a coach for an extracurricular activity or an overseer of a volunteer/community project that you have worked on.

A reference should always be someone who knows you very well and remembers your name. Most importantly, a reference should be someone who will say glowing things about you and convince a company you are the best person for the job.

The information that you provide for a reference should be straight forward and easy to follow: name, title, relationship to you, company, address, telephone number, and email address. If a company email address is not provided to employees, provide a personal (but professional) email address. Before providing any reference's information, get permission. A sample reference would look like:

Jane Doe, Program Director (direct Supervisor at XYZ Company)
XYZ Company
1123 S. Main Street
Chicago, IL 60611
(777) 777 - 7777
jdoe@xyzcompany.com