

References

References can have a significant impact on the final hiring decision. Be ready at a moment's notice to provide potential employers with at least three solid ones.

Approach only your natural contacts, the people who would unquestionably offer a glowing report about you. You want people who know you well professionally and can relay information about your proficiency, skills, attitudes, and behaviors.

Consider mentors, bosses, or coworkers in positions of authority. Also look at professors, coaches, or counselors. Steer away from family and friends, who may be biased or unaware of your work habits.

Ask early and carefully

Ask for references before you leave your current job. Say something like, "If I need a reference, would you feel comfortable offering a positive recommendation?" If there is any hesitation, avoid using that person. If he or she is a solid mentor, talk about the type of position you are seeking, your hopes, and your goals. Asking for advice educates and engages your references in your efforts.

Do their work for them

Make it easy for your references to say good things about you.

- Provide an updated resume.
- Give them warning that a potential employer has asked for references.
- Describe the job you are seeking, the challenges it might provide, and your ability to meet them.
- Outline why you are the best candidate for the job.
- Ask them to let you know when/if they've been contacted.

How HR managers use your network

Human resource managers almost invariably ask for references when seriously considering someone. For liability reasons, if for no other, they will probably call each one. They will look for inconsistencies between information gleaned from your interview and from what your references say. They may ask about the following.

- Promptness or tardiness
- Interactions with coworkers
- Attitude
- Competency
- Weaknesses

Thank your references

After your job search is over, contact your references to let them know how their referral paid off. Ask if there is anything you can do in return.

- Leslie Tebbe, Salary.com contributor