

Network to Work Meeting

Resource Materials – June 2016

All About Professional References

What is a Professional Reference?

- A professional reference is a person who can vouch for your qualifications for a job and your potential as an employee. It is typically a former employer, a supervisor, a professional mentor a client or vendor, or someone else who well knows your work skills and accomplishments and can recommend you for employment.
- A professional reference provides to an employer who is considering you for employment a final confirmation of your skills and abilities as well as a verification of your positive performance on the job.

What do Employers look for in a Professional Reference?

- A description of past job duties and experience.
- A view into the applicant's strengths and weaknesses.
- Confirmation of job title and dates of employment.
- A description of workplace accomplishments.
- A sense of the applicant's preferred work culture.

Who Makes an Ideal Professional Reference?

- Someone who is a big fan of yours, who you know from a full-time or part-time job, an internship, or volunteer work, and who knows your work background and accomplishments very well.
- This could include: your current manager or supervisor; professional mentors; co-workers; clients; vendors; and individuals you have worked closely with such as teammates, community leaders, teachers, etc.
- Someone who has known you for at least three months; the more recent the connection, the better.
- Someone who is comfortable sharing an honest assessment of you and your professional development, including your awareness and ability to manage your weak points.
- Avoid personal references such as family, friends and neighbors as employers know they will be biased.

How should you Line Up and Prepare a Professional Reference?

- Be sure to have your references lined up, confirmed and prepared **before** you apply for a job.
 - Make certain you have their most recent contact information.
 - Seek their permission each time you begin a new job search.
 - Ensure your reference will be available via phone and email during the period of your job search
- Be certain your reference is truly willing and able to give you a good recommendation.
 - Don't simply ask "Could you give me a reference?"
 - Instead, ask:
 - "Do you think you know my work well enough to provide me with a reference?"
 - OR
 - "Do you feel you could give me a good reference?"
 - A request for a reference sent via email makes it easier for a disinterested reference to decline.
- If unsure of the kind of reference you might get, ask:
 - "Was my job performance such that you would rehire me?", OR
 - Have a friend or reference verification service check your references.
- Prepare your reference well in advance and definitely before the employer asks you for your references:
 - Provide them with your current resume, cover letter and the job description of the job you have applied / are applying for.
 - Inform them of the technical, interpersonal or other skills that are crucial to the position(s) you are applying for.
 - Remind them of any tangible results you achieved while working with them and point out other accomplishments listed on your resume.
 - *Each time* you have an interview be sure to inform your reference that you have given their name and they may be getting a phone call.
 - Remember, any inconsistencies between what you say about yourself in an interview and a reference's responses could eliminate you from consideration for a position.

When should you provide your List of Professional References?

- *After* your references have given you permission to use their names
- *After* the list has been requested by the employer.
- In some cases you may be asked to provide references when you apply for the job.
- Always be sure to bring copies of your reference list to your interview.

How many Professional References should you provide?

- At least 3 or 4.
- Offer a mix of contacts who can address different aspects of your background.
- A greater pool of references allows you to strategically select the best among them for the particular position you are seeking.

- Consider the job and your skills and experience that make you a good fit. Which reference can best speak to those skills / experience?

Where and how should you list your Professional References?

- Don't list your references on your resume'. List them on a separate sheet of paper using the same formatting, fonts and paper as your resume.
 - Be sure to put your complete name, address, telephone number and email address at the top of the reference list.
- Include the reference's current name, title, company name, full address, phone, cell phone, email and relationship to you.
- Do NOT put "References Available upon Request" on your resume'; that's a given.
- Do NOT post your reference list on job boards.

What can a Previous Employer say about you in a Reference?

- A reference may be asked about your performance, abilities, interpersonal skills, communication style, conflict resolution capacity, decision-making, leadership qualities, and whether you clearly understand your specific type of work.
- They can say whatever they want so long as it is factual and accurate.
 - They are **not** limited to simply stating your title, salary, and dates of employment.
- A previous employer can also say why your job ended or why you might have been terminated from your position.
 - So, ask your former employer what information they will give if called to verify your work history. You can try to negotiate their response with them.
 - Make sure your story matches that which the former employer will provide.
 - Be sure to be truthful in your job application.

Finally, remember, your references are doing you a favor:

- Respect their decision should they decline your request.
- Provide a formal thank you for their time and effort.
- Stay in contact with them through your search and beyond.
- Consider ways you may be of help to them.

Adapted from:

jobsearch.about.com / about careers

- *10 Common (and Corrosive) Job Reference Mistakes; Sending a good resume and cover letter doesn't always mean you're in the clear.* By Lindsay Olson, U.S. News & World Report Money, October 4, 2014.

<http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2012/10/04/10-common-and-corrosive-job-reference-mistakes>

- *If your reference says this, you'll get a job.* By Amy Levin-Epstein, CBS Money Watch, November 5, 2012. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/if-your-reference-says-this-youll-get-a-job/>

- *Want a Professional Reference? How to Ask and What to Expect.* By Nicole Fallon, Business News Daily, July 16, 2015. www.businessnewsdaily.com

- *What Employers Want from Job References.*

<http://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/what-employers-want-from-job-references-hot-jobs>

- *How to Find the Right References for the Right Job.* www.Hcareers.com
