

Establishing References

It is inevitable that at some point in your job search you will be asked for references, and when you are, you want to be sure you have a great group of advocates who are prepared with answers that will help rather than hinder your chances at landing the position. References are something you should think about at the beginning of your interview process and not just at the end when you are under immediate pressure to provide them.

Make a list of all the possible people you can use as a reference: Former employers, Former Clients, College professors, Deans, Family friends who have seen you in a professional setting, Association leaders.

It is very important that the individuals you choose know you well enough, have experience working with you, and are willing to vouch for you. In short, you are looking for anyone who can communicate your experience, skills, integrity, professionalism, and can-do attitude to any potential employer. Once you have a list of approximately five potential references you need to:

1. Ask them for permission. Be sure to keep thorough notes of when you contacted them and what their response was.
2. Ask for their preferred means of contact whether it is by personal or office phone, or if they would rather be contacted via e-mail.
3. Discuss the following likely questions with your potential references, so that you know what they are going to say and there are no surprises. You can tell them what points you are aiming to reinforce with the employers who might contact them and more than likely they will be happy for the input.
 - What was your relationship with the candidate?
 - What responsibilities did she perform in her position with the company?
 - Why did she leave that position?
 - What are her strengths?
 - What are her weaknesses?
 - What was her approximate salary?
 - Would you hire or work with this person again?

It is also a good practice to keep a folder of references and commendations for a job well done that you augment throughout your career. Get into the habit of asking for a letter of reference from someone who you have worked with who might be moving on and ask that person if they would be willing to serve as a verbal reference as well. This is certainly something to keep in mind if you are or have worked as an intern where the big payoff is more likely to be in experience gained and contacts made than in money earned.