

Reference and Credential Checking

- **Purpose of Checking References and Verifying Credentials**
 - To verify or confirm information obtained from a resume, an application, or during an interview.
 - Some studies indicate that as many as 45% of all resumes contain false information.
 - College registrars report that at least 60% of the requests for verification concern falsified educational information.
 - To obtain additional information regarding applicant's work ethic, initiative, and performance.
 - To avoid the risk of negligent hiring. An employer's failure to conduct a thorough reference or background check can expose it to a negligent hiring lawsuit, if an applicant is hired and subsequently commits a criminal or violent act on the job that results in injuries to a third party. If the injured person can show that the employer did not exercise proper care in hiring the worker or should have known of the worker's dangerous tendencies, the employer can be held liable.
 - Employment decisions can be challenged legally on a variety of bases. The best defense is to show that a reasonable decision was made. Checking references and verifying credentials is part of making an informed decision.
- **Be Careful When Giving a Reference!**
 - If an applicant feels his/her rights have been violated by a reference given by a former employer, he/she may sue that employer for defamation. Defamation is defined as the act of harming another person's reputation through the "publication" of a false statement, and may be based on either a written (libel) or verbal (slander) statement.
 - If you are going to give a former employee a negative reference, refer the reference checker to the verification line (702-1201) where only basic information is verified.
- **Preparing for the Reference Check**
 - Reference checking should be done only for the finalist for a position. A finalist is someone who has been through a least one interview and who, if the references are positive, will most likely be given an offer for the position.
 - Ask each applicant to sign a release (i.e. our application) which includes permission to contact former/current employers.
 - Ask the applicant for three work-related references.
 - Prior to conducting the reference check, review the application and resume. Identify what data needs to be verified. Target the intangible information that is not usually on a resume, such as work ethic and initiative. Design specific open-ended questions to ascertain the skills and characteristics that you desire.

- **The Basics of Reference Checking**
 - When conducting a reference check do not say, “I am doing a reference check on X,” but rather, “I’ve been talking to X about a position in my office and he/she gave me your name because you know him/her well. May I ask you a few questions?”
 - Try to talk with the reference-giver at a time when he or she is able to speak freely.
 - Ask prepared, open-ended questions.
 - Reword questions several times in response to vague answers.
 - Do not ask questions “off the record” – no answers can be treated as such.
 - Listen “between the lines” to the tone of voice, inflection, and word choice.
 - Keep the conversation going as long as possible. The longer the reference talks, the more forthcoming the reference is likely to become about the candidate.
 - Ask for the reference’s advice.
 - Take good notes. Document! Document! Document!
 - Ask the reference if there is anything he/she would like to add that you might not have asked.
 - Thank the reference-giver for his/her time.

- **The Basics of Educational Verification**
 - Call the registrar of the schools attended and verify dates of attendance and degree;
 - Or ask the applicant to have official, sealed transcripts sent to you directly from the institution.

Sample Reference Checking Questions

- **Opening**
 - I've been talking to X about a position in my office and he/she gave me your name because you know him/her well. May I ask you a few questions?"
 - Is this a good time to talk, or is there a more convenient time when I might call you back?
 - Is there another phone number at which to reach you?

- **Basic**
 - How long did you work with the applicant?
 - What was the applicant's formal job title and did he/she hold other titles while at your company?
 - Why did the applicant leave the company?
 - If you had the opportunity, would you re-hire this applicant into the same/different job?
 - What was the applicant's salary at the time of termination (including any bonuses)?
 - How often did the applicant receive a salary increase?
 - Did you promote this applicant while he/she worked for you?
 - Did you have an opportunity to promote this applicant while he/she worked for you?
 - How did the applicant learn the job? What training methods would you recommend?
 - What support will the applicant need to perform successfully on the job?

- **Job Content**
 - Tell me about the applicant's job. What were his/her primary responsibilities?
 - What do you feel are the most important skills needed to succeed in this job?
 - Describe a typical day in your department.
 - How frequently was the applicant asked to work overtime?
 - Describe how the responsibilities of the applicant might have changed or increased while he/she was in this job.
 - Tell me about the work flow process.
 - To whom did the applicant report?
 - Describe the common verbal/written interaction required for this job.

- **Supervision**
 - How would you describe the applicant's management/supervisory style?
 - How is the applicant's management style different than or similar to your own?
 - How would the applicant's subordinates describe him/her?
 - What methods did the applicant use to motivate subordinates?
 - What aspects of the applicant's management style were most effective/least effective?

- **Performance Level**
 - How would you compare him/her with others in your department who were performing the same job?
 - How would you describe the applicant's attendance record and the quality of his/her work? Can you give some examples?
 - What would have made the applicant more effective?
 - What are the applicant's strengths?
 - What kind of mistakes did the applicant typically make? Were these mistakes corrected?
 - How would you describe the applicant's work style?
 - In a few words, how would you summarize this applicant's job performance?

- **Skill Area**
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's technical skills?
 - How would you describe the applicant's interpersonal and written communication skills?
 - What kinds of writing did the applicant do?
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's leadership ability? What leads you to that conclusion?
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's verbal communication skills?
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's conceptual ability?
 - Can you give me some examples that demonstrate the applicant's conceptual ability?
 - How would you compare the applicant's skills with others performing in the same area?

- **Personal Traits**
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's ability to learn and follow directions?
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's ability to take suggestions/criticism?
 - Is the applicant flexible? Can you give me an example?
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's ability to pay attention to detail and follow through on a job?
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's ability to demonstrate ingenuity and act on his/her own initiative?
 - How would you describe the applicant's general attitude concerning his/her work?
 - How would you evaluate the applicant's overall accuracy?
 - Does the applicant accept responsibility? Can you give me an example?

- **Other**
 - If I were going to be this applicant's supervisor, what advice could you give me about how to maximize his/her performance?
 - How would you best describe your company's culture or personality?
 - What would be an ideal position for this applicant?
 - What would you do differently with this applicant if he/she worked for you again?
 - What haven't I asked you that you might be able to tell me about this applicant which would help me better evaluate him/her?
 - Who else in the company might be able to give me some insight into this applicant's work?
 - What advice could you give me about how to best motivate this applicant?
 - What is the best path for developing this applicant's skills further?