

SECURING REFERENCE AGREEMENTS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Most companies currently adhere to a strictly limited or “no references policy.” The underlying concern stems from the desire to avoid any litigious action that could arise from a claim that negative (and possibly dubious) references are the cause of otherwise qualified candidates losing job opportunities. Because companies have no legal requirement to provide reference information, the logic is “Why take the risk?” While it might make sense for the company, such a policy can create enormous roadblocks for separating employees as they conduct their future job search. We will address the best ways to overcome such hurdles and build a credible list.

Fortunately, it is nearly always possible for job seekers to find people in the former company who are willing to help out in a constructive way. Since “negative references” are the only culprits here, a positive reference poses no threat (except in the rare instance that the company absolutely forbids any references under any circumstances). In fact, the “restrictive” company policy can actually serve as a filter to ensure that your references will be positive. Use this to your advantage!

This leads to the most important point about references; the only kinds you need are positive, constructive, even glowing! Consider the fact that, if you and 2 or 3 other candidates make it to the final round in a typically long and laborious hiring process, every candidate is technically qualified and considered a good fit for the position and the company culture. When it comes to making the “hairline call,” references often play a key role in the final decision and the offer.



“The only kinds of references you need are positive...even glowing!”

KEY STEPS

1. Consider all of the people you would like to include on your list, based on their role or relationship to you, as well as your assessment of their willingness to provide a persuasive and positive report. You should have at least 3 **Professional References** and may include:

- Former Employers/ Bosses/ Managers
- Colleagues/ Team Members
- Subordinates
- Clients
- Vendors

Additionally, you should provide at least 2 **Personal/ Character References**, who would be asked more about character traits than work accomplishments. They may include leaders or co-workers from:

- Volunteer or Charitable Organizations
- Professional Associations
- Community Groups

2. Select the best among Employers/Bosses. If your most recent boss is not a good candidate, look for someone at a level above you, such as a Project Leader who is familiar with your work, or select a Boss/Manager from a former company.
3. Round out your **Professional References** with others, for whom or with whom you worked most closely and who could speak in detail about your skills, attitude and any special expertise.
4. **ASK** each person if he or she “**feels familiar enough with your work to give you a positive recommendation.**” Language is critical here. Focusing on “familiarity with your work” gives them a choice, without putting them on the spot; a graceful out if they do not feel comfortable with a positive recommendation. **Do ask specifically for a “positive” reference as those are the only kind you need.**
5. After securing an agreement, let your references know that you will give them a heads-up when you believe they will be contacted. Let them know that you will also give them a thumbnail sketch of what the prospective employer is looking for and how that relates to your past work accomplishments.

Successful execution of this second part of the reference agreement is a powerful way for you to get the “distinctive edge” over your competition. **The specificity that links your past performance with future requirements of the company could very well swing the “hairline call” in your favor.** (Remember, even a boss or colleague that loved your work can easily forget the specifics if a few months or more have passed. Couple this with not knowing exactly what is needed and all of the “Great and Good and Would Definitely Re-hire” comments actually don’t say much).

6. If, as your search goes forward, you notice a pattern of getting into the final rounds in the hiring process, but not getting offers, it is wise to re-visit your references. See if they are getting called, get feedback when appropriate, and evaluate if there are ways to refresh, remind, upgrade and generally improve their effectiveness.

SAMPLE REFERENCES LIST

NAME	AGREEMENT DATE	NOTES
<p style="text-align: center;">JOHN SMITH VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING MY GENERAL MANAGER XYZ COMPANY, INC. 2411 SOUTH MARKET ST. TUCSON, AZ 85701 214.865.7356 johnsmith@xyz.com johnsmith@gmail.com (alt)</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">GAYLE MAHONEY PROJECT MANAGER FOR SOAR (CUSTOMER CARE INITIATIVE) MY GROUP LEADER XYZ COMPANY 2411 SOUTH MARKET ST. TUCSON, AZ 85701 214.865.7359 gaylemahoney@xyz.com galylemahoney@me.com (alt)</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">TERRY STAFFORD CO-MANAGER (WITH ME) OF ACCOUNTING RE- ORGANIZATION BRONSON AND BRONSON, INC. 7834 APACHE DRIVE PHOENIX, AZ 85004 623.881.9500 terrystafford@bronson.com tstafford@earthlink.net (alt)</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">DOUG PETTIGREW VICE PRESIDENT, BOYS & GIRLS CLUB (VP WHILE I WAS PRESIDENT) SCOTTSDALE, AZ 817 MAIN STREET SCOTTSDALE, AZ 85256 480.493.7000 dtpettigrew@sbgc.com dougpettigrew@hotmail.com (alt)</p>		