

REFERENCES

References are the people who vouch for our performance and professional bearing. A potential employer will usually ask for references in the course of selecting a final candidate for a position.

WHO TO USE AS A REFERENCE

It is customary to provide three references when a potential employer asks. It is up to you which names you provide, unless the employer specifies what type of references he or she wants: "I'd like to speak with your last three supervisors," "Please include a former client."

Your reference list should always include the name of at least one former supervisor. A reference list devoid of supervisors will raise questions about your ability to get along with the boss. If your current supervisor is a problem, list an earlier supervisor. In most cases, the opinion of former supervisors will be given the greatest weight, so include as many former supervisors as you can.

In many cases, however, you will need to supplement your list of former supervisors with other types of references. A former client is often a good choice. A senior person who worked closely with you, even if he or she did not supervise you, is another option. Team members or other work colleagues in a position to comment on your work can round out your reference list. Professors can be used if you have relatively little work experience, and if the relationship with the professor went beyond showing up for class. For example, a professor who supervised you in a research project can be a very useful reference.

Try to have more people ready to act as references than you actually use at any one time. This allows you to get maximum effect from your reference list by carefully tailoring it. It also prevents "reference fatigue," which often occurs when one reference gets multiple phone calls and starts to feel overused.

VETTING REFERENCES

Many a job has slipped away at the last minute because a reference was less than enthusiastic about the job seeker. Don't assume that someone will give you a good reference. Take steps to ensure that potential employers are hearing what you want them to hear: good things about you.

Vet references over the phone or on a video call. As you will see, you are listening not just to the content of the answers you are getting, but the emotional

quality of the responses. You will not get an accurate sense of how enthusiastic your reference is if you ask these questions in an email.

To vet a reference, take the following steps.

1. Confirm that someone is willing to act as a reference: "I am looking for a marketing manager position, and am actively interviewing. Would you be willing to act as a reference?" Pay attention to the rapidity and enthusiasm of the response. You can be much more comfortable with a quick "I'd love to be a reference for you" than with someone who says, after a pause, "All right."
2. Ask the person "What kind of a reference would you be able to give me?" You are listening to see how enthusiastically the person responds.
3. Ask point-blank about any negative information this person may share with a potential employer. "Is there anything negative about me or my performance that you would feel compelled to share?"

You should vet all your references in this way, to be sure you are getting the best possible boost for potential positions. If you sense any hesitation or lack of enthusiasm on the part of the person you are speaking with, thank them for their time and their willingness to act as a reference. Once you are off the phone, eliminate them from your reference list. They don't need to know they won't be used.

There are times when you will need to list someone as a reference who is not a complete fan of yours. This is most often the case with a recent supervisor--the potential employer insists that your last boss be included in the reference list. The vetting process described above can help you to shape the reference your former supervisor will give. The simple process of telling you what he will or won't say can help fix the reference in his mind. And the fact that you are asking directly about negative information that may be shared may help to soften or even suppress it.

TREATING THE REFERENCE WELL

People on your reference list are some of your best contacts, because they think highly of you. It is important that you treat them with courtesy and respect. Always provide a reference with a current resume; don't assume they remember all the twists and turns of your career. Call a reference every time you give out his or her name, providing information on who will be calling, for what position, and what would be most helpful for the reference to communicate. Hold your references close. Do not provide them unless specifically asked, and even then, try to ensure that there is a real offer being considered. You only want your references called when it really matters. Finally, send a thank-you note whenever

you know that someone has provided you with a reference, regardless of whether you get the position or not.

LISTING REFERENCES

Your reference list is part of your marketing package, so take time to ensure it is well laid out and easy to read. Consider describing your relationship with the reference in a sentence or two. Below is a sample reference list.

References for John E. Doe

JohnEDoe2021@email.com
(123) 456-7899

Jane Likesme

Director, New Products Marketing Group
Fabulous Company
Phone (202) 123-4567
Email: JaneLikesme@Fabco.com

Jane supervised my work on the launch of four new products, and nominated me to the company's leadership development program.

Dan Thrilled

Account Manager, Product X
Fabulous Company
Phone (202) 123-9876
Email: DanThrilled@Fabco.com

Dan was my internal client for two years as we worked on the Product X launch.

Mary Marvelous

Director of Marketing
Stupendous Inc.
Phone (202) 987-6543
Email: MaryMarvelous@sinc.com

Mary was my supervisor for three years at my previous position. She was very supportive of my move to Fabulous Company.