



# City Difference Maker

*Tips to help you effectively manage and lead your employees*

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## Reference Checking

You have finished interviews and have selected your top candidate. You want to fill the position as quickly as possible. Should you skip reference checking and go straight to the job offer?

According to industry experts, up to one-third of résumés contain material falsehoods. Résumés are not factual documents. Applicants use them as marketing tools, and the same can be said for applications. If all this is true, you need to verify things they told you in the interview as well!

Besides confirming the honesty and accuracy of the application and interview, reference checks:

- **Achieve better hiring fits.** The best indicator of future performance is past performance, and the best way to find out about that is the reference check.
- **Explain gaps in employment.** By verifying dates of employment, an employer can make sure that there are no unexplained employment gaps.
- **Protect the investment.** Bad hiring decisions create administrative, financial, and legal difficulties, as well as wasted time, and delayed productivity.
- **Prevent charges of 'negligent hiring.'** Reference checks can uncover the potential for violence in the workplace, discrimination or harassment. They will aid in the promotion of workplace safety.

We strongly recommend that at least two reference checks are made prior to making the job offer. The more the better—shoot for three! Let the candidate(s) you are considering know that you intend to contact their references, including past employers or supervisors. If the applicant asks that the current supervisor not be contacted, make the request contingent on a job offer. The applicant should be told that the hiring decision may be affected by the lack of a reference from the current supervisor.

## Planning to Ask the Right Questions

Start off by reviewing the duties of the vacant position and the application materials prior to making your phone calls. Make a list of facts or qualifications to verify and a list of questions to ask. These questions should be tailored to the individual you are considering hiring. Human Resources is more than happy helping you out if you are unsure of what you are able to ask.

The information you request must be related to the job. Avoid questions regarding marital status, religion, age, race, health-related issues, child care, worker compensation claims, and other non-job related questions. Areas of possible inquiry should include:

- **Sociability.** How well does the applicant get along with and relate to other people? Is the person a team player or does he or she work better alone?
- **Work habits and ability.** How well does the applicant know the work and perform on the job? Assess technical or functional knowledge or skills and attitude on the job. Ask about the responsibilities of the applicant's position and if they are ready to assume the responsibilities of the job you are offering. Would the supervisor rehire this candidate? What was the candidate's reason for leaving the position?
- **Personal character.** Is the person trustworthy, honest and dependable? Check for facts about the candidate's attendance record. Was the candidate on-time and dependable? How did the candidate respond to suggestions for development?

## Conducting a Reference Check

If the candidate has only provided names and contact information for co-workers or friends, let them know that you will need to speak with someone who has supervised their work.

Typically, you will contact the most recent employer first and speak with the candidate's supervisor or other person who has evaluated their work. However, if the candidate is hesitant about you contacting their current supervisor until you are ready to make an offer, you should contact past supervisors/references first. If all goes well, you would then call your candidate back and say something like this: "At this point, you are our top candidate. We just need to contact your current supervisor and conduct a reference check prior to moving toward a potential offer." When conducting reference checks be friendly and try to build rapport. Introduce yourself and let the reference know that you have consent for the check or that the applicant listed them as a reference.

## Using the information:

Don't accept all the information at face value. Personality conflicts and different work cultures may influence responses. You will want to use the information from a combination of different methods to make an overall assessment. HR is always available if you have any questions.