

MAKING REFERENCES WORK FOR YOU

Like most job seekers, you've probably spent more time thinking about how to word your personal statement and perfect your covering letter- at the expense of thinking long and hard about your references. Who you choose as a referee is one of the most important parts of the job search process and can be the difference between winning and losing a role.

Always remember that employers are making a big investment hiring you and they need to be sure you are who you say you are. A referee, who would give you a genuine account of your personality and skill set, is obviously a good choice. Someone who was a little 'lukewarm' towards you should be overlooked. After all, why would you want a mediocre reference?

So if we have to pay such close attention, what criteria do we need to stick to when setting up the reference process?

1. SCRAP THE GENERIC LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Employers do not want to read letters written in the past nor do they want anything 'generic'. They want to be able to communicate directly with a contact who can give them a clear, up-to-date account of your abilities and character. Agenda's Screening department do not accept these on the grounds of credibility. How can you truly tell that the letter isn't written by the candidate themselves?

2. NEVER LIST NAMES OF REFEREES ON YOUR CV

Referees should normally be listed on a separate sheet and should not be given out until some form of offer for an interview or the job itself, has been given. If you get to the interview stages, take a list with you in case they want to take your application further.

3. THINK STRATEGICALLY ABOUT REFEREE CHOICES

Think about the type of reference you want and who would make the strongest recommendations. Don't assume that former managers have to be a referee - you could choose a former colleague or even a supervisor in a different department. Again try and choose those who know your strengths and abilities and will say only positive things.

4. USE A VARIETY OF PEOPLE

Whatever you do, don't use three people from the same company and leave it at that. You want to use three to five people with whom you have worked closely but who came from different places. If possible, use an educational, a professional and a personal reference. In addition to those, a reference from either an internship or voluntary work is also desirable but not necessarily essential.

For personal references, avoid listing family members or anyone you are in a relationship with as companies cannot accept these and will instead ask you to provide a friend's details. If you have had your own company, former customers and business acquaintances are acceptable for this.

5. GET PERMISSION TO USE SOMEONE AS A REFERENCE

Don't just list someone as a reference - be sure to ask them first. Not only is this common courtesy, it also makes the process easier for the company. Companies often find themselves waiting on referees to respond, delaying the application process and sometimes costing the applicant a job due to time delays. And don't delay asking them because you're afraid, most people will be flattered and if they aren't, ask someone else.