CDI BEST PRACTICES TIP SHEET

Employment Reference Sheets

All job seekers need professional employment references, but many aren't prepared. With your help, they can choose, prepare, and follow up with the best references, gather their information, and use them for leverage in their job search.

Before Providing References

Let your client (the job seeker) know why he must provide references. The employer wants to make sure he will be a good fit for their organization. They want to hear what others have to say about previous performance.

Up to 45% of employers check references, so it is necessary to have reference information ready. When your client offers references at the end of the interview it is proactive and demonstrates that he is confident about his skills and relationships.

Other preliminary preparations include:

- **Social Media:** As employers expand their searches on candidates to social media, coach your client to polish up these forums and remove any controversial materials.
- **Credit Check**: Many background checks include a review of candidate credit. Alert your client to become aware of what a potential employer may learn ahead of time by pulling his credit report and resolving any questionable issues.

Choosing References

A candidate needs to choose five references. Typically, employers ask for three business references. Some ask for one or two personal references, excluding family members. Your client may prepare more professional references and choose the best for each application.

Appropriate references are usually previous bosses, supervisors, and employers or leaders of volunteer organizations with which the candidate is affiliated. If these choices are not available, consider customers, vendors, professors, and/or professional colleagues from networking, professional, or community organizations.

Help your client to select only articulate individuals who will give a positive, professional reference. If there are doubts, it is best for your client not to consider that person as a reference.

If your client has worked in a variety of career fields, the best strategy is to obtain references that can speak with knowledge about his performance in areas relevant to the current search.

Preparing References

Before your client adds a reference to his list or uses the reference in an online application, he should obtain the reference's permission by emailing, telephoning, or meeting with them.

To prepare professional references, he should provide copies of their resume and a summary of his current career goals. He can email the job description of the position for which he is applying or share three to four of the most important points mentioned in the job announcement. This helps the reference understand how to describe him in terms that are relevant and specific to the goal at hand.

He should remind the reference of relevant projects or tasks in which they were both involved. Your client can also offer to answer questions or have a conversation regarding the specific qualifications relevant to the desired position. This conversation can refresh the reference's memory of his qualifications and help him or her to understand what pieces of information would be most helpful in a letter of reference or when discussing him with the hiring manager.

In addition to vetting talents and skills, good references can speak with knowledge about your client's work ethic and personal characteristics such as integrity, honesty, dependability, punctuality, and attitude.

Your client may also ask the reference to keep them in mind if anyone in the reference's network has a need for the client's talents and skills.

Gathering and Presenting Reference Information

Your client should obtain the following standard information on each reference to accommodate employer needs:

- Name.
- Title (If the individual has left the company or retired, in the job title line put "former" or "retired").

  Example: "Steve Jones, Former Director of Engineering" or "Martha Miller, CEO – Retired"
- Company (where the reference and job seeker worked together or were associated).
- Company Mailing Address (or home address if reference prefers not to be contacted at work).

  Note: Never list reference contact information on the Internet without their express permission due to potential issues with identity theft.
- City, State Zip.
- Preferred Phone Number.
- Email.
- Relationship: How the client knows the reference – former employer, coworker, or instructor.

Optional Content:

- Areas of Knowledge: What would the reference say about your client? Which facets of the candidate's character, work habits, accomplishments and contributions can they attest to?

- Recommendations: Include excerpts from certificates of appreciation or notable awards about your client. Incorporate quotes about performance from previous employers, while reserving valuable space on the actual resume.

As a part of service offerings, prepare the reference page for your client. Create an additional page to match the resume presentation and color scheme. Include place markers for your client to insert or modify their references as needed for particular opportunities.

Do not include reference information on the resume. Rarely will an employer request references be included with the resume, or the value of candidacy could be enhanced by the industry recognition of reference names. In either case, it is still best to create a separate page that matches the resume and cover letter.

Adding “References Available Upon Request” to the resume has become unnecessary, as it is true for every candidate.

Following up with References

Coach your client to maintain contact and a good business rapport with their selected references.

Each time the candidate applies for a new position, the references who will be asked to speak on the job seeker’s behalf should be contacted and emailed the job description for the position.

Using References

In general, follow the company’s directions for providing references.

Most often, the job seeker should bring their reference page to the interview and provide them only when requested.

However, in some fields, such as broadcasting, many decision makers say they prefer the references be included in the package with the resume and cover letter, and won’t even consider an applicant without seeing references in advance. If in doubt, candidates should find out what works best for their career field and act accordingly.

Your client should NOT send references each time they send a resume. References are being generous with their time. They will quickly tire of being a reference, and their kind words may go sour if they are interrupted during supper every night to respond to reference calls.

Coach your client to keep records of which references he uses for each application or interview. This enables follow-up with references to learn which companies have called. It also allows him to thank them occasionally for their efforts.

Special Circumstances

Verifying Employment: If your client is unable to locate a certain reference, coach them to provide the requisite number of references using colleagues and alternatives as recommended above. They can also verify employment by providing a prospective employer W-2s from tax records.

Government / Public Service References: If required to complete government security clearance forms (Standard Form - SF86) or those used for background checks on candidates working in positions of public service (Standard Form - SF85), your client will need to provide a variety of information on people who knew them. This data can be lengthy and include the names of people where the job seeker claims to have lived, went to school, or worked (friends, acquaintances, family members, employers, and supervisors), as well as birth dates of family members. Specific data requests will include:

- Type of Reference (Personal or Professional).
- Number of Years Known or Dates Known (MM/YYYY – MM/YYYY).
- Last Name, First Name, Middle Initial.
- Job Title or Position.
- Associated Name of Organization and Address.
- Mobile Phone.
- Home Phone.
- Work Phone.
- Email Address.

No prior experience: If your client has little or no experience in the target position, consider references they have worked with in the past to achieve a common goal such as in volunteer efforts, fundraisers, and school projects. If he led a team of students in a project that earned an "A", he might ask fellow students to act as a reference and describe the project to a Hiring Manager. College professors and community leaders are also good choices.

Fired from last job: If your client was fired from their most recent position, he doesn't necessarily need to list that employer as a reference. Most job applications specifically ask if they can contact a former employer as a reference. Proactively supplying references puts the power in your client's hands to seek out the best person for the reference. Perhaps your client had a good relationship with another manager in the company, or possibly a manager who has left the company would be willing to give a good reference.

Your client might also turn to a co-worker or former client who was pleased with their work and who will vouch for their success at that particular company.

Additional Resources

International Update Your References Week: http://careerdirectors.com/library/category/update-your-references-week-mo-get/.

Employment References Worksheet and Template: http://careerdirectors.com/library/p1000135/

References: Helping Clients Secure Job Offers (1 of 3): http://careerdirectors.com/library/p1000657/

References: Helping Clients Secure Job Offers (2 of 3): http://careerdirectors.com/library/p1000662/

References: Helping Clients Secure Job Offers (3 of 3): http://careerdirectors.com/library/p1000665/

Your Client's Professional References: http://careerdirectors.com/library/p1000462/

References for the Job Seeker (Audio): http://careerdirectors.com/library/p1000634/

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