

ESTABLISHING REFERENCES:

Anyone can say they can build a bridge, manage employees, or balance expenditures, but it is harder to provide credible support for this claim. For this purpose, references often make the difference between the dream job or the not so dream job. However, job hunters are sometimes lost in the dark when it comes to utilizing their references effectively.

- **Always ask permission.** It is absolutely necessary to ask potential references if they may be used ahead of time. Do not take people for granted. You must ask the person even if you are certain they will give their permission to be used as a reference. This is a simple matter of courtesy.
- **Choose your references wisely.** When choosing a reference, it is a good policy to keep in mind two things: references should be customized to the position you are seeking and each reference should know you, your skills, and your abilities. These points go hand in hand. Your reference should have a good working knowledge of your performance in relation to the job you are seeking and should have a reasonable knowledge of your character. Dropping the name of someone in a position of power or prestige when that person does not have a reasonable knowledge of you is embarrassing to both you and the interviewer when checking your credentials, and this practice should be avoided.
- **Give your reference a copy of your resume.** Your references should have a copy of your resume to see the way you have presented yourself to your prospective employers and what you find important in your background. It also gives the references a springboard from which to base their recommendations. Give your references updated resumes if you use them again in the future.
- **Reference letters need to be original personalized copies.** Photocopies are discouraged. However, in extenuating circumstances, such as a prospective employee applying for several jobs and needing several letters of recommendation, a photocopy is acceptable. It is absolutely necessary that these photocopies be of professional quality. In addition, the letters of recommendation must include the address and telephone number of the reference for follow-up by the prospective employer.
- **Avoid overloading your references.** Refrain from asking your references to write letters of recommendation for every job you apply for; it may detract from a potentially good recommendation. However, you should also realize that most references are now checked by phone.
- **Keep your references updated.** After giving a reference's name to an employer, call the reference to tell them to expect contact from the employer. Also inform them as to what skills the position you applied for requires. This way, your reference can emphasize your abilities in those areas. Keep references informed even if you have been unsuccessful. Also, always remind them how helpful they have been. Give your references brief accounts of your experiences on the job. It is recommended that you write a letter to your references after you have been on the job six months. Once again tell them how things are going and thank them for their assistance and support.
- **Remember to thank those who have helped you.** When you finally have obtained a job, express your gratitude towards those who have supported you, including (and especially) your references. Hand-written thank-you notes are appropriate. References may be reluctant to give a recommendation when you ask them another time if they don't receive a thank-you note.