

Conducting Reference Checks

Why is it important to conduct Reference Checks?

1. Conducting reference checks give you additional information on your top candidate(s) to consider when making a hiring decision. The best indicator of future performance is past performance.
2. An employer can be held responsible for negligent hiring if the employer knows, or should have known, that the candidate would create an undue risk or harm to other employees. An employer has a more defensible position if reference checks are conducted.
3. Based on 2.6 million background checks conducted by ADP Screening and Selection Services in 2001, 44% of applicants lied about their work histories, 41% lied about their education, and 23% falsified credentials or licenses.

Who conducts reference checks?

1. Hiring managers are responsible for conducting reference checks for every hire.
2. Interview candidates should be told during the interview that reference checks will be conducted and the hiring manager should verify appropriate information is provided to contact references.

When should reference checks be conducted?

1. The best time to conduct a reference check is after you have completed interviews.
2. Checking references may be time consuming so only check your top candidates that have been identified as potential hires.

Who should the hiring manager contact to get reference information?

1. Direct supervisors typically provide the best reference information because they have first hand knowledge about the candidate's strengths and weaknesses.
2. Human Resources, co-workers, or subordinates may also provide important information about a person's work history.
3. In most cases, personal references are not as valuable as work related references.
4. Review the candidate's application to see if you have permission to contact his/her current supervisor. If not, contact the applicant to ask for this permission.
5. You may contact references not listed on the application and/or resume.
6. You should always try to contact at least two employment references.
7. You may contact the candidate and ask him/her to provide additional references if you cannot get relevant information from the reference contacts provided.
8. As a courtesy, you should always inform the candidate when you plan on beginning the reference checking process.

What if the candidate is an internal Virginia Tech employee or has worked here previously?

1. The hiring manager may review the Virginia Tech personnel file (evaluations, written notices, performance information) of a current or previous Virginia Tech employee.
2. A release form should be signed by the employee during the interview process in case you need to review the information later on.
3. Contact your Human resources staffing specialist to review personnel file information.

What is the best way to conduct a reference check?

1. Reference checks may be conducted in writing, by email, by fax, in person, or over the phone.
2. Most of the time the best information can be gained by phone. People are sometimes uneasy about putting information in writing but may be willing to share information over the phone.

How to conduct a reference check (by phone):

1. Familiarize yourself with the job description, qualifications, and department needs.
2. Review all information provided by the applicant (resume, application, cover letter, etc).
3. Prepare a standard list of questions that will be asked to all reference providers.
4. Questions must be job related and must not be related to marital status, religion, age, race, health-related issues, child care, transportation, workers compensation or any other non-job related questions.
5. Introduce yourself to the person you've contacted and explain your role in the search process.
6. Provide the reference provider with information about the job such as job duties, qualifications, and educational requirements. If he/she has a good understanding of what your candidate will be doing, then he/she will be able to give you better reference information.
7. Use the reference form and document answers to your questions.
8. Pay attention to what is said, and to what is not said. If you encounter hesitations, try to rephrase the question to see if you can get an answer. One option may be to ask the reference provider to simply verify information for you by restating what the applicant told you and asking if the reference provided can verify this information.
9. Be alert to very negative or very positive responses and consider the entire response you receive.
10. Always ask why the applicant left employment, or restate the reason the applicant gave as to why he/she left employment and ask the reference provider to verify this.
11. Ask if the applicant would be eligible for rehire. Why or why not?
12. Evaluate all information you receive to determine what is helpful and what may be an outlier or irrelevant to your vacancy. What may have been perceived as a weakness at a previous job may actually be a strength for your job.

What to do with the reference information.

1. Reference information must be maintained for three years just as you keep other job search information.
2. All reference information must be kept confidential and should not be shared with the applicant.
3. Reference information should only be shared with those who have a business need to know.

Sample Reference questions:

It is usually best to start with simple questions or by asking the reference provider to verify information you already have so he/she becomes more comfortable with you and therefore may be willing to share more information as you ask additional questions.

1. Ask about (or verify) work title and job duties at the organization.
2. Verify dates of employment.
3. Verify reason for leaving.
4. Verify ending salary.
5. Ask the reference provider for his/her relationship to the applicant (direct supervisor, co-worker, Human Resources, friend)
6. What is/are the strengths of the candidate?
7. Knowing what I told you about my job, what area(s) do you think this candidate may need additional training or coaching to be effective?
8. A critical responsibility in this job is _____. Based on your experience with this candidate, will he/she be successful in this area?
9. What type of supervision is this candidate most responsive too?
10. How well did this candidate interact with others (co-workers, supervisors, subordinates)?
11. Did this candidate have any performance issues; or Did this candidate have any documented disciplinary actions; or Are there any performance areas I should pay close attention to?

12. Our department processes a high volume of _____ where customer service and attention to detail are very important. Do you think 'candidate' will be successful in an environment like this?
13. How would you describe the quality/quantity of work provided by the candidate? Can you give specific examples?
14. Teamwork is very important to me and my department, will this person be a team player and get along well with co-workers?
15. What motivates this candidate?
16. Is the candidate eligible for rehire?
17. Is there anything I have not asked that you think I should be aware of before making my hiring decision?

Reference Check

Name of Applicant: _____
Position applied for: _____
Company/Organization contacted: _____
Reference Provider's Name & Title: _____
Reference Provider's phone/email: _____

Position held: _____
Dates of Employment: _____
Reason for Leaving: _____
Final Salary: _____
