



It's not advisable to give out job references at the application stage.

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MENTOR MINUTE

Making the best use of your references

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The Scenario:

As a job seeker, I am constantly confused on how to present and manage references. Should they be provided as part of an application, or should I wait for someone to ask for them? And when they do ask, what is the best way for me to present references who will maximize my chances of getting the job?

The Advice:

References should never be taken lightly. In many cases, they are the final step in helping an employer decide whom to make the job offer to, but you shouldn't offer them up automatically, because there is no point in an employer phoning to check references if it is clear you don't actually want the job. My advice is to have a list of references to offer up in case the employer asks for them in an interview. If you don't have them with you, offer to forward them as quickly as possible.

Get permission: You should never assume that someone will act as a reference for you. Line up your

references at the start of your job hunt to make sure they are comfortable recommending you. Approach your references directly, and ask what contact information they would prefer you use when you submit references. It is very awkward when someone is called for a reference check and is unaware their name has used. It can also be frustrating for an employer to be calling a number that the contact doesn't answer.

Use logical references: References should be able to speak to experiences that are relevant to the job you are in the running for. For instance, if you are applying for a customer service role, include a recent customer as a reference. If it is a leadership role, find a subordinate or fellow manager who will act as a reference.

Keep them manageable: Make it easy for the employer to contact your references. Three or four names are sufficient to keep the list manageable. The list should include names, e-mails, phone numbers and a sentence explaining how you know each person.

Provide a briefing: When you do offer someone as a reference, make sure that you contact them immediately to let them know who to expect a call from, and, most importantly, what to say! Inform your references to whom and for what role you have provided their information by sending them your résumé and the job posting. Prep your references by giving them key points that you would like them to talk about.

Be discrete: References contain private information, such as phone numbers and e-mails. Never attach reference names as part of your résumé or a job application, even if the company asks for them. If you are asked for references as part of your application, politely say that, due to the confidential nature of the references, you would be happy to provide references once you are short-listed for the position.

Follow up: Create a follow-up protocol that allows you to contact your references, or they you, once a reference has been completed. Ask what your references said about you and their impression of what your potential employer thought of their comments. What they say may not be what you expect!

If, for instance, they said you had areas that you need to improve on, that can be useful feedback. As long as you agree with the comments, you'll be prepared if those issues come up in your next discussion with the employer. The last thing you want to do is have a shortcoming mentioned as a surprise in a hiring interview. References may also provide useful feedback about red flags they sensed in their discussion with the potential employer.

Putting time and preparation into choosing and prepping your references is a worthwhile investment, because they have the power to "seal the deal" for an offer to be made.

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