

How- to: Reference Check

1. Purpose

The background check is designed to understand the applicant's work style, temperament, professionalism and a few competencies. You will get concrete information from the applicant's past work-related experiences and qualifications through previous supervisors and/or work colleagues.

First you need to obtain permission from the candidate to contact past employers for references. Tell the candidates that you would like to do a background check and if she/he can provide you with 2-3 references. Ideally the background check will be conducted by someone who was present at the previous interviews and knows if there are any concerns about the candidate.

The reference check is always best conducted over the phone, but if this is not possible (for example the referrer has expressed that they do not wish to be called) it can be done over email.

2. Conversation Starter

When calling a referrer for employment references, begin the conversation with introducing yourself and explaining that you are calling about a reference for a candidate you are considering. Ask if now is a good time to talk or whether they would rather schedule a call at a later time. Assure that the conversation is strictly confidential. If you sense hesitation, emphasize that you would really appreciate his/her comments.

3. Introduction

If the referrer agrees, introduce yourself, your position and the organization more in detail and give some information about the position you are considering the candidate for. Ask the person to do the same.

Ask some introductory questions:

- In what capacity have you known or worked with (candidate)?
- What was his position?
- What were the dates of his/her employment?
- What were his/her role and responsibilities?

4. Competencies

To find out about the candidate's approach to work, relationship with colleagues and supervisors and other competencies ask any of the following questions according to what you would like to further explore about the candidate. Ask for examples and explanations. While asking the questions do not mention the criteria for which the question is being asked. Have an easy conversation while slipping in the important questions.

Strengths and Weaknesses

- What is the first positive thing that comes to your mind if you think about (candidate)?
- Any areas that needed development?

Performance

- What impact has (candidate) had on the organization? In his/her department?
- What do you consider to be his/her key accomplishment?

Team Work

- Have you worked with him/her in a team?
- How well did he/she integrate into the team?
- How well did he/she work with other employees?

Problem Solving

- Would you consider he/her as a problem solver?
- Do you remember a situation when he/she handled a problem well?

Approachability

- Have you ever asked him/her for guidance or directions while working with (candidate)?
- What did he/she do in that situation?

Leadership

- Did (candidate) supervise other employees? How effectively did he/she do that?
- How would you describe his/her leadership skills?

5. Closing

Conclude the interview by thanking the referrer for their time and cooperation and ensuring again that the information he/she has provided will be treated in a confidential manner.