

WHAT WOULD YOUR LAST BOSS SAY ABOUT YOU? CONDUCTING A QUALITY REFERENCE CHECK

Resume- Check

Interview- Check

Degree Verification- Check

Reference Check- Is it really necessary? All I'm going to get is verification of previous employment dates, right?

Minus the push for more creative resumes and lengthier interview processes, there have been few significant changes in the hiring protocol used by most companies... save for one: the reference check. Confusing legal guidelines have resulted in many larger companies refusing to provide anything other than the verification of employment, dates, and rehire eligibility. In fact, [surveys indicate](#) that while 80%+ of companies actually conduct a reference check before making hiring, many complain about the lack of information gathered from the reference. A significant portion of our own clients tell us not to worry about completing a reference check. Needless to say, we do them anyway. Why? Because the value that can be derived from a *quality* reference check is significant.

The big question is: Is it possible to gain true insight into a potential new hire through a reference check?

We say 'yes'... If you do it correctly.

Leverage your network.

Reaching out to a candidate's previous boss is not the only tool at your fingertips. Chances are, your potential new hire worked with a variety of people- many of which are in your professional network. Connecting with these people will provide insight

beyond verification of employment. Questions about a candidate's ability to collaborate, his leadership qualities, and areas of growth can all be answered by connecting with the people you know who also know the candidate.

Engage with the reference.

The key to a quality reference check is engaging with the reference, building rapport and never accepting the first answer as gospel. True, a reference is likely to provide a positive reference (or she wouldn't be on the reference list in the first place). However, with the right questions, even a candidate's best friend can provide useful and candid feedback.

Do NOT ask open-ended questions.

"Is Bob Smith eligible for rehire?" and "Can you verify the dates Sally worked for you, along with her title." Do not qualify as a quality reference check. Even the standard "Tell me about Sally" is worthless because there is no context for the type of role and culture the candidate will be immersed in. Instead, ask specific, situational and behavioral questions.

"Tom will be working as a Marketing Director for a 6 year old software company that just hit \$10m in revenues. The environment is very similar to a start-up, where everyone wears multiple hats, and is expected to work 50-60 hours/week while embracing the fluid and constantly changing priorities. How do you think he will fare in this type of situation?"

Call a reference that is NOT on the candidate's list.

Want to gain a completely unbiased and unrehearsed opinion about your potential hire? Ask someone who has not been given a heads up. Keep in mind that in order to paint a reliable picture of a candidate there must be multiple sources to provide information. Therefore, contacting several of the provided references in addition to a few that were

not provided can give a broader, and possibly more accurate, view. Just be careful about who you call to ensure that you don't break confidentiality or jeopardize the candidate's position before they have given notice.

It is important to peel back the onion to uncover the true make up of a candidate. While both resumes and in-person interviews provide insight into many of the skills she brings to a new role, the only way to obtain a clear picture of how those skills play-out in the work environment is by communicating with the people who have worked closest with him/her. Leveraging your network to ask specific, situational and behavioral questions about a potential new hire will allow you to engage in a **quality** reference check.