

Struggle to get referees?

Maybe you're feeling a little nervous about the referees you have and are concerned about the type of feedback you will receive? Let's face it, most of us have had a boss at sometime or another that we didn't totally trust! Or for some reason or another you don't have referees because you've been out of the work environment for a while or have changed jobs a few times and you are having trouble tracking down who you worked for.

Don't despair, it's more common than you think and while we know that references are an important part of the selection criteria, it's pretty likely that your future employer has run up against this problem before. This is where they will use their judgment of the whole process and their feel for you when making the important decision.

So what options do you have?

There are a few things you can do to try and find a former referee if you've lost touch.

1. Google - type in the persons name and see what comes up.
2. Can you remember if they were a member of any particular group, professional association or sports club?
3. Social Networking – MySpace, Facebook & LinkedIn. Even if you can't find them you might be able to find another person who could be a good link to help you locate your referee or better still, if appropriate, would they mind acting as one for you?

If you are approaching through social media sites, just be mindful of privacy. Be polite and explain that you are having trouble locating past referees.

You may come across an employer who is adamant that they want a reference, in this instance ask them what they would accept as a reference. A good tip here is to bring this up at the end of the interview when they are impressed with you. This way you can use the information to also 'prime' your referee to ensure they cover the desired areas.

Please reframe from stating you have no referees at the start of the selection process as it suggests you have something to hide.

When the time comes for the reference check, explain your dilemma and outline all the work you have done to try and locate your referees – this way it shows that you are not trying to cover something up. Sometimes employers will accept character references from teachers, clients, customers, colleagues, suppliers, sports teams etc – it's worth keeping this in mind if you have such connections.

Another option is to offer to provide them with past performance reviews – glowing ones' of course!

Being proactive to build a talent bank of referees is of course the best way and you can do this by undertaking casual / temporary work through family, friends or with small businesses in your local area – without the need of providing references.

If all else fails and you are still unable to track down a referee, you could always negotiate with hiring manager and offer to do a longer probationary period to provide them with the comfort that you can prove yourself. Another option is to offer to come onboard as a contractor/temporary worker for an agreed period instead of as a permanent employee – this reduces their risk as well as demonstrates to the employer that you are willing to back yourself.

From personal experience through my time in recruitment and as a hiring manager – if an employer wants you badly enough – they'll find a way to take you on, regardless of references.