

## **REFERENCE CHECKS – THE DO'S AND DON'TS**

***By Robert Ridout***

With the prospect of finding work in a ever decreasing pool of opportunities, the emphasis on creating a good impression, to the recruiter and hiring company is becoming of vital importance. Key to creating this good impression is having good referees and references. Companies today are still placing a lot of emphasis on the good old fashion telephonic reference.

Going to an interview with a recruiter or a company without preparing your reference checks puts you at risk of not being considered for that opportunity. Even the recruiter has the right to not forward you for a role if he or she feels your background checks are not in order. Pressure is mounting on recruiters now than ever before to ensure that their candidates are trustworthy and can provide proof of their previous accomplishments.

Technology is also starting to play an important part, with finger print technology being introduced later this year and many companies also internally starting to use security checks even when promoting candidates internally. Most companies, recruiters and suppliers of security services are improving their forms of security checking year on year. Mainly due to the amount of fraud being committed by candidates desperate to find work and alongside international trends. Employees that are promoted especially into roles where money is being dealt with often will now need to comply with internal company security checks.

As search consultants, we lose every year in our business at least one or two placements where candidates have simply not provided us with the correct security checks. We still get candidates that provide us with references that once called, just cannot remember who the candidate is or provide a shocking reference. Clients are also now calling companies without the permission of the candidates and getting references directly often leading to candidates not being hired.

The problem is compounded by the fact that most offers are actually reference dependant and companies will not put an offer on the table if the references aren't good even if your credit and criminal records are clear.

There are two main types of background checks that all candidates need to prepare themselves for before entering the job market; references and then the standard credit, criminal, qualification and identification checks(which I will cover in another article).

References, remain a major form of background checking for most companies or recruiters. Most insist on the candidate providing at least two references with their CV's when applying for a job.

I must emphasize that overseas companies are now performing more reference checks on candidates and I see this becoming the trend becoming popular in South Africa.

Experienced recruiters will also notice when you have skipped a reference check in your CV history as a warning sign of poor work relations. So be prepared for probing questions on this.

You can provide two types of references on your CV, a character reference; which is normally a lecturer or colleague that will speak about character. The second and more commonly used type of reference is normally a previous superior in a past company that you had a good working relationship with. Most companies prefer the latter.

When providing references there are a few golden rules and I mean "golden".

- Call your references and check they will provide you with a favourable telephonic reference and I mean favourable.
- Make sure your references are contactable.
- Don't provide references that are older than three to five years.
- Don't provide your current boss as a reference unless you have requested permission.
- Make sure you have at least an additional two back-up references handy.
- If you cannot get this referee to provide a telephonic reference then A written one will do as well.
- Try limit the calls to telephonic references to a minimum as your old manager will not want to be receiving calls all day.

If you are lucky enough to be considered for an offer often the greatest delay is in getting hold of the telephonic references.

This is extremely frustrating for the recruiter as the client will not offer if the references have not been conducted. Some companies have now started not offering telephonic references. I recommend that before leaving a company you should try get a written reference from a direct supervisor at least. A good idea to help you with getting your references in order is to get a professional recruiter to perform your telephonic references and ask them for a copy even if you need to pay a small fee. Most professional recruiters will have standard reference templates that they will use when performing references in bulk. I see a lot of very subjective references that for me do not assist the potential hiring company at all in making a decision regards hiring.

You can then use this as standard reference in your CV for future purposes. In this way you make sure your references don't provide poor references as the you never know when your referee will have a bad day at work and receive that call for a reference.

Briefly the second type of background check includes all previous proof of qualifications, proof of nationality, matriculation certificate, and proof of residence, schooling, in-house courses credit and criminal checks.

You should have copies made and stamped by a commission of oaths. Have these available at short notice. I will certainly be covering credit and criminal in another article as especially in 2009 this has become a critical element of the hiring process.

One final word on your checks – many people do not know that your ITC has a record of your qualification and previous work history if you lie regards previous work experience in your CV an experienced recruiter or Human resources Manager will pick this up. Remember you can be regretted for an opportunity at any point in the process and making the hiring manager nervous regards your honesty will certainly limit your chances of success even if there is the slightest uncertainty regards the integrity of the information you have provided.