

# How to Build Up Job References

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Many employers' selection processes include checking references to ensure that they've made a wise decision to hire you. In most cases, the reference-checking stage in the selection process comes after you receive a conditional job offer. Your job offer might be conditioned upon your prospective employer receiving positive and helpful information from your job references. It's important you have a list of three to five people who have direct and recent knowledge about your professional qualifications and performance so they can speak intelligently about your abilities.

## Supervisors

The best time to ask your supervisors for a reference is during your employment -- although you can also ask for a job reference when you tender your resignation. When you ask for a job reference during your employment, tell your supervisor that you like to maintain a list of colleagues and professional acquaintances who will attest to your professional capabilities. If you ask at the same time you tender your resignation, be sure your request accompanies an appropriately timed resignation and that you're leaving on good terms.

## Clients

Before asking clients of your current employer whether they will provide a job reference for you, consult your company's policies concerning staff-client interaction. You don't want to violate the company policy concerning a job reference. It could result in requiring a reference sooner than planned if you lose your job over the indiscretion. Ask the client for permission to list her as a job reference and, if necessary, remind the client about the project you worked on or the extent of your interaction with the client or her organization. If the client is a large organization, ask someone most familiar with your work so they can give meaningful comments about your professional qualifications.

## Professors

If you've been an intern, graduate assistant or employed by your professor to perform work that requires training and expertise, ask your professor if she will be a job reference during your search for employment. Not only will your professor be able to discuss how well you perform as an employee, but she can attest to your skill level in specific areas in which you are trained. For example, if you're a registered nurse and your preceptor was assigned to you via a professor with whom you have a good relationship, ask to use both the professor and the preceptor as your job references.

Together, they can speak to your clinical expertise and how well you grasp nursing theory as well as the qualifications you demonstrated during your clinical rotations.

## **Colleagues**

People with whom you work directly are excellent references; however, some recruiters and hiring managers may see them as simply friends who are doing you a favor by providing a glowing job reference. Carefully select the colleagues you ask to provide you with a job reference. Ask colleagues at a higher level than your peers, so that your prospective employer can trust that your job reference is speaking from a position of authority.

## **Updates**

Continually update your list of reference and rotate names if you have enough people who can provide substantive and valuable information about your skills and qualifications. Also, update your professional references on your recent accomplishments so they have current knowledge of your skills. When you know that one of your professional references has provided information to a prospective employer, drop him a thank-you note to let him know the outcome of your job search, particularly if you receive an offer as a result of the reference he provided.