

Episode 101: How should I manage my references?

When you apply for a job, internally or externally, you need references.

1. Having the right references

It's good to have people say nice things about you on LINKEDIN but you need more. You need to have people who a potential employer can call and talk about you.

The reality is that it may be an HR person or even a recruiter who will make the call. That means it's someone who has done this before and will be looking for specifics. Establish the important things in your career area and look for references to them. Find people who can talk to what you achieved and the business benefits it bought. Then, when you need them, pick the references that you need for any specific job.

2. Keep your references ready

We all have a habit of letting our references go cold, not keeping in contact. They perish after 3 years and become unusable. Not necessarily because they will say bad things but because they will struggle to be specific. Today we can use LINKEDIN, Facebook, email and websites to keep in touch. Make a positive effort to keep your references updated with what you are doing. If possible buy them a coffee or lunch.

3. What to expect from your reference

You want your reference to say glowing things – truth is they will not. Good references identify strengths and weaknesses. A good employer knows we all have weaknesses but will look for balance. The trick is to know what your references will say and be already positioned for it. When I ask someone to reference me, we try and talk on the phone. We talk about the role, my candidacy and the focus. I never tell them what to say but I do ask them if they are comfortable to help. If get the role or if they get called I always send a thank you email or gift.

4. Acting as a reference

Remember to 'pay it forward' - be willing be a reference for people around you. Your integrity is important and therefore you should always be honest. It's OK to say you don't remember or you never saw them in a certain scenario. Learn from how references deal with you and then adjust your approach to yours.

Bottom Line: Like all friends and contacts, you need to keep a connection going for it to be valuable but remember, a good reference will always tell the truth, whether you like it or not.

