

# CONDUCTING REFERENCE CHECKS



Speaking with a job candidate's references can provide a valuable, independent check on the candidate's qualifications, work experience, past performance appraisals and their individual strengths and weaknesses. Planning ahead and noting down the questions to ask can ensure you get the answers and insights you will need to help make a hiring decision. Reference checks are equally not without their limitations though. Reading this article should provide you with some tips and considerations for getting the most value out of reference checks.



## 1 WHY SHOULD YOU CONDUCT A REFERENCE CHECK?

Reference checking is crucial when hiring a healthcare professional. Whereby most candidates will prove to be trustworthy, cross checking their background and accomplishments against their resume can provide confidence and peace of mind around your hiring decision.

Reference checking also helps to create a more level playing field. The process can uncover those who may perform poorly at interviews but are excellent employees. It can equally identify those who may shine at the interview but lack the actual qualities and abilities necessary to be successful in the role. Drawing on the details provided by a referee, together with all of the other inputs you have uncovered within your screening processes, can strengthen the clarity of a candidate's profile and contribute to your final decision. You should always inform the candidates that if they make it onto the shortlist you will conduct a thorough reference check.

## 2 WHO SHOULD CONDUCT A REFERENCE CHECK AND WHO DO YOU SPEAK TO?

The hiring manager is best placed to conduct the task since she/he knows the skills and abilities required to undertake the role effectively. They will also know which aspects of a candidate's resume require professional verification.

We recommend that at a minimum, you contact a current or former manager who worked with the candidate within the past two years. One-to-one verbal contact is always best rather than the passive approach of a letter or email. Phoning the referee allows you to ask spontaneous questions and detect nuances in the referee's voice that can reflect on the candidate.

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## 3 PLAN YOUR REFERENCE CHECK QUESTIONS IN ADVANCE

Here are few of the basic reference check questions you may like to ask:

- ❓ How long did the candidate work for your company?
- ❓ What type of work did they do?
- ❓ Can you describe some of the candidate's strengths / weaknesses?
- ❓ How well did they work as part of a team?
- ❓ What kind of people did they have the most difficulty working with?
- ❓ Were they punctual?
- ❓ Would you rehire them in the future?

Additional questions more unique to the candidate and the role should also be asked especially for clinical based questions.

There are also a few "no go zones" when it comes to reference checking, particularly around discrimination laws. Do not ask questions pertaining to marital status, age, religion, gender, disabilities, ethnicity or other personal matters. If in doubt, review your reference checking procedures with your company's HR and/or legal team.

## 4 THE LIMITATIONS OF REFERENCE CHECKING AND RED FLAGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Whereby references are an essential tool within any hiring process, they also have their limitations or disadvantages. Firstly, in nominating their own referees, the candidate is in control of who you speak to. They are highly unlikely to provide a referee who will not say positive things about their previous performance. Red flags in this respect include candidates only providing referee details for entities they have worked for in the distant past or providing the details of a co-worker of the same level as opposed to their direct line manager or a more senior manager.

You are fully entitled to ask that a candidate provides you with a current or previous manager's details, however if they are presently employed there you may find they will not be very forthcoming in providing an existing line manager's details out of fear of ruining their current employment status. An ideal alternative is to speak to a dependable manager who exited the organisation recently.

Another red flag to also look out for is when you contact a nominated referee and they are clearly not aware that they have been nominated to provide a reference. This can indicate a flaw in their communication skills and professionalism.

The team at Curamoir Healthcare Recruitment are always here to assist with any aspect of your job search. Just drop us an email or give us a call to discuss how we can help.

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## 5 THE FINAL HIRING DECISION

Apply objective hiring criteria to the evaluation process.

Make sure your hiring process follows a fair and level playing field in which each candidate is judged against identical selection criteria.

- Does the preferred choice match the job requirements you identified for the role?
- How much experience does the candidate have doing the work required for the job?
- What relevant advanced skills can the candidate bring to the role?
- How much training will he/she need?
- How quickly will he/she be able to work without supervision?
- How fast did the candidate progress through previous roles and responsibilities?
- Was he/she able to provide qualitative evidence of past career achievements?
- How recent were these achievements?

## 6 FINAL REFERENCE CHECKS

By this stage you will have already checked at least one or two references for each candidate. If your top candidate has included more references on the resume it is wise to pick up the phone and check them out. They may be able to add to your understanding of the candidate's skills or personality attributes and thus provide that final injection of confidence to support your decision.

## 7 ARE ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN AGREEMENT?

Ideally, ensure that the key decision makers are in agreement with the preferred candidate before you move forward and make a formal job offer. But equally, do not lose the opportunity to hire your star candidate by allowing the bureaucratic process and final decision to drag on. Set a clear deadline and make sure all stakeholders stick to it. If, for any reason, more time is needed, make sure the candidate is informed immediately. Finally, unsuccessful candidates should be informed of the result as a matter of professional courtesy.

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