

I am continually surprised by the number of hiring decisions made without the benefit of employment references. Talking with former supervisors, co-workers and customers is a crucial step in the overall candidate evaluation process, yet many hiring managers never take the time to do so. I have often wondered why this step in the hiring process is skipped and have concluded that, in general, hiring managers simply do not place a "value" on references. Perhaps hiring managers feel that those providing employment references will not be honest about "negatives" fearing some type of legal backlash? Maybe their interview process is so thorough that they assume all possible concerns have been identified and addressed? Whatever the reason, reference work is a valuable step in the hiring process that is often missed and I encourage you to avoid this common mistake...

- Do not simply rely on the reference names provided to you by the applicant. Suggest people you would like to speak with (former managers are best) and ask your candidate to cooperate by providing you their contact information. Of course, confidentiality must be respected at all times.
- When talking with any reference, preface your conversation with the importance of your hiring decisions and sincere interest in finding a productive, long-term employment situation for the candidate as well as your company. A reference that "sugar coats" the answers is not doing you or the candidate any favors either.
- Listen for "tone of voice" in the answers you get to reference questions. Probe where you get the "standard" reply. Ask for some examples, etc. And, if it is a really key hire, I suggest meeting face to face with references.
- A thorough reference will confirm some things you have learned in the interview process and will likely also lead to further questions. Do not hesitate to expand upon areas of additional interest with your candidates prior to making a final hiring decision.

We all agree that hiring decisions are often critical to the future success of our organizations. Please, please take the extra step to check references when you are hiring. Contact us if you would like a free electronic document that outlines the basic reference check questions that we utilize here at Palmer Group, and as always call if we might answer a question or help in any way.