

Reference checks

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When advertising a position, an organisation is often inundated with the CVs of potential candidates. Most candidates do a good job of painting a glowing picture of themselves on paper and during the interview process. The question is how to assess whether the information they have provided you with is accurate. After sifting through the CVs, interviewing and shortlisting the candidates, it is worthwhile to check the background of prospective employees.

The objective of the reference check is to confirm skills, experience and aptitude of the candidate.

There are two methods that are used to do so. The first is to email previous employers. here are disadvantages with this method as it often lacks the depth required and most employers are wary of putting any information about putting their perceptions and comments about former employees in writing. Although this method is quick and doesn't cost much, it is not the most effective means of doing a background check on a candidate.

The next method is to make a telephone call to a previous employer to verify whether the information provided by candidate is accurate. This method is cost-effective, time-efficient and previous employers are more likely to give complete information about the candidate. The person making the call also has an opportunity to ask questions should there be any 'red flags' during the course of the conversation thereby providing immediate clarification. It is best to use a structured form on which the information about the candidate can be recorded. This speeds up the process and results in a quick, efficient conversation. It is important to note that there is certain information that a previous employer may not release without the written consent of the candidate. This includes credit information, medical information, school records and the results of employment tests. They should also be careful not to make false, misleading or unverified statements about the candidate.

Another means of doing a reference check is to telephone the personal references listed on the CV of a candidate. The individuals listed should not be previous employers or family and they must be able to attest to the suitability of the candidate. The problem with this method is that candidates often list individuals who are very positive about them and will add to the glowing picture already provided by the candidate. For this reason, it is useful to evaluate the quality of the personal recommendations.

A reference from a professional person or a business owner will carry more weight than a reference from a neighbour or an old high school friend. Another issue to consider is how well the person knows the applicant. Sometimes the person has little or no knowledge of the candidate other than living next to them or working down the hall from them. A lukewarm recommendation from a personal reference should be a warning sign that the candidate is not suitable for the position. A reference check provides additional context about a candidate and in most cases, it can be used to verify and confirm the information already provided on a CV or in an interview. Although it is a time-consuming element of the recruitment process, the additional checking plays an important role in preventing the wrong candidate from being employed thereby saving time and resources in the long-run.