PRE-EMPLOYMENT TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECK

PURPOSE

A pre-employment reference check serves largely to discover any undesirable factors in a job applicant's background prior to making an employment commitment.

WHY USE THE TELEPHONE

The most desirable way to conduct such a check would be by personal visit, but the telephone check serves adequately and is less expensive.

Letters or forms rarely uncover negative factors. People hesitate to put in writing information they might give either in person or by telephone, or because of the stylized approach of the form letter; the necessary information you seek might not be elicited. The telephone check can be guided into different avenues to gain information, depending on how the person giving the information is reacting to the questions being asked. Much more flexibility is thus provided.

PREPARATION FOR THE TELEPHONE CALL

The original interviewer should make the reference check. In all probability he or she is most familiar with the applicant and will have the background to do the necessary probing.

Make a checklist of questions bearing upon the particular job that you will want to ask about this particular applicant. Special questions should be tailored to fit the particular call.

Be sure you obtain permission from the applicant if you plan to call a present employer. You cannot jeopardize the applicant's present employment.
THE CALL ITSELF

Call the person who had direct supervision over the applicant. Do not attempt to get the information secondhand. For instance, do not try to get information from someone in a staff relationship (such as the personnel department) unless no other channel is available. People in the personnel office or accounting department can verify dates of employment and termination, but they are not usually in a position to give valuable information regarding the job applicant's work habits, performance, etc.

Here are some do's and don'ts to consider:

1. Do not leave a callback if the person you are trying to reach is not available. You may receive the return call when you are unable to discuss the applicant.

2. Identify yourself immediately, explain your position with the University, and tell the party why you are calling about the applicant.

3. Assure your contact that any discussions you have will be held in confidence.

4. Ask whether he or she is free to discuss the situation.

5. Offer to have the party call you back collect if you sense that the person doubts the legitimacy of your call.

6. Try to establish rapport with the party you are calling. Perhaps he or she has a son or daughter attending the University. Maybe you know someone in his or her organization. Many times a freer exchange of information comes about when the individual you are calling identifies with the University, your position, or some mutual point of interest.

7. Tell the person about the position for which the applicant is being considered. A better evaluation can be made if made in relation to a specific job. The job must be explained completely enough to have meaning.

8. Ask the general question such as, "How do you think the applicant would fit into our vacancy?" After the person responds, lead in with more specific questions, such as:

   • What was the nature of the applicant's work with you?
   • What are his strengths? Weaknesses?
   • How did the applicant get along with co-workers?
   • How did the applicant get along with supervisors?
   • Did you consider the applicant reliable?
   • Did the applicant meet commitments?
   • Did the applicant have any personal habits you consider to be negative?
   • Has the applicant been bypassed on promotions with your company?
   • How was the applicant's attendance?
   • Why did the applicant leave your employment?
   • Is there anything else you think I should know about the applicant?
   • Would you re-employ the applicant?
9. Let the person talk freely in answering for as long as he or she wishes without your interrupting. Often a question from you at the wrong time will shut off further information.

10. Follow up and probe when you feel the contact is reluctant to discuss certain factors. Many times a further explanation of why you are 'digging in' will elicit the information you want. After all, you are doing the applicant a favor by checking. Placement in the wrong job could lead to ultimate unhappiness or even dismissal.

11. Be alert for obvious pauses in answering when you ask questions. Often these are a sign that further questions may bring further information you might not otherwise have received.

12. Do not be concerned about how long the conversation might take. A few dollars for a toll call might save untold dollars in expense in making the wrong hire.

13. Do not hang up until you are sure that you know the opinion of the person called. Frequently, you will receive ambiguous answers. The person called may give very little useful information. One technique that often works is to summarize the conversation by making either of the following two statements:

   - "I take it that you don't recommend the applicant for the position."
   - "I take it that you highly recommend the applicant for the position."

   Sometimes one or the other of these summary statements evokes the responses you need.

14. Glance at your checklist of questions to be sure you have covered everything.

15. Always end the call by asking the person, "Would you reemploy the applicant?" Often this question brings forth information that you were unable to get by other questions.

16. Be sure to thank your contact for his or her help.
PRE-EMPLOYMENT TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECK

Applicant’s Name: ____________________________________________________ Date: ____________
Position applied for: ____________________________________________________________________

Previous Employer(s)

CONSIDER CONTACTING MULTIPLE PRIOR EMPLOYERS – I.E. THE APPLICANT WORKED FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS FOR ONE EMPLOYER AND FOR 12 YEARS FOR THE PRIOR EMPLOYER

Company_____________________________________________________________________________
Address ______________________________________________________________________________
City _____________________________________ State _____________________ Zip _____________
Phone ___________________________________
Person to contact _____________________________________________ Title ____________________
1. Was _________________________________ employed by your company?  ____ Yes   ____ No
   Applicant’s Name
2. How long and in what capacity have you known the applicant?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
3. Employment was from _______________________ to __________________________
4. Starting position he/she held in your company ________________________________________________________________________________
   Rate of pay $_______________ per __________________________
5. Last position he/she held in your company ________________________________________________________________________________
   Rate of pay $_______________ per __________________________
6. What was the nature of work and job responsibilities?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
7. Please tell me how you would rate him/her in the following areas:
   5 = Outstanding  4 = Good  3 = Average  2 = Needs Improvement  1 = Unsatisfactory
   Attendance  1  2  3  4  5
   Cooperation/teamwork  1  2  3  4  5
   Initiative  1  2  3  4  5
   Productivity  1  2  3  4  5
   Job Knowledge  1  2  3  4  5
   Reliability  1  2  3  4  5
   Quality of Work  1  2  3  4  5
Compliance with Employment policies and procedures

Communication Skills

Inter-personal Skills

Creativity

Attitude

Adaptability

8. What would you consider to be his/her strengths?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Weaknesses?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________


______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

10. What was his/her reason for leaving? __________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

11. Do you have additional comments? ____________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Signed by __________________________________________ Title ____________________________

Reference Given By: ___________________________________

Date _____________________________________________