Checking Job References

Most of the time job applicants misrepresent themselves. Why not check their credentials with their current employer? It would save you a lot of time, money, and agony.

When considering applicants for a job, it is always good to check references prior to making the final decision to hire. Most of the time job applicants misrepresent themselves in terms of size of their current job, reasons for leaving their current employer, current job title and of course compensation.

But how many of us recruiters really bother to do a check out Feedback received from a reference check too could be used as a powerful tool to identify training needs, which can give you a substantial strengths and the amount of useful information about how your final choice can be most productively managed. Most professionals would change jobs for approximately 20- 25% increase in compensation. For correct pay positioning (apart from supply and demand which seems to be the rule rather than the exception in Sri Lanka where quality of recruits are concerned) why not request to see the last pay slip of the candidate?

Here is a real life situation. A sales executive, under pressure to perform suddenly quits. Anil’s salary at the time of quitting is Rs 9,000/- per month. He meets a overall value of the individual to the organization.

sales manager of a company who is desperately sourcing a sales executive and offers Anil a similar position, and inquires the amount of his last pay.

Anil inflates his salary by 100% and quotes 18,000/- per month. The sales manager tells Anil I can’t pay you more than what you were earning in your previous job.

I will give you the same amount.” Anil is hired at twice his previous pay.

This sales manager then hast hired a mediocre performer for 100% more than Anil’s market price in terms of his competence and performance value.

Had the sales Manager requested to see Anil’s last pay slip and checked references, I wouldn’t have had a story to quote here. This happened approximately 3 months ago.

In the previous issue of Business Today, we discussed how psychometric tests help to understand the personality of a job applicant which would help in the future management of the individual. Similarly, the feedback received from a reference check too could be used as a powerful tool to iden tify training needs, strengths and the overall value of the individual to the organization.

How to check references

Use the phone In my career I have used the phone to make reference checks and this has been more productive than reference checks by mail.

You hear from the ‘horse’s mouth’ and it saves time. Moreover more information can be obtained in a shorter time period by phone. Few people will write negative comments on paper, and voice signals are extremely helpful. The following are my type of questions, which have provided me with a wealth of information about candidates.

1. Exact period of employment with your organization.

2. What were the applicant’s initial responsibilities on the job?

3. What were the applicant’s most recent responsibilities on the job?

4. How much supervision and follow up did the applicant require?

5. Was the applicant a team player?

6. What work-related conflicts did the applicant encounter?

7. Can you name 3-5 of the applicant’s strengths?

8. Can you name 3-5 of the applicant’s areas of improvement?

9. What was the applicant’s most recent performance ranking and salary increase percentage?

10. Why is the applicant leaving your company?

11. How do you plan to replace the applicant?

12. What was the applicant’s final compensation?

13. Given your experience with the applicant would you rehire him/her? Depending on the success of the telephone conversation and the attitude of the person providing the information, here are additional questions you can ask that will shed further light on the applicant’s abilities and suitability for the position you are recruiting.

What is the best way to work with the applicant to ensure his/ her maximum output and effectiveness?

What could the applicant have done to be more successful?

How would you describe the applicant’s overall attitude? What additional training does the applicant need?

It is very important to listen’ between the lines and rely on your instincts to interpret what the reference person is really telling you. For example, anything less than recognition and praise regarding an applicant’s performance may mean the applicant is an average performer. And anything less than an immediate ‘Yes’ to the question, ‘would you rehire this person?’ can well mean ‘No’.

Also remember that the persons you contact to provide references may have built-in biases. Some may have a few good things to say about the applicant whilst others may feel upset that the employee has left the organization, and still others may have learned over the years to respond in a very generic manner when asked about an employee’s performance.

To leverage a reference check, particularly if it is with the applicant’s previous employer, it is important to have a cordial conversation. Networking with corporate colleagues, non-profit groups and professional bodies could also be of immense help.

Correspond

Normally people don’t like to write answers to your questions. No one likes to dispatch negative reports in writing and writing itself doesn’t offer signals that a voice may offer in a conversation. However, if you have trouble contacting a reference by phone a ‘mail reference check’ should prove useful.

Check credentials.

By checking professional memberships, awards, and educational background you can increase the chances of selecting the best candidate. Whenever possible arrange for an interview with the candidate prior to issuing the offer letter, once you have checked the references and credentials, to get a more rounded view of the individual and to clear any gray areas. Your reference and credential checking efforts should stop after this conversation. Only one individual from the organization that's recruiting the applicant should be designated for the reference checking activity and the final checking out discussion with the applicant. It is professional courtesy to permit the selected candidate to serve out the notice period with his/her current employer, without exerting pressure on the applicant to apply for leave during the notice period, and join the new company.



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