

## Do Not Be Fooled—Reference Checking Is Essential When Hiring the Best Candidate

In today's tight economy, the employer who is looking for the best candidate has the advantage in finding the perfect fit for the organization. Employers, however, need to be more aware of the process that will help them select the perfect candidates for their open positions.

Interviews and resumes do not paint the complete picture of prospective candidates. Resumes can exaggerate and in some instances misrepresent credentials and experience. Applicants may have learned interviewing skills to give them the advantage of appearing to be well prepared for the interviewer's questions, and in some cases, better prepared than the interviewer.

The question facing employers is, "How do we make sure that we are getting the right candidate for our organization?" The reference checking process is the route to obtaining information relating to previous work experience, academics, and on-the-job performance. Individuals that are familiar with the candidate's performance can provide all of this information.

What are the three most important aspects of reference checking that are essential to finding the right candidate?

### 1. Document Verification:

A standard application is useful because it includes complete information regarding past employers, dates of employment, supervisors, education, and background information. This information provided by the applicant must be verified.

### 2. Signed Authorization:

An authorization and release form provides the necessary consent to the hiring organization to obtain references about the candidate. A well-written authorization and release form allows the employer to check all credentials, employment background, education, and criminal background, as well as to contact former supervisors and others for references. A copy of this form should be signed by all applicants and submitted along with the employment application.

### 3. Experienced Reference Checkers:

Trained reference checkers have the ability to elicit information from former employers and supervisors without asking illegal questions. Reference checkers should possess a thorough understanding of the employment laws including the Fair Credit Reporting Act. They should be thorough and be skilled in asking probing questions in order to reveal any discrepancies in the information provided by the applicant. A thorough reference check is more than paper documentation and face-to-face interviews; it looks into the total persona of the candidate from an unbiased perspective. Checking references will help avoid negligent hiring suits and should be a key part of any employer's hiring process.

Remember, a candidate brings to a new position all previous work habits and experience. It is a costly error to hire what looks like the best candidate. Do not be hasty. Taking the time to check references and conduct a thorough background investigation will enhance an employer's chances of hiring the candidate that is the perfect fit for the organization.