

SUMMARY

From starting a job search to being a finalist candidate, few parts of the journey are more important than your references and how you use them throughout the process. Yet, for the vast majority of people, their strategy about references is an afterthought, not at the forefront, and not well executed. This poor approach will hinder top job seekers – from losing traction in networking to being rejected as a candidate. On the flip side, average job seekers can vault ahead if they do the reference process well.

If you're already a candidate for a job, there are two common mistakes at this stage:

- 1 gaps of references in the recent past, and
- 2 reluctance to provide a more complete list, even when asked.

These are red flags for hiring people or recruiters. Generally, candidates act defensively by timidly spooning out a few references only when asked. Instead, play offensively. You also need to ensure your references are in sync with your story since alignment is a key evaluation for recruiters.

A good approach shows you're **H**elpful, **O**rganized, **T**ransparent and **C**redible...a **Lower Risk** job seeker.

THE BEST APPROACH

Numerous

15 from the last 15 years. By listing many references, you show thoroughness and confidence. If one person gives an average reference, that rating counts less if many rate you well. That one might even be axed as an outlier. Also, some might not be called due to the big list, particularly those from years ago.

Multi-level

Bosses, Peers, Subordinates. Key clients can be added if you've been in sales or partnerships. Try to include all former bosses in the last 15 years, although ones from your current employer can be understandably excluded. No past vendors including outside CPA or law firms since you paid them.

Continuous

No gaps. If there are no references from a fairly recent company or boss, it's an alert to hiring people or recruiters. Often, a former employer or boss was a problem. Most people, however, will give a reference after enough time has diminished old wounds. Plus, that past boss might need your reference or a sales lead or an introduction. Additionally, an average reference is better than no reference.

Disseminated

Post many references on LinkedIn. Also, list all of them at the end of your resume, especially if you've changed jobs often. Include the reference's name, title and company at the time you worked with them, and the dates you worked with them. Don't include their contact data on the resume. Incidentally, recruiters won't begin calling your references without having interviewed you several times.

Early

Reveal references soon. Send the full list with their contact information to hiring people or recruiters before they ask, even after your first phone interview. They may not need it at that time and they also won't think you're desperate for a job. Instead, they'll appreciate you being helpful, **organized**, **transparent**, and hopefully **credible**.

