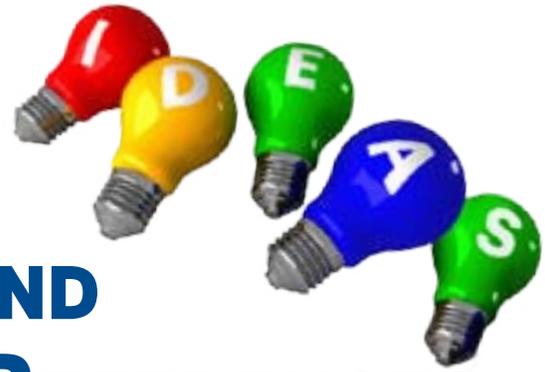


10 STRATEGIES FOR CHOOSING, USING, AND MAINTAINING POSITIVE REFERENCES



~ Written in partnership with Diana Abath

1. **Build a diverse “reference team.”** Choose from former/current supervisors, coworkers, customers, vendors, professors, and professional colleagues. If you’re unemployed, volunteering is a great way to gain references while concurrently giving back, staying productive, sharpening your skills, and expanding your network.
2. **Choose wisely.** Make sure references can speak fairly, favourably, and knowledgeably of your character, abilities, achievements, work skills, attitude, education, training, and performance. Choose references with whom you’ve had positive, productive interactions.
3. **Use family/friends carefully.** If applications ask for “personal” references, family/friends are acceptable if they can professionally discuss your work life - not your personal childhood or college memories. Otherwise, only use friends/family if they gave you the job lead or have a good reputation with the company/sector.
4. **Be proactive.** Before leaving your current job, create a career portfolio to save letters, emails, and notes reflecting your skills and accomplishments. Use LinkedIn to ask for recommendations and endorsements from your connections. Be aware of your company’s policy before asking colleagues and/or supervisors for a reference. When you leave, ask for a reference as soon as you can and make your job search known to your entire network.
5. **Catch up with references first.** If it’s been a while since you’ve talked with a potential reference, call or email to invite him/her to reconnect over coffee or lunch—your treat! Show genuine interest in catching up on each other’s lives and sharing news about your job search, industries of interests, and goals.
6. **Ask for permission.** Never use a reference without his/her knowledge or consent! No one likes getting caught off-guard with an unexpected call or feeling taken advantage of. Employers may perceive the reference as clueless which can damage his/her credibility and yours, ultimately impacting your chances of getting the job.
7. **Inform/coach references.** Provide references with a copy of the job posting, your resume, and your cover letter so they are knowledgeable. Advise them when to expect a call, and who will contact them, and update them with the outcome (e.g., you got the job). If necessary, coach your references about questions they may be asked and ask how they would relay your skill compatibility to an employer.
8. **Keep references separate.** It’s best to avoid putting references directly on your resume. Maintain a separate, up-to-date reference list with each reference’s preferred contact information, current title/company, and association to you. Include direct phone number(s) or relevant extensions. Take this list with you to your interview, providing it when asked. If you maintain a job search log, use a “References” column to track who you provided for each position applied for. Not all of your references will be suitable for each job application.
9. **Use reference letters.** Letters take time to write; ask early and give a realistic deadline. Provide relevant information including who to address the letter to, the position you’re applying for, and what you’d like highlighted. Ask for a signed letter on company letterhead, if possible. To minimize repeatedly requesting new letters for each application, request an editable version (e.g., MS Word) and permission to make minor adjustments. This enables you to customize the letter for different applications on behalf of your reference; however, you must always advise the reference of changes and request approval before submitting to an employer as a PDF.
10. **Be appreciative.** When they agree, be sure to thank your references right away. When you’re hired, show your appreciation with a small token (e.g., thank you letter, gift card for coffee). Whether or not he/she gives you a reason, graciously accept if someone doesn’t want to continue being a reference—don’t apply pressure or get bitter.

imagine • achieve • excel



604.856.2386
info@lifestrategies.ca
www.lifestrategies.ca