



HIGHMARK
COMPANIES

**HUMAN CAPITAL
STRATEGIES IN
CORPORATE
FINANCE**

**THE FINANCE LEADER'S
REFERENCE CHECK
GUIDE**

WHY REFERENCES MIGHT BE YOUR BEST DATA POINT

Candid reference conversations provide some of the most objective insight you can gain on a prospective employee. Past performance is the leading indicator for what the future holds when you choose to make a hire. References may be your most valuable data point in making the hiring decision.

Make sure you are talking to the right people. References can come in multiple forms including character references, professional references and employment references. Character references from friends and professional references from colleagues are far less valuable than employment references. You should demand at least two past supervisors as references as a starting point.

Make the call yourself. This is one area where you should not delegate. The granular nature of a reference conversation leads one question into another. Making the call firsthand allows you to follow these natural conversations to their end and uncover a deeper understanding of the prospective employee.

GET HELP FROM THE CANDIDATE

Chasing references for a returned call is frustrating and can chew up a lot of your time. Before you make the first call, contact the candidate and ask them if they wouldn't mind contacting each of their references to let them know that you will be calling them. Have the candidate set the reference's expectations and frame the call for you. This will uncover any scheduling issues or inaccurate contact information and save you valuable time.



REFERENCE QUESTIONS

What is the capacity of your relationship with [Candidate's Name]?

How long have you known him / her?

What were the responsibilities of the position the candidate had while working at your company?

How did he / she perform with regard to (primary responsibility of your job)?

Use this question to address the most critical elements of the job. Ask questions about the quality of the work product and ability to meet strict deadlines. Ask for skill-related examples to determine organizational or communication skills.

The role I am looking to hire him / her into has primary responsibility for:

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In what areas did you coach them, and how did their performance improve?

Use this question to uncover any performance weaknesses that may not have otherwise been volunteered by the reference. Listen carefully as the reference describes how the candidate responded to coaching and whether or not there was any improvement in performance.



In what areas do they still have room for improvement?

What part of your management style was most effective with him / her? What areas were least effective?

This is about understanding which management behaviors the candidate responds well to. Be conscious of your own management style and evaluate how much energy it will take to get the best out of the candidate.

How did he | she relate to others? Is he | she more of an independent worker or did they excel by working as part of a team?

Although teamwork is highly regarded by most companies, a person who is more independently directed may be what your position calls for. Determine, based on your assessment of the job, whether an interactive or independent work style is important for success -- and regardless of the answer, probe to determine whether the candidate demonstrated respect for other employees' contributions and a willingness to consider others' opinions.



How committed are they to their career? What was their attendance record?

What is appropriate attendance at one company may be cause for dismissal at another. Be sensitive to extenuating circumstances that may have contributed to poor work attendance, such as illness or family problems. What you are attempting to determine by asking this question is whether this candidate assumed responsibility to show up for work and be on time.

Why did they leave this position?

This question should verify the reasons that the candidate provided for leaving his or her past job during the interview. The reason a candidate leaves a position can also help you in determining whether your position will give the candidate what he or she is looking for in a new role.

Would you rehire him / her?

This is the defining question. Based upon the reference's answer, and your evaluation of the other information provided, this will help you make the final hiring decision.





ABOUT HIGHMARK COMPANIES

Highmark Companies LLC is a North Carolina limited liability company established in 1999. We are headquartered in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina and have additional offices in Washington, DC, San Diego, New York City, Dallas, Denver, and Salt Lake City metropolitan areas.

Highmark provides full-service recruiting and staffing services to our clients. We deliver well-credentialed executives, managers, and professionals to a client base that are among the most successful companies and organizations in the country. Our reach extends nationwide – with placements in every region of the country.

We have three integrated businesses that specialize in the following areas:

- Finance & accounting professionals
- Creative talent
- Technology professionals



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