**Work References**

**(Your Name)  
(Phone Number & Personal Email)**

**PURPOSE:** Three fold:

-To give potential employers a document that will help sell you.

-To guide employer’s questions when they call each reference.

-To increase the odds of them making you an offer.

People lose out on career opportunities because of weak references, not bad references. When you provide a list of references that just includes names and contact information you put the person running the reference, and your former bosses at a serious disadvantage.

You need to guide the potential employer to ask your former boss questions the boss can honestly remember and answer. You may not have worked for some of your references in 5-10 years. Don’t expect those bosses to remember details about your performance.

Potential employers can’t read your mind on what to ask. Help them to help you.

Following is format that thousands of career seekers have used.

When you have created your Reference list, be sure to send a copy to each of the people on your list. Include a brief letter thanking them for agreeing to be on your reference list. Then remind them of your specific accomplishments when you worked for them.

Next, in a paragraph, tell them how your career has progressed since working for them. If you had major weaknesses in your background when you worked for them, tell them how you have overcome those weaknesses.

Last, ask if they have any openings you might be able to refer people to. Let your previous employers know you still care about them and still want to help them be successful. Who knows, they may have a position to offer you.

**Work References** (List 3-4 recent direct bosses. Peers only when you can’t locate direct boss.)

**Joe Sample My key accomplishment** when I worked  
GM Westin Hotel for (with) Joe Sample. Increased F&B revenue  
Current address each of first two years, achieving record F&B  
City, State, Zip profits. In 2008 only experienced 5% drop in   
Phone number profits on 22% drop in F&B revenues  
Business email  
Relevant to years: **Areas of my experience Joe Sample is qualified to  
  
12/2005-4/2010 address:** -Ability to control expenses and labor.  
Joe was GM of -How well I projected F&B revenues and profits.  
Hilton in Minneapolis -Ability to coach, motivate, and prepare people for   
when I worked for him promotion. (Promoted 7 managers within hotel or to  
 other hotels we operated. Cross-trained and moved 22   
 hourly associates up.  
 -Effective participation in Executive Committee meetings.

The above information tells the person running the reference how to contact each reference. What position the reference currently has and position they were in when you worked for them. (If Joe has been promoted or moved up since you worked for them it helps you. Employers like employees who have worked for others who have moved up.

The **Key Accomplishment** tells the person running the reference the most important information they should verify with this reference. (Why it is important to remind your references about your accomplishments with them.)

**Areas of experience Joe Sample is qualified to address.** Guides the reference on which areas of your background to question. It gives the person running the reference the opportunity to ask “How did…” questions. This gives your former boss the opportunity to help sell you.

In this example the person worked for Joe over 10 years ago. Trust me Joe isn’t going to remember specifics. Especially when Joe gets a call “out of the blue” that interrupts his chain of thought.” Think about people that worked for you 10 years ago. Employees you have not seen or talked to recently. How much could you factually say about them if someone called you today to get a reference?

Biggest pitfall of references is when employer asks your references about parts of your background they can’t answer. In effort to help you references will speak in generalities. When employers see generalities with all or most of your references as they read over their notes and say “These references are not telling me anything. Oh, maybe they were trying to tell me this person didn’t accomplish much.” When employers do this, they usually will go back to your reference list. This will give them the opportunity to see they asked the wrong questions. Rarely will they go back and re-run the references, but they will give you the benefit of the doubt.

Getting a copy of your reference list to each of the people on your list. Include a reminder to each about your accomplishments with them. This information helps your references address specifics, not generalities. Again, you have improved your odds of receiving an offer.

It’s always good to get a written reference when you leave an employer. Hopefully from your direct boss, citing your key accomplishments. If you have a written reference from a person on your reference list. Send a copy to them. It will be a reminder on what the person thought of you when you left. These written reference letters may be a “To Whom It May Concern” letter, but it is still meaningful when the letter cites specific accomplishments.

The reference letter becomes more important when you have lost track of a key reference.

**What types of references should be on your reference list? How many?**

**Direct Bosses & Peers**

3-4 Direct Bosses covering the most recent 10 years of your experience. (It’s wonderful if you have worked for some of people more than once.)  
 People should never lose track of former bosses. If you have, 1-2 peers can be included.

Should you include bosses who may have fired you or laid you off? ABSOLUTELY. Often these people are your best references. **B**e sure to tell them how your career has progressed. It’s never fun to fire or lay people off. Over the years we have found these references have been very fair.

**Professional References**

These are optional. Perhaps from local Convention & Visitors Bureau, or Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, etc. Include them if position will require you to take a leadership role in civic/professional organizations.

**Personal References**

Include couple of these if your career is just starting out and you only have 1-2 direct bosses.

**How many references should be on your list?**

No more than 5-6. Start with your most recent employers first. Potential employers rarely call more than 3 references. You want twice that number on your list in case some of your references are on vacation or business trips.