

Work References

(Your Name)

(Phone number and personal email)

Purpose: To give potential employers a document that will help sell you, and guide them when they run work references.

People lose out on jobs 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. Don't expect potential employers to read your mind on what questions to ask.

Following is format that thousands of job seekers have used. When you have created your reference list, be sure to send a copy to each of the people on your reference 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 job to offer you.

Work References (List 3-4 recent direct bosses.)

Joe Sample

GM Westin Hotel

Current address

City, state, zip

Phone number

Business email

Relevant to years:

12/2005-present

My key accomplishment when I worked

for (with) Joe Sample. Increased F&B revenue each of first two years, achieving record F&B profits. In 2008 only experienced 5% drop in profits on 22% drop in F&B revenues.

Areas of my experience Joe Sample is qualified to address:

- Ability to control expenses and labor.
- How well I projected F&B revenues and profits.
- Ability to coach, motivate, and prepare people for promotion. (Promoted 7 managers within hotel or to other hotels we operate. Cross-trained and moved 22 hourly associates up.)
- Effective participation in Executive Committee meetings.

The above information tell the person running a reference how to contact the person and what position they are currently in. (Joe may well have been promoted or moved up since you last worked for them. Potential employers like to see references who are advancing their careers. It tells them you worked for a person that was moving up.

The **key accomplishment** tells the person running the reference the most important information they should verify about you.

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.

Getting a copy of your reference list to Joe Sample helps him remember you and what you did when you worked for him. In this example, Joe is a current, or very recent boss. It should be easy for Joe to remember you. If you worked for Joe 10 years ago, it would be much more difficult. 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, or people you knew 10 years ago, but have not seen since. How much could you factually say about them if someone called you today to get a reference on them.

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 one, send a copy to the former boss when you send a copy of your reference list. It will be a detailed 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 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?

Types of References

At least:

-3-4 Direct bosses covering most recent 10 years of your experience. (It’s wonderful if you have worked for some of the same people more than once.)

-1-2 peers/employees who you have worked with and kept track of.

Professional References are optional. These can be from local Convention & Visitor Bureau, professional organizations, peers from other properties or companies, etc. Include them if position you are applying for requires you to take a leadership role in civic/professional organizations.

Should you include **Personal References**? If your career is just starting and you don’t have enough of the above. Most employers avoid personal references if possible.

How many?

A reference list with 5-6 people is usually enough. 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 on an extended business trip.