

## How to choose the right references for your job search

*What every job seeker should do when identifying and prepping job references.*



**Q:** *How can you ask your immediate supervisor or manager (who knows the most about your work and skills) to be your reference when you are secretly looking for another job? Thanks. – K.T.*

**A:** In a perfect world, we would all have very good relationships with our bosses, openly communicate with one another and be able to let that person know we're looking for work while still employed at the company.

Unfortunately, not everyone works in a place where they could tell their boss they're looking for new work, and still maintain that job during the search. The reality is that if you're conducting a [confidential job search](#) while employed, you most likely won't be able to use your immediate supervisor as a reference.

So let's talk about what any job seeker – regardless of their current employment status – should do when identifying and prepping references for the job search.

**Target three solid references** from people you currently work with (if you have a close relationship with that person and you trust them to keep your search confidential) or have worked with in the past.

This can include: (1) former bosses or people to whom you had a dotted-line reporting relationship, (2) peers, (3) clients or vendors and (4) people you've successfully supervised or mentored.

**If you are new to the workforce**, consider asking for references from college mentors, professors who taught courses relevant to your job goals, fellow students who headed up organizations with which you were actively involved or those who managed you during internships.

**Only include references** who have insight into your work and capabilities and those you trust to say good things about you and your performance. Remember you don't need these people to write out letters of recommendation – you need someone who could field a phone call or email from a prospective employer and advocate on your behalf.

**Once your contact has agreed** to be a reference, you want to do three things:

- Find out what email address and phone number they'd prefer the recruiters use when contacting them.
- Make sure they have the most up-to-date copy of your resume.
- Go through your career history and current goals with them so they understand what you're targeting and what skill sets you're most eager to pitch to employers.

**If your contact is willing**, it doesn't hurt to have a [written reference](#) on file. This can be in the form of a LinkedIn Recommendation, or a written document that appears on the company letterhead where the person works.

**Unprepared references can unknowingly hurt** your chances of landing the job. Once you have an interview scheduled, make sure you alert your references. Tell them the name of the company, supply them with a copy of the job description (when possible) and explain to them how you meet the core must-haves for the role – this will be good practice for answering the “**Tell me about yourself**” interview question. When a contact understands what skills or experience you want to highlight, they’ll be in a better position to support you as a reference.