

## **MAXIMIZE YOUR REFERENCES**

*Or Networking Is An On-going Process*

By Janice Sacramento  
Job Center of Lake County, Workforce Development Department

Keeping your references current will help you get that next job or promotion. Today's employers want references and letters of recommendation showing past performance as an indication of future performance. With so many companies merging and filing for bankruptcy, you do not want to be caught in a layoff, because, by then it may be too late to get a reference. Networking is an on-going process. You want to be prepared for any job opportunity.

References take on new importance as you search for a job. With today's technology, many employers are doing background checks as soon as you enter your data into their online system. See [www.pretrieve.com](http://www.pretrieve.com) to view what employers can learn about you. Therefore, your references need to be very attuned to what you have to offer as they are the first human contact for background information an employer has about you.

Now, think about your current or last job and the duties that you perform(ed) and what unique characteristics you have. Then think about the people who can best describe what you do. They can be your co-workers, your boss, another department boss, an outside vendor or contractor, or even someone outside of your immediate place of employment such as someone from an organization where you volunteer.

After you have identified your job duties, identify three people who can describe what you do and what unique characteristics you possess. Next you need to approach the people you identified and ask them if they will not only be your reference but also if they will write a reference letter for you.

- 1) Tell them what you want them to write about you, i.e. how you lead a team to a successful system upgrade, or how you increased customer service through a new approach, that you received the Perfect Attendance Award, or that your fund raiser brought in the most money. You want them to describe not only what you did for the company, but also, something about your character or work ethics.
- 2) Ask them how they want to be contacted (at home, at work, phone, e-mail). If they give you their work contact information, ask if you may have their personal e-mail address and phone number for later use. Again, this is about networking and if they or you are laid off, you will still be able to keep in contact.
- 3) Be sure to get the correct spelling of their name and title.
- 4) Ask for at least two copies of the letter on letterhead.
- 5) Give them a copy of your resume so they know what you are saying about yourself.
- 6) Personally phone or write them a thank-you note for being your reference and for writing a letter of recommendation.
- 7) Once you have the letters, and all the contact information, write the contact information on a separate "Reference List" sheet. On this sheet you could also include the number of years that you have known them. File all of the above in a separate folder for future use.

This is also about networking, so if you are currently unemployed, keep your references informed of your job search progress. If you are working, but should be laid off in the future, this will be one less task that you will have to do and you will already have a jump start on your network. Review your reference list

once a year to ensure all the information is correct. Career Directors International recommends doing this every May. Today's employers are seeking the best employees for their organizations. Be prepared with a list of references and letters that can describe your work performance and the unique characteristics you bring to the workplace.

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*Janice Sacramento is a Certified Advanced Resume Writer and Trainer with the Job Center of Lake County, Workforce Development Department. She has been assisting job seekers for fifteen years as well as working directly with business in the county. Janice can be contacted via e-mail at [www.jscaramento@co.lake.il.us](mailto:www.jscaramento@co.lake.il.us) or by phone in the US at 847-543-7663.*