



SHOULD JOB CANDIDATES CHECK REFERENCES ON THEIR FUTURE BOSSES?

This Unusual Practice can Increase Your Hiring Success

We're all used to checking references on candidates. It used to be done by letter; now it's done by a telephone call. A live conversation allows the potential employer to do some exploring and to ask questions about issues which can be glossed over in a letter. BUT are you 'big' enough to allow a potential employee to check **your** references with your current employees in the same way?

"No way," you say.

It's easy to think of the disadvantages. Your employees would be at liberty to discuss you and your job performance in juicy detail. To do justice to the request, they would have to do some critical thinking about you and your organization. In the traditional organization, critical thinking goes in one direction only – DOWN! Except for those few progressive companies conducting 360° reviews, we're not used to it coming back up the chain of command. Sure, we know it takes place, but it's usually behind our backs and we can choose to ignore it. It's a big step to encourage this kind of thinking in a proactive way.

Now consider the advantages!

First, the main reason a new hire does not work out is that (a) they don't meet your expectations, and (b), equally important, you don't meet theirs. Fit is a double-edged sword. You want to make sure that a new employee will be easily integrated into the team, and will be responsive to your management style. The new employee has the same expectations.

Let's take a simple example. Suppose as a boss, you are at your most effective late in the afternoon. In fact, you just get rolling by five, habitually stay late, and often expect your support staff to stay on as well. Your new employee is a young parent, very much involved with their family. Perhaps they do some community work once or twice a week. Chances are you'll lose this person as soon as they can find something that fits in better with their lifestyle. Wouldn't it have been better if your working habits had been known beforehand?

Second, critical thinking and appropriate feedback from an employee to the boss are not such bad ideas. The process required for an employee to give a reference on their boss could be used to advantage by a manager who is open to improve, regardless of any new hiring.

For obvious practical reasons, you would have to limit the number of candidates to whom your employees would give references; probably to the short list. You are, after all, running a business, and the issue is somewhat sensitive. In addition, the culture in the workplace would have to be sufficiently co-operative and supportive to allow the reference to be meaningful and useful. For this reason, it would probably work best in an organization that values openness and honesty. (But that's another article for another time.)

Would it work for you?

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