

Q&A Recruiting & Hiring

HR

Courtesy of Meridian Benefits Consulting

Q

How can I find actual relevant information about candidates when checking references, rather than being stuck with neutral reviews?

A

Many companies have policies that allow only very basic information to be provided when giving employee references. They may confirm the employee's name, dates of employment, salary and job title, but will not reveal anything about his or her work ethic, productivity or demeanor. Companies do this to avoid litigation by employees who are disgruntled and who may try to claim damages for a negative reference.

Below are some suggestions to obtain valuable information from candidate references:

- Ensure that the employment application includes some form of the following statements:
 - All candidates must successfully complete pre-employment background checks.
 - Misrepresenting information at any point on the application or during the interview process may result in rejection or immediate termination of employment.
 - Employment gaps must be explained.
 - Failure to permit any portion of the background check is grounds for disqualification from consideration for the position.
- Require each candidate to sign a reference check release form, stating that he or she will not press charges based on the references being contacted or the information being provided—employers can provide reluctant references with copies of the signed release form in order to encourage sharing of valuable information.
- Check the candidate's credit history, if applicable. However, if a decision to not hire is based on a credit report, employers will need to include a Summary of Consumer Rights along with a pre-adverse action notice. Providing an incomplete or out-of-date form may result in substantial fines.
- Attempt to contact references that the candidate did not provide—asking the primary references for names of other former co-workers or supervisors may assist in getting a variety of reviews from more than just pre-approved sources.
- Provide a brief questionnaire—employers may feel more comfortable responding to specific questions about the employee, especially if the responses include a pre-determined rating scale.
- Ask for more detail or examples when given vague answers.
- Ask about the candidate's eligibility for rehire and ask what the company's policy is for rehiring former employees.