The Reference Game  By: The Editors of WetFeet

You will probably be asked for references before you receive a job offer—sometimes as early as at the screening interview, sometimes when you interview with the hiring manager, and sometimes only when an offer is extended “subject to a satisfactory check of references.”

It isn’t unusual, however, for people to be hired without a reference check, particularly if they come to the organization through a referral, if they’ve previously held a part-time job at the company, or if the hiring manager is in a hurry.

Get Permission
In any case, your references are valuable to you, and you need to treat them with respect. Obviously, it’s a good idea to begin, early in your campaign, by asking potential references for permission to give their names. If they grant it, express your appreciation, offer to send them your résumé, and, if possible, meet with them or discuss your campaign strategy with them by phone.

You should try to develop a list of five or six references, although you may use only two or three of them in any one situation. These might be former managers, professors, friends of your family who know you well (but not family members), or people who know you through community service. Ministers, rabbis, and the like qualify if they can attest to your service to the community or the congregation or otherwise provide insight into your manner of overcoming obstacles.

Try to develop a list that can provide various perspectives on your accomplishments, and remember that what hiring managers are trying to assess is how you will perform and behave on the job.

Maintaining Goodwill

Because your references are doing you a favor, you don’t want to abuse their goodwill. This means making sure they’re not called too frequently. If they have been called three times already, and you need to use them again, you should call them, thank them for their efforts on your behalf, apologize for any inconvenience, explain the circumstances, and ask whether they are still willing to help. This will help you avoid having your references go flat.

You should also take steps you can to prevent their overuse in the first place. If you’re asked for references early in the interviewing cycle, you can mention who you would use and what they can confirm about you, but say you would prefer that they not be contacted until a later stage in your discussions. Explain that you want to be fair to your references by not having them called too often and that you are having discussions with several organizations.
When the time does come to provide contact information, say that you wish to call the references first to provide them some understanding of the position you are discussing and to introduce the person who is calling.

This approach has multiple advantages. It gives you a chance to prime your references. It shows the hiring manager that you treat people with respect. It delays the reference checking until late in the process when the company already has decided you are the right choice. And it indicates that you are giving consideration to several companies and positions—raising your worth as a candidate.

Making the First Call

When you do reach the stage of providing contact information, be sure to call each of the references you will give. Explain to them who might be calling, what the position is, why it relates to your goals, and what you think the person calling might be interested in knowing. You can also request that the reference confirm or emphasize certain characteristics.

A week later, ask your references if they received a call. If so, find out what the caller seemed to be interested in, and seek recommendations from your reference on what clarifications you should make with the employer.

For example, your reference might indicate that the caller said, "He seems likable, but I'm not sure he's persistent enough to follow through when the going gets tough." The reference might not have been able to address the caller's concern based on what he knew about you, but you—now knowing the concern—could find a way to introduce more evidence regarding your persistence when the going gets tough.

If your references have not received a call after a week, check in with the hiring manager to see if there is anything you can do to make it easier to get through to your references—find out when they will be available or ask them to call the hiring manager on your behalf.

Bear in mind, though, that the hiring manager may already be satisfied that you're the right person. Or on the other hand, the manager may be having discussions with another candidate and holding you in reserve. Either way, your thoughtful persistence will leave a positive impression.

Dealing with Unfavorable References

If you must provide a particular reference—your most recent manager, for example—but feel that the person may give you a mixed review, have a discussion with that person. Find out what he or she sees as your strengths and weaknesses. Try to show them how you are making the most use of your strengths and that you are either working on your weaknesses or choosing a path that doesn't emphasize them.

Ask for the person's own suggestions. It's pretty unusual for a person to give a weak endorsement of someone who is listening to his or her constructive suggestions.

At the same time, it's important for you to prepare a hiring manager to hear an unfavorable reference if you think this may be a problem. By doing so, you get to tell your side of the story, and the manager won't be hearing for the first time that someone thinks you made a mistake or didn't handle your job or a particular situation well. Here's an example:

"There is one reference I'm giving you that may not be as favorable as the others. Let me explain why. When I was hired by Security Services, I was told to notify my supervisor immediately if a dangerous situation seemed to be developing in the mall. I did so when after the July Fourth event, the crowds seemed to be getting thick, and a few troublemakers were starting to stir things up. I immediately told my supervisor of my concerns about the developing situation, but he took a wait-and-see attitude. Later, when trouble broke out, he seemed to want to pin the blame on me for not telling him soon enough. I don't wish to make an issue of it, but I thought you should understand some of the background."
Your ability to follow through and address outstanding issues will impress not only the recruiting manager, but also your references smoothing the way for your next job search.

You will probably be asked for references before you receive a job offer — sometimes as early as at the screening interview, sometimes when you interview with the hiring manager, and sometimes only when an offer is extended "subject to a satisfactory check of references."

It isn’t unusual, however, for people to be hired without a reference check, particularly if they come to the organization through a referral, if they’ve previously held a part-time job at the company, or if the hiring manager is in a hurry.

http://crs.wetfeet.com/schools/texasamdp/CRS-Article.aspx?aid=d1f82a53-363c-4fcb-8e2b-6ccfb16406c7

Exploring Your Options with Your Ag Degree Panel
April 12, 4-5:30

Company Spotlight

Founded in 1923 and headquartered in St. Paul, MN, Ecolab serves customers in more than 160 countries across the world. Employing a global workforce of more than 26,000 associates, Ecolab delivers comprehensive cleaning and sanitizing programs and services to meet the unique needs of customers in the foodservice, food and beverage processing, hospitality, healthcare, government and education, retail, textile care, commercial facilities management and vehicle wash sectors.

Ecolab is committed to supporting customers worldwide with professional, personalized service. Our more than 14,500 sales-and-service associates comprise the industry’s largest and best-trained direct sales-and-service force. These product and service professionals are dedicated to assisting customers as they meet a full range of cleaning and sanitizing challenges.

More specifically, Ecolab’s Food & Beverage division provides cleaning and sanitation products, water and wastewater solutions, equipment, systems and services to customers in agri-business, beverage, brewery, cosmetic, pharmaceutical, dairy, meat, poultry and food processing industries, including a broad range of antimicrobial food tissue treatments and food safety expertise.

The Food & Beverage Internship Program is an excellent way to explore the world of opportunities available at Ecolab. Ecolab interns gain valuable hands-on experience in the food, beverage, and dairy manufacturing environments by learning the various components involved in servicing Ecolab customers. Interns will work closely with existing Account Managers in customer plant environments, focusing on food safety and food quality through the use of effective, efficient sanitation products and processes. In addition to learning the daily responsibilities of an Ecolab Account Manager, interns will have the opportunity to work on a special project throughout the summer. Start your future at www.Ecolab.com/Careers/CampusRecruiting.

Join College Of Ag & Life Sciences Social Networks!
Employer Advice
Lisa Johnson
Associate Campus Staffing Specialist

Howdy Aggies!

Finding a job and company that are a good match for you can be tricky. My advice to you is to do your research. Just as you would prepare for a test, you should prepare for an interview. If you’re willing to spend hours studying for a test for a class you want to ace, don’t you think you should be willing to devote some time to selecting an organization that you’ll be spending potentially 40+ hours a week with? Doing your homework is the best way to show a company that you are interested and see yourself in a role with that organization. More importantly, this will help you to make sure that you are a good match for the position and that the company is a good match for you.

Maybe it is important to you that you are working for a company that has a positive impact on the environment and will afford you opportunities of continuous growth. Or maybe you are looking for a company that gives back to the community and allows you to work independently. Regardless, you want to make sure that the companies you pursue afford you those opportunities that align with your values. Doing your homework on a company before the interview will be the best way to find the company you’re looking for and the company that’s looking for YOU!

Good luck!
Lisa

Featured Career Center Service

CareerShift is a job search database that is available to all Texas A&M students. It is one of the most valuable tools available to students during the job search, and as long as you are a student, you are able to utilize the site at no cost. Listed below are the many things CareerShift allows you to do.

- Search, select and store job listings from all job boards and all company job postings.
- Get up-to-date contact information, including e-mail addresses, for millions of companies.
- Access in-depth information about contacts and companies posting jobs.
- Record, save and store your correspondence history records automatically.
- Create personal marketing campaigns, including unlimited resumes and cover letters easily, and save them to access, print or e-mail.
- Manage your confidential CareerShift account securely from any computer 24/7, to update & maintain your organized and recorded job search.

CareerShift saves time while putting you in complete control of your career and job search. With CareerShift, you’ll move into the fast lane by finding the companies, jobs and contacts with which you can pursue career opportunities that best fit your personal goals and aspirations. CareerShift provides all the on-line tools and links to keep you organized for success.

Current postings on HireAggies.com:

Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc.
Kansas or Nebraska

Position Type: Full-Time  Job Title: Agronomy Trials Manager

Opportunity: Work with Business Unit Agronomy Research Manager to plan and conduct Business Unit, Sales Area, and North America agronomy field trials and demonstrations. Partner with Area Agronomists, Account Managers, Sales Reps, Research, and Supply Management to create and deliver local, highly relevant agronomy information which differentiates Pioneer with customers.
Student Profile
Not all students decide to begin a career after they graduate with their bachelor’s degree. Some choose to apply for graduate school. Meeting with your career coordinator can help clear up which decision is right for you. Below is a profile of a student that chose graduate school. You will find out why she chose grad school and what her program has to offer.

Name: Lauren Bergin
Major: Agricultural Communications and Journalism
Graduate School: Texas A&M University, Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications
Grad School Graduation Date: Dec 2011

1. Why did you choose to go to grad school?
I felt that I still had a lot to learn about the industry I want to make my career in.

2. What does your program have to offer?
My program has a variety of classes that prepare you for the communication industry with a specialization in agriculture.

3. What do you plan to do in the future career wise?
I plan to work for an ag association doing marketing and sponsorship efforts.

4. Do you have any advice for the students who are in the same place you were one or two years ago?
Make sure to tailor graduate courses according to what you want to learn more in, not just what you think your strengths are in.

Questions?
If you have any questions or comments about your career search as a College of Agriculture & Life Sciences student, please contact us!

Good places to start your job search…

www.usajobs.com    www.agr.state.tx.us    http://greatjobs.tamu.edu