



# Conducting Revealing Reference Checks

**Overcome useless reference checks. Get the information you need.**

I discovered a creative and effective reference checking process from Bradford Smart's excellent hiring and high-performance manual: **Topgrading, 3rd Edition: The Proven Hiring and Promoting Method That Turbocharges Company Performance.**

I've shared the steps recommended in this book below. They are worth the extra effort, especially when you have unanswered concerns around a candidate or if you are filling a key, high-impact position within the company.

## **FIRST:**

- **Get Written Permission.** Secure written permission from your candidate to talk to past managers as far back as ten years. Be ready to send this to each reference, if asked for it.
- **Ask your candidate to reach out, in advance of your call,** to let each of his/her past managers know to expect a call from you.
- If the candidate cannot share, **contact information from a current manager,** make hiring contingent upon no negative surprises.

## **NEXT:**

- Contact each reference:
  - o Call during an off-hour. People will tend to be more relaxed and open early in the morning, late in the day, or on the weekend.
  - o Promise total confidentiality.
  - o Take notes.
  - o Create the tone of a trusted colleague and fellow professional who knows the applicant well who is apt to better manage the applicant if (the reference) will be kind enough to share some insights.
  - o If you are getting a 'whitewash' inquire about negatives specifically. (Use the areas of concern uncovered in the assessment and during the interviews.)

**REFERENCE CALL – SCRIPT AND QUESTIONS:** Just follow the script, you will be amazed at how well it works! Be ready to take notes and to press for specifics.

*"Hello \_\_\_name of reference\_\_\_. Thank you very much for accepting my call. As \_\_\_candidate's name\_\_\_ indicated we are considering hiring her/him for the position of \_\_\_title of position\_\_\_. I would very much appreciate your comments on her/his strengths and areas for improvement. I would also appreciate your*



*wisdom and insight into how we might best manage her/him. Anything you share will be held in the strictest confidence."*

1. What would you consider are \_candidate's name\_ strengths, assets, things you like and respect?
2. What are \_candidate's name\_ shortcomings, weak points, and areas of improvement?
3. Would you please clarify what \_candidate's name\_ responsibilities were in the position?
4. On a scale of excellent, good, fair, or poor, how would you rate \_candidate's name\_ overall performance? Why did you give him/her that rating?
5. Just to clean up a few details, what were \_candidate's name\_ starting and final employment dates?
6. What were \_candidate's name\_ initial and final compensation levels?
7. Let me tell you more about the job \_candidate's name\_ is applying for is \_title of position\_ . How do you think \_candidate's name\_ might fit in the job? Good fit indicators? Bad fit indicator?
8. Would you please rate \_candidate's name\_ on these categories, excellent, good, fair, and poor scale. (Share the top personal skills from the position benchmark for the job. Ask for a rating for each area and comments.)
9. What would be your best advice to me for how I could best manage \_candidate's name\_? Do you have any final comments or suggestions about \_candidate's name\_?

*"I would like to thank you very much for your insightful and useful comments and suggestions. Our feedback has been very helpful."*



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