

## References: The Most Overlooked (Crucial) Part of Your Job Search

You've made it to the second interview for a great job. They want references. Hallelujah!

Until this point, you haven't even THOUGHT about references. So you quickly put together a list of three people who you think will say good things about you, and send it off. The job slips away. They hired someone else.

Don't wait until the last minute. Think about references well before you need them.

1. Do they know your work and think highly of you? You don't HAVE to include your last boss as a reference, if he/she isn't the best person. Jim included his mentor on his reference list, since this man knew his work much better than his supervisor. Besides, Jim wasn't sure the supervisor liked him.
2. Evaluate your potential references—Are they articulate, and can (and will) they speak with enthusiasm about you and your accomplishments?
3. Find out what are the best times and methods to reach them: office phone, cell phone, fax, or email. Employers checking references often work quickly, and if they can't get through to your references, they may choose someone else.

Be sure to let your references know they may be contacted and coach them about what to emphasize. You DON'T want your references to be caught off guard by a phone call from an employer. You certainly don't want them mumbling incoherently, trying to remember what you did.

Remember, they have had other things on their minds besides what you did last year—or five years ago. Refresh their memories about your accomplishments. You might write a summary for them to refer to before or during the reference call.

Be sure to check up on them. Have a friend call them, posing as a reference checker to see what they will say. If they aren't positive and enthusiastic, take them off your list.