

CAREER DOCTOR



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Q Could you please outline the usual procedures for obtaining a reference from my present employer? I would also like to know what information I can expect from my employer as to the content of my reference? There is no evaluation of performance procedures in my place of work.

A The whole area of job references has become uncomfortable for employers and employees and is now a legal minefield. Employees are concerned what former employers will say and about their inability to monitor this. Employers are concerned that references will lead to lawsuits by former employees claiming defamation. The reality is that references are still a common tool in the job market. Most employers check references as part of their recruitment process, but more importantly they are a key decision-making tool, with research showing that six out of 10 employers have changed their minds at least once as the result of a bad reference.

From my experience, clients rarely ask for a reference from a current employer for obvious reasons but there are cases when it does happen. For example, where the potential employee has no other references or their current role is the only relevant work experience for the potential employer. If it is the case that you are leaving, you can get a written or verbal reference. Most hiring companies prefer to take a verbal reference so it would be useful to get all the contact details from your referee and if possible request personal contact details so you can track your referee down for future job moves. Having said that, with changes in reference law, companies will only give a standard written reference when they receive a written request. Depending on your company policy, you may have to request your reference in either form from human resources or your direct line manager.

Finding the content of your reference will depend on format. If you get a written reference it is easy to monitor but verbal references are not so easy. It would be rare for a bad verbal reference to be communicated to you by either party. To find the content, use the direct approach and ask your referee what they would say, but be aware that you may not always get an honest answer.

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