



Finding the Right Employee: Reference Checks

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After the jubilation of having the board approve your request to hire additional staff wears off comes the work of advertising, screening and interviewing the applicants. With any kind of luck you find just the right person. Then the daunting task of checking references begins.

While Minnesota Statute Chapter 13 limits the collection of data on potential employees the skilled and wise interviewer knows what to ask to solicit critical, yet legal, information to make an informed decision. Following are some suggestions to get you off on the right foot.

Start with the simple stuff. Focus on determining if the basic information provided by the candidate is accurate and complete.

I'd like to verify the dates of employment. According to the information provided he/she was an employee of your company from ____ to ____.

What type of work did he/she perform for your company? What was his/her title?

What are his/her earnings at this time or at the time they left your company? Does that include bonuses, overtime or incentive pay?

Whom did he/she work for prior to joining your company?

Increase the probative nature of the questions to solicit more detail. Consider asking questions that are indicators of how well the candidate may function in your organization.

How did the candidate compare to the person who's now doing the job? (assuming the applicant has left their previous employer)?

What type of characteristics will you look for in replacing this person?

Would you rehire this person? If yes, why didn't you try to persuade the person to stay?

When there was a time sensitive or urgent project assigned to the person, did they meet the deadline? If yes, what steps did the person take to get the job done?

Recognizing that no one is perfect at everything can you describe some of the candidate's shortcomings?

On average, how many times a month was the candidate absent from work? Were any of these absences unapproved? Did they have a history of arriving late and/or leaving early?

Having the ability to get along with people is essential. Please share any situations where the candidate used their people skills to resolve a difficult situation or where their lack of skills disappointed you?

When you hired the candidate did you check his/her references? Can you share what those references said?

Whatever the question, it is important to remember that the same discrimination laws apply to questions you ask of others about the candidate as the questions you personally posed to the candidate during the interview. If answers to your questions refer to the candidate's marital status, color, age, national origin, religion or reference a disability you can not consider them when making a final decision. When in doubt, consult with your attorney.

Reference checks can be tedious and time consuming. They may, on face value, seem unnecessary. However, take the time and prepare for the process. There is an old saying, "Act in haste, repent in leisure." For all the time it takes to do reference checks it is nothing compared to having to deal with an employee that is ill suited for a position.

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