

Is it still necessary to check references when recruiting?

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Checking references remains a valuable tool to ensure reliable recruitment, provided its limitations are understood. When done well, it offers a useful, ethical, and contextualized external perspective.

In an increasingly fluid work world, where candidates accumulate experiences and interviews have become well-rehearsed exercises, reference checking remains one of the rare moments where an external perspective can complete the picture. But is it always useful? And above all, can it really be trusted?

A frequently neglected... yet valuable component

Reference checking allows us to move beyond the candidate-recruiter face-to-face. It introduces a third party who has seen the candidate in action, often over a long period, in a real environment. It is a valuable addition to the CV and the interview, which remain declarative formats and sometimes highly controlled.

When used effectively, it allows one to:

- **Validate key skills** mentioned during the interview,
- **Confirm the coherence of a career path**,
- **Evaluate behavior in real situations**,

- and sometimes anticipate integration into a team or with a client in the case of ESN or consultancy firms.

But be careful: all this **has value only if the source is reliable**, if the context is understood, and if we remain aware of the limitations of the exercise.

What we too often forget: the limitations

A reference is not a truth. It is a perception. And this perception can be:

- **Biased by a personal relationship**, positive or negative,
- **Several years old**, hence no longer necessarily relevant,
- **Strategic**, in some cases where the referee wants to "push" or, conversely, hold back a candidate,
- or simply **out of context**, when it does not align with the position's stakes.

It is therefore always necessary to **cross-reference opinions**, **search for recurrences**, and especially **put feedback in perspective**: what is a weakness in one company's culture can become an asset in another.

A practice to be handled ethically

There is a true issue of trust surrounding reference checking. Too many companies misuse it for commercial purposes, under the guise of recruitment. Result: candidates become wary, refuse to provide names, or give unusable contacts.

It's a vicious circle: the more the practice is misused, the more it becomes ineffective... and the more it is bypassed. To ensure reference checking remains a reliable recruitment tool, **it must be transparent, explained, and respectful of the candidate**. Not a pretext to obtain a contact list to prospect.

A double benefit when done right

When conducted according to the rules, reference checking gives you:

- **Robustness in your hiring decision** by multiplying viewpoints,
- **Concrete arguments** to highlight your future employee to a client (social proof),
- and sometimes, **natural commercial opportunities**, but which come after, not before.

And that changes everything. Because a candidate whose former manager is ready to speak well of them, with concrete examples to back it up, becomes more than just a good profile. They become a **credible story** to tell.

In conclusion

Reference checking is a powerful tool, provided it is not distorted. It isn't a trap, nor a formality. It is an act of professionalism and responsibility, where ethics, discernment, and respect for the candidate make all the difference.