

The Gold Standard of Candidate References

All references are not created equal. Seasoned reference checkers know a conversation with a current or former supervisor is likely to provide information of greatest value, so the supervisory reference is the gold standard.

If the candidate does not list supervisors as references, it is acceptable to identify supervisors from the history portion of the application/resume and contact them. Of course, if the candidate has asked that a current employer not be contacted, this request must be honored.

What if the candidate can't think of supervisory references to provide?

If a candidate is unable to provide supervisory references, sometimes offering creative suggestions can get the juices flowing. For example:

- Candidates who have recently graduated might substitute a teacher or college professor for a supervisory reference.
- A person returning to the workforce may not have work supervisors to provide, but may have a supervisor from a volunteer experience or from a freelance job who is familiar with the individual's work.
- If there is military experience in the candidate's background, a former platoon leader or commanding officer can be an excellent alternative.
- Indirect supervisors such as team leads, trainers, or temporary supervisors should not be overlooked. They often have significant experience working with the candidate and can provide the objective information that is desired.

While references from a coworker certainly have some worth, their usefulness may be limited. A coworker has no firsthand knowledge of performance reviews or disciplinary actions, and his or her opinion on strengths and weaknesses may be different than those observed by the trained eye of a supervisor. Coworkers listed as references often are friends of the candidate, and this may mean the information they provide is less objective.

It may take some digging, but when checking references, it is worthwhile to talk to the people with the best knowledge of a candidate's work—and that is usually current and former supervisors.

Need help with your reference checking process? MRA's [Reference & Background Investigations](#) department can help you!

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