Reference Checking Guidelines

Some Common Errors

Error	Description
• First impression	Forming a favorable or unfavorable impression within the first few minutes of the interview instead of evaluating all the information obtained in the interview.
• Halo effect	Tendency to rate a person high on all factors even though the person was outstanding in only one.
• Horns effect	Opposite of the halo effect.
• Central tendency	Inability to rate responses anywhere but in the middle.
• Similar to me	Tendency to rate higher those people who seem most like me.

Pointers for reference check telephone calls:

1) Based on the screening of the application materials, identify areas about which information or additional information is needed and develop a set of reference check questions.

2 If there is a team of people making the reference checking calls, identify one person in the group to be person who opens and closes the phone conversation. This person should also take responsibility to move the conversation along if the reference is a "talker." It's important to cover ALL the questions with each reference.

3) If members of the interview team take turns asking questions, each person should give his/her name when asking a question for the first time.

4) Key points for the interview:

A) Questions and discussion should <u>focus on characteristics that are clearly job related</u> (the range of characteristics can still be very broad but keep in mind how the characteristic being discussed is related to the person's ability to do THIS job).
   – Ask questions in such a way that it's clear to the referee that the questions ARE job-related.
   – Avoid asking questions that may be "perceived" as personal or NON job-related.
   – Be as neutral as possible in your responses to comments given by the referee (avoid such comments as "that's just what we need" or "that wouldn't work here").

B) <u>Listen carefully and ask follow-up questions</u> especially if you're not sure what the person's comment means. Don't assume positive or negative meanings without checking out your assumption.

C) <u>Keep the questions opened-ended</u>. Comments like: "could you say a little more about that" leave lots of room for the referee to talk.

D) <u>Let silence be okay</u>. Give the referee time to think about his/her answer AND don't take the person off the hook if s/he doesn't answer right away. Hesitation MAY be a signal that the referee is uneasy with the question OR the referee may just need some time to think about the question and how best to answer it.

E) Anyone can ask a follow-up question (not just the initial questioner).

F) Avoid yes/no questions.

G) Ask for examples whenever possible - don't let the referee generalize; press for supporting information for the generalization.

5) After the interview with the reference is over, finish making any notes and then have a brief discussion about what you heard. Identify, in particular, any points where there are significant differences among the group in terms of what was said by the reference. **Be sure to keep notes. These notes can be compiled into an overall summary of the information gathered by the team about the applicant. This overall summary should include the names of the references contacted (both named and non-named), dates of contact, etc., but without associating individual referees with specific information.**