

## Reference Checks – The Final ‘Check’ in the Recruitment Process

How often have you employed someone in the blind faith that what the candidate said they could do in their interview was really what they could do?

Often, when recruiting, employers don't seek references of preferred candidates because they 'like what they see' – or if they do conduct reference checks, they are not specific enough to really illicit valuable information about the performance of the candidate. More often than not, business owners are not really comfortable asking the tricky questions that relate to concerns they may have in the back of their minds... so they choose not to ask referees the tough questions – to their detriment.

Not performing structured reference checks on your preferred candidate may result in a poor hire, with ongoing consequences. The candidate may have performed wonderfully during interview, but the reality is that they may have performed badly in their previous or current position. What the candidate says in an interview needs to be validated.

Competency-based reference questions relate specifically to the competencies that the candidate would be expected to show when performing in their role. If the role requires competencies such as attention to detail, teamwork, strategic thinking or networking, these are the competencies that should be addressed when undertaking references.

### Benefits of reference checks

- Clarify that what a candidate says they can do, is the reality
- Gain an understanding of a candidate's strengths and areas of development from someone who has managed them (a previous employer)
- Confirm that they have the competencies, behaviours, abilities, skills and experience that you need for your role

### When undertaking references:

- Make sure you have the candidates permission before you call their referees and only call those that they have agreed for you to contact
- Ensure that you are speaking with a person that has managed the candidate, talking to a peer is not sufficient. Some candidate's are reluctant to use their current line manager as a referee because they do not want to disclose the fact they have been job seeking. However, it is possible to get around this. If the candidate has measured up in every other way, and obtaining a positive reference from their current manager is the only thing standing between the candidate and the role, you can provisionally offer them the role, based on the results of their line manager's reference. This gives the candidate some confidence, while giving you access to that much needed reference.
- Ask reference questions that correspond to the interview questions that you asked i.e. if you asked the candidate about their attention to detail, ask this of their referee too

- Follow a structured reference process – following a clear set of questions will ensure that you don't forget anything and will also make it easier if comparing two candidates that are proving difficult to differentiate
- Listen for the silences and probe...if the referee is being silent or avoids giving a straight answer, endeavour to get to the bottom of their reluctance to share the information

In summary, not conducting reference checks could potentially mean that you are inviting someone on to your team who could prove to be more of a liability than a valued asset to your business.