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References: Available upon request?

Take a moment and reflect. How many times in the past have you typed “References available upon request” or “References furnished upon request” at the end of your résumé? Probably more times than you want to remember. A few other items, depending upon your age, you also may have written on your résumé in a section titled “Personal” are your date of birth, height, weight, marital status, number of children and the fact of your “excellent health.”

Remember? Well, as these “specifics” have faded into the distant past, so has that statement at the bottom of your résumé: “References available upon request.”

I want to share various guidelines you should consider when preparing your list of references during the job search process.

- Your reference list should be on a separate page, not on your résumé. Ideally, this document should be in the same format with the same font as your résumé and cover letter. This consistency enables you to create a professional brand. Keep the same contact information at the top as on your résumé, and simply use a side or centered heading for the title: “References.”

- Your next consideration should be the number of references to provide. Most employers ask for three professional references, but that number can vary. I usually recommend a minimum of three and a maximum of five. In some cases, five to seven references may be requested of senior-level manage-

ment applicants. The key here is to adhere to the number required by the employer based on instructions in the job application. Unless otherwise noted in today’s job search process, you should list your references’ contact information, including name, job title, company name, phone number (preferably cell) and email address. Some employers may ask that you also add your connection to each reference, such as previous employer, supervisor, co-worker, client, business contact, former high school teacher, college instructor, coach, etc. Proof-read each listing to ensure correct spelling, contact information and the inclusion of any degrees or professional designations — e.g. Ph.D., CPA, MD, PMP, MPA, MBA or PE — as preferred by your reference.

- Now it’s time to determine which individuals in your professional/personal life you should choose to be a job reference. I encourage you to choose carefully. Consider people who will emphasize your knowledge, skills, abilities, strengths, attributes and work ethic. In other words, choose someone who knows you well and will be able to speak about your qualifications for the job you are pursuing. The persons previously mentioned in the second bullet point are all individuals whom you can select. Keep in mind, though, when making your choices, they also should be people you have had recent contact with in the past three to five years, for example.

- Before adding someone to your list, you should call or email the po-

tential reference and ask for their permission. Whether calling or writing, be sure to bring the person up to date with your job and activities, as well as send a recent copy of your résumé and the job posting/description for which you are applying. Once you receive permission to use a person as a reference, there are several additional strategies to consider. Alert them as to when to expect a call, provide an update on the job status and send a “thank you” email to show your appreciation for them serving as one of your references.

Unless your references are requested as part of the application package, do not submit them with your résumé. However, be prepared to submit your references when asked, as well as bring copies of your reference list to the interview if it has not been previously requested.

In the final analysis, as Alison Doyle, one of the career industry’s most highly regarded experts, points out, “While your qualifications, experience, skills, résumé, cover letter and interview all play an important role in getting hired, your references can enhance the whole picture.”

Dr. Shirley White is now a member of BIC Media Solutions’ speakers bureau. For more information about BIC Media Solutions’ speakers bureau, contact Earl Heard at earlheard@bicalliance.com or call (800) 460-4242.

For more information on Dr. White’s programs and publications, visit www.successimages.com or call (225) 769-2307. ●