

References are Useless

There is an exercise in self-delusion that most of us engage in without much thought to how effectively the behavior actually assists us in reaching our objectives. We do it because it gives us a level of comfort, the feeling we did something, and probably because we don't know what else to do.

Tudog has always been puzzled by references. The idea of asking a candidate to provide the names of people to be contacted to verify his/her qualifications seems a bit like letting the bank robber count the cash. It's not that people are dishonest, but naturally they are sending us to people they are certain will give them shining reviews. The irony is, we probably wouldn't want to hire someone who did not have the forethought to be "selective" in whom they sent us to.

There is also an element of human frailty in the system. Whether someone was liked or disliked could have an influence on feedback in spite of how they actually performed. In addition, there are former employees unwilling to give assessments of past performance for fear of being sued if he/she gives a negative reference, regardless of how truthful it may be.

References are not the indicator we should be using. History is. Rather than let the candidate channel our inquiries and dealing with reluctant or biased evaluations, we should be viewing all relevant aspects of the resume as an invitation to explore past performance. By determining past performance we should be left with some indication of how the candidate will perform in the future. By engaging in the due diligence on our own, we ensure that the information received is coming to us without being filtered or controlled.