

**WORK IT RIGHT! - #10**  
**Improving Relationships On and Off the Job**

**by Gini Graham Scott**

**BEATING THE RECOMMENDATION GAME**

A big problem today is getting recommendations, when the company you have worked for is no longer in business or the person you worked for has moved on. Another difficulty is that so many employers have become recommendation-shy, so they will say little more than dates of employment and job title. Why? Because if they say anything negative, even if true, they fear they could be sued by the employee if he or she has trouble finding a job. Alternatively, if they avoid saying anything negative and the employee messes up on the new job, they could be sued by the new employer for giving a positive recommendation that contributed to hiring the employee.

You get the picture. In a suit-happy society, people fear to say anything, even if they are still around.

Unfortunately, this “no recommendation” stance creates problems for the person trying to get a job, since many prospective employers still want them. That’s what happened to Susan, whose most recent written job reference was from 5 years ago. Though she asked many supervisors to write references, they declined citing company policy. And her next most recent employer had left the state and the one before that had retired.

Now her dilemma was that a potential employer wanted to personally chat with one of her former supervisors about her job performance. But she had no one to do

this, and she felt she was repeatedly losing out for jobs she was qualified for, because she lacked the right references. So what should she or anyone do to overcome the problem of not getting references?

If you can't get these references, look for alternative solutions, so a prospective employer feels comfortable making a decision based on other information about you.

One way is to do everything you can to make a bang up impression with everything else you have to offer, so the references become less important. For example, have a super-good resume; get references from community leaders or volunteer program supervisors; prepare to do an extra good interview, so you can show great confidence and expertise. To help prepare, say affirmations to yourself, such as: "I will get the job I want without any references," so you let go of the belief that you need the references.

Whenever a request for references does come up, be up front about why you don't have them. If you are missing them for one or two jobs, you might easily explain this verbally. Or if you are missing references for a number of jobs, write up a bullet-point list, where you list each job, along with the company's name, your supervisor, and what happened, to explain why you don't have a reference letter or why your previous supervisor can't be contacted. Many prospective employers will understand and accept such clearly presented reasons.

Additionally, offer alternatives as a substitute, if a prospective employer wants a further performance evaluation of how you do on the job, such as a recommendation from a community leader or volunteer program leader who has seen you in action. Or make a hard-to-refuse proposal to show how much you want the job by offering to show

how you perform first hand, say by offering to work for a day or two, or perhaps a week, with a how can you lose enticement, such as proposing: “Let me show you what I can do. If you like my work, hire me; if not, you have no obligation. But I’m so sure you’ll like what I do, that I’m willing to take the chance and work for you on this no-obligation basis.”

In short, if you can’t come up with references, come up with alternatives. Use these to show you’ll be great in the job and to show why your prospective employer doesn’t need any references -- written or verbal -- to show how great you will be.

### **Today’s Take-Aways:**

- If you come up against one closed door, look for another that will open. So if references won’t work, find an alternative that will.
- Getting references is like getting sodas from a vending machine. If you can’t get one soda, another may taste a good or better.
- Don’t let getting no references get you “no’s”. Instead, find other types of references to turn these “no’s” into “yeses”

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