

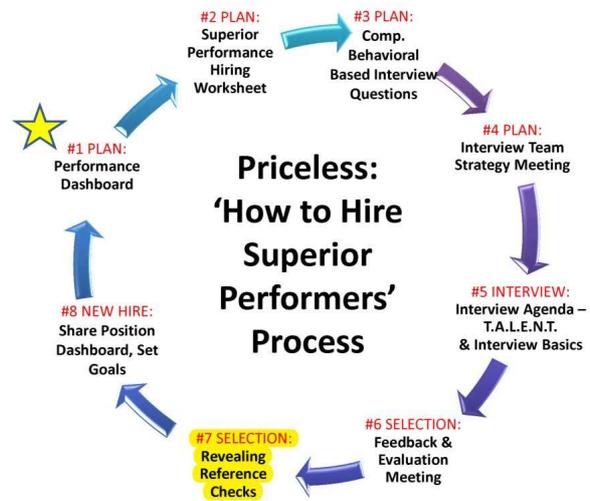
Conducting Revealing Reference Checks

I discovered creative and effective reference checking ideas from Bradford Smart's **excellent** hiring and high performance manual:

[Topgrading, 3rd Edition: The Proven Hiring and Promoting Method That Turbocharges](#)

[Company Performance](#). (Every hiring manager should own this powerful reference manual.)

The steps Smart recommends in his book, Topgrading, work and are worth the extra effort, especially when you have unanswered concerns around a candidate or if you are filling key, high impact position within the company.



The First Steps- Get Written Permission, Ask the Candidate to Let His Past Bosses Know...

The first steps in the Conducting Revealing Reference Checks process are:

- **Secure written permission from your candidate to talk to all past bosses.** You will want to go as far back as **ten years**. Scan the signed, written permission word doc and be ready to send it via email to each reference, if asked for it.
- Ask your **candidate to reach out, in advance** of your call, to let each of his/her past bosses know to expect a call from you.
- If the candidate cannot share contact information from current employees – make hiring contingent upon no negative surprises.

Making the Calls – Make a Difference Strategy Steps – Off-Hour Calls, Tone, Press for Specifics

Next, you want to make calls in an **off-hour** - people will tend to be more relaxed and open – **early in the morning, late in the day and on the weekend**, and when you reach the reference promise, him/her **confidentiality**.

Create the tone of a **trusted colleague** and fellow professional who knows the applicant well who is apt to do a better job of managing the candidate if the reference) will be kind enough to share honest insights. If you are getting a ‘whitewash’ (vague positive comments) **inquire about negatives specifically**.

Just like when you are interviewing candidates, **take notes during the conversation**.



Revealing Reference Check Script Be ready to **take notes** and to press for specifics. Just follow the script, and you will be amazed on how well it works!

Opening the Call:

“Hello ___name of reference___. Thank you very much for accepting my call. As ___candidate’s name___ indicated we are considering hiring her/him onboard for the position of ___position___.”

“I would very much appreciate your comments on her/his strengths and areas for improvement. I would also appreciate your wisdom and insight into and how I might best manage her/him.”

“Anything you share will be held in the strictest confidence.”

Nine Reference Check Questions To Ask:

1. *What would you consider are ___candidate’s name___ strengths, assets, things you like and respect?*
2. *What are ___candidate’s name___ shortcomings, weak points and areas of improvement?*
3. *Would you please clarify what ___candidate’s name___ responsibilities were in the position?*
4. *On a scale of **excellent, good, fair or poor**, how would you rate ___candidate’s name___ overall performance? Why did you give him/her that rating?*
5. *Just to clean up a few details, What were ___candidate’s name___ starting and final employment dates?*
6. *What were ___candidate’s name___ initial and final compensation levels?*
7. *Let me tell you more about the job ___candidate’s name___ is applying for is ___position___. How do you think ___candidate’s name___ might fit in the job? Good fit indicators? Bad fit indicator?*
8. *Would you please rate ___candidate’s name___ on these categories, **excellent, good, fair and poor** scale. (Share the top personal skills used in the job. Ask for a rating for each area and comments.)*
9. *What would be your best advice to me for how I could best manage ___candidate’s name___? Do you have any final comments or suggestions about ___candidate’s name___?*

Closing the Call:

“I would like to thank you very much for your insightful and useful comments and suggestions. Before we close, please let me know which of your comments I can share with others, and which should just be between the two of us.”