

## Hot topic

## How can you get former employers of prospective candidates to provide useful references?

**Most HR practitioners have taken a spin on the reference-checking merry-go-round. Asking the right questions helps. Iryani Kamal reports.**

**Anderson Lim, deputy director, human resources, Republic Polytechnic**



Among the many forms of references, feedback from former employers of new applicants often reveals the most about the candidate and thus are very helpful towards recruiting the right talent. While some companies may shy away from providing feedback on former employees, most would oblige if it is not too time-consuming.

The key is to keep the questions simple and focused. It helps if the recruiting organisation can provide former employers with an easy-to-complete form, coupled with one or two concise but well-directed questions, such as "Would this candidate be eligible for re-hire in your company?" and/or "How would you describe the applicant's quality of work and style of relating to people?" This will encourage applicants' former employers to provide useful and targeted feedback because such an approach makes it easier for them to respond specifically. By avoiding questions which are too vague or indefinite, the chances of getting quality and insightful feedback will certainly be improved. Sometimes, it is also useful to ring up the former employer's human resources manager directly, it may just get you the information you need.

Of course, having a good network of HR professionals can also help towards getting that valuable feedback!

**May Foo, vice president, group human resources, Apex-Pal International**



Getting references from candidates' former employers is not as difficult today. The HR industry is now more open to new ideas and strategic thinking. I think we have to be more open towards sharing as it is the only way Singapore can remain competitive as a nation. I don't see it as an 'us against them' situation. In fact, I feel it is us competing against the world market.

I do not necessarily follow up on the references provided by job applicants, I'd sometimes rather go straight to the chief HR executive of the company to garner information. The HR teams I have come into contact with, including those of our competitors, have always been forthcoming. We discuss salary, work behaviour and performance expectations in a professional and helpful manner.

**Karen Tok, bio-science and bio-IT&T director, ScienTec Search**



Typically, we ask the candidates' former or even current employers, ex-colleagues, ex-customers and on certain occasions, personal friends for references. A quick telephone conversation is most effective in obtaining feedback as former employers are usually too pressed for time to provide details via email and letters. As a guide, it pays to be polite and to keep the conversation short, bearing in mind that ex-employers are not obliged to answer your queries. It is best to begin the tele-conversation by stating your details, followed by the candidate's and establish clearly how much of their time you will need. This polite approach will work wonders for your subsequent questions.

You should begin by asking the former employers questions, such as the length of time known, reason for leaving and the basis of their relationship. It is also useful to find out the candidate's key strengths and weaknesses. Ask the tough questions, such as "Given a chance, would you re-hire the candidate?" or "Do you think he or she would be suitable for the new role?" later in the conversation. On occasions where the respondents paint pictures too rosy to be true, it is time to make unsolicited phone calls to other sources in order to verify any grey areas. Using this cold call method requires tact. It is absolutely vital to first obtain permission for the conversation from the former employers and speak in a casual yet careful manner."

## Techwise

## Fingerprint lock

### What is it?

Fumbling, forgetting or losing those jingles is a thing of the past with fingerprint lock: a lock that needs no key, just your fingerprint for authentication. Cool, sexy technology aside, the sensor is supposed to be so sensitive the likelihood of opening to a non-authorised fingerprint is 1 in 1,000,000 – better odds than a key! Besides, there is only one in a thousand chance it rejects your print, in which case, you just apply it again, or override it by punching in your personal code. The sensor is unfazed by a shallow cut or burn on your finger. Fingerprint lock can recognise up to 25 different fingerprints, which may be easily added and deleted.

### How does it work?

Simply place your finger on the fingerprint sensor and the lock opens in about a second. The system operates on four AA batteries which will last up to 5,000 authentications or roughly about 20 times a day, over six months. An alarm goes off well in time to warn you when the battery is low.

### Drawbacks

Using it on exterior doors may not be such a good idea as it may not withstand the rain. If you're thinking of using this lock as a primary security device for your property, it's also advisable to check with your insurance company to verify that the lock complies with their policy regulations. Did we mention that the device is really pricey too?

### Where to get one?

www.gizmos-us.com  
£700  
(\$2,175)



## Guru for hire



### Name

John C. Maxwell

### Job Title

Founder

### Company

INJOY Group

### In a nutshell

In 1985, John C. Maxwell founded The INJOY Group, a group of three companies that employs 200 people and provides resources and services to help people reach their personal and leadership potential. Maxwell has authored more than 30 books, including *New York Times* best sellers *Failing Forward: Turning Your Failures into Stepping Stones for Success* and *Thinking for a Change*. His books have sold more than seven million copies.

Widely known as America's foremost expert on leadership, Maxwell credits his excellent leadership instincts and his early leadership training to his father, Melvin Maxwell.

### Refreshed or New?

Maxwell's books set him apart from other leadership speakers because he is constantly looking to bring out the winning attitude in his clients and not just preach about the ABCs of leadership. Maxwell has cultivated an extensive following among some highly respected and influential business leaders.

Maxwell's philosophy – "everything rises and falls on leadership" – seeks to motivate and help individuals reach their highest potential, both in the home office and abroad through conferences, books, audio and video resources. His book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* surpassed the one million mark early last year.

### Delivery:

Maxwell speaks live to more than 350,000 people yearly. His dynamic personality coupled with his 20-year experience with presentations and his practical methodology has put him in high demand. He is frequently invited to several American corporations and entrepreneurial organisations, including *Fortune 500* companies and sports organisations such as NBA and NFL.

It is his style to provide practical advice to seminar participants looking to affirm, guide, direct and influence themselves and others called to leadership.

### Put in front of:

CEOs, directors, HR directors and department heads.

### Cost:

Maxwell charges on a per trip basis. Expect to pay no less than a five-figure sum for a day.

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