Using Phone References and Recommendation

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Most people already know that they need a list of Professional References. But you might be asking, “Why do I need Letters of Recommendation at this point in my career?”

The answer is simple. You don’t NEED them … but you should WANT them. Why? Because when you find yourself in a competitive interviewing situation (and what interviewing situation is NOT competitive?), the letters of recommendation can really “give you an edge.”

In other words, when two or more candidates are equally qualified, the one who provides strong letters of recommendation at the later stages of the interview process will get the offer!

So why not have this “extra ammunition” in your arsenal?

The recommended number of “phone reference people” is between 4 and 6; and you should secure at least 3 or 4 solid Letters of Recommendation.

Here’s how to get your “Phone Reference People” on board and generate your Letters of Recommendation.

1. Make a list of all the people you want to ask for help.
2. Separate them into two categories - one group to write Letters of Recommendation; the other to serve as phone references.
3. Call and ask them all for their help, stating exactly what you want them to do, and soliciting their participation.
4. Send them each a packet, including these four items: Cover Letter, Professional Biography, CV and List of Targeted Companies. Your cover letter will include a bullet list of the specific attributes or experiences you want them to focus on in their letter or phone call. NOTE: the cover letter you send to the “letter writers” will be slightly different from the letter you send to the “phone reference people.”
5. Follow-up to be sure they received everything and that they fully understand your documents.

6. Tell the "phone reference people" to inform you immediately when they receive any calls from prospective employers. (This information will be very valuable to you)

7. Tell the "letter writers" that you want to review their "rough drafts" and "check them for accuracy." Later, instruct them to print-out the final letters on company letterhead (after you have edited the text, as needed).

8. Offer to help each of these participants in a similar capacity, should the need ever arise in their own careers.

Letters of Recommendation: Guidelines for the Writer

Provide these instructions to your "letter writers:"<ul>

Print the final letter on your company letterhead. If your employer does not permit you to write such letters on company letterhead, then please use your personal letterhead. NOTE: you could create a simple letterhead for them (name, address, phone, e-mail at top of the sheet).

Do not date the letter, and do not include any salutation (there should be no "Dear _"). Also, do not write, "To Whom it May Concern," or "Dear Sir/Madam."

Keep the letter fairly brief, and never more than one page.
</ul>

Also give the following instructions to the people who will be writing your letters of recommendation (adapted to your own name/situation/ background):

1. The first paragraph should say something like:

   "I am writing to you on behalf of my former colleague, Sally M. Smith. I had the privilege of working with her from 19XX to 20XX when she was the (title) of (company XYZ)." Use your own words.

2. In the 2nd paragraph, mention some specifics that you recall about me:

   "As the [title/company], Sally directed the strategic planning process for our division and led the economic and market forecasting. Her forecasts were instrumental in a number of projects. She actively contributed to the composites industry by doing [A, B and C]. Sally consistently demonstrated [words such as leadership, problem-solving, communication, follow-through, analysis, organisation are good to use]. Throughout her tenure with company XYZ, she proved herself to be _ and a _ team player." (Or something along these lines. Focus your attention on my contributions to the company as much as possible).

   Again, use your own words.

3. For paragraph 3, you may wish to mention some personal traits/values of mine:

   What was it like to work with me, how did I measure-up as a team member compared with others? What contributions was I known for?

   What was I particularly good at? What positive recollections of working with me do you have? Use whatever adjectives come to mind.

4. The last paragraph should reiterate how you feel about me as a professional:

   "I feel strongly that Sally would bring A, B and C to any organisation and prove to be a valuable, contributing member," (or something similar). End with a sentence that says something like, "I would be happy to talk with you if you have any questions about Sally," or "Please feel free to contact me directly if you would like to know more about Sally's work." Use your own words.

Telephone References: Whom to Ask and How to Ask

When you create your list of Professional References, be sure to include the following elements for each individual:
- Name
- Title
- Company
- Street Address
- Phone Number
- E-Mail Address

- The person's relationship to you (Example: As the Senior Scientist in charge of all research projects, Terry can attest to my technical and analytical skills.)

Also, always use the prefixes Mr., Ms., or Dr. before each name on your list of Professional References.

Conclusion

You'll need to go through the necessary steps to get these tools together - and it may take some time. But as a result, your "Job Search Portfolio" will be much stronger. When used properly, your Telephone References and Letters of Recommendation will distinguish you from the other candidates, and ensure that you'll get more offers!

Ford R. Myers, President of Career Potential, LLC, helps companies and individuals achieve maximum results through career development! He is also author of "The Ultimate Career Guide," the only comprehensive manual for career management and job search. For free career resources and assessments, please visit http://www.careerpotential.com, www.careerpotential.com
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Lower back injuries are among the most common complaints seen in primary care and workers’ compensation. Approximately 85% of the general population in the western world is afflicted with an episode of back pain in their lifetime. The peak incidence of lower back pain is found to be highest during the most productive years of life, ages 25-60, making work-related lower back injuries a major health concern. In order to address this health concern, a strategic plan to reduce work-related lower back injuries is required. The first step of this plan requires the identification of ergonomic risk factors that can contribute to injury. The next step in reducing lower back injuries involves implementing ergonomic control measures. The third step in back injury prevention involves following safe work practices including utilizing proper posture and safe lifting techniques during work activities.

**Ergonomic Risk Factors**

Ergonomics is a multidisciplinary field which addresses the interactions of people, work tasks and the total work environment. Ergonomic risk factors are job attributes or exposures that increase the probability of developing a work-related injury. Ergonomic risk factors are not necessarily causal factors for injuries. Examples of ergonomic risk factors include repetition, forceful exertion, stressful postures, contact stress, vibration and temperature extremes. The presence of an ergonomic risk factor does not necessarily mean that a person is at an excessive risk for developing a work-related injury. However, the greater the exposure to an ergonomic risk factor, or the exposure to multiple risk factors, generally results in the greater probability of developing a work-related injury. Therefore, reducing ergonomic risk factors in the workplace will decrease the probability of an individual developing a work-related injury.

**Postural Risk Factors**

The primary ergonomic risk factor responsible for back injuries in the workplace is stressful posture. Posture refers to the position of a specific anatomical body part in relation to an adjacent body part. Stressful postures occur when an extreme or awkward body position places undue stress on the muscles, ligaments and joint structures that are used to maintain the position. Stressful postures can result in physiological damage to the tissues within or around a joint. Stressful postures typically include end range of joint motion and excessive rotation. In order to reduce the physiological damage induced by poor postures, these stressful postures should be minimised. To effectively...
reduce postural stress, the evaluator must be familiar with the components of posture and how these components induce physiological damage. The components that define posture include adjacent body parts, the angle of the joint connecting adjacent body parts and motion.

Adjacent body parts are the body parts above and below the segment that is being analysed. If assessing back posture, the position of the legs and the thoracic and cervical spine is critical. If the adjacent body parts are positioned in awkward angles in relation to the spinal segment, there will be a greater physiological stress placed on the tissues that support and maintain the position. The more awkward the position of these adjacent body parts is, the greater the physiological stress and potential for damage. To reduce the postural stress, adjacent body parts should be maintained in positions that promote open packed joint positions, tissue relaxation and maximise the circulation to the working tissues.

The angle of the joint connecting the two adjacent body segments will influence the degree of joint and tissue stress. Awkward joint angles place physiological stress on the joint structures, muscles and tendons surrounding the joint. The more awkward the angle of the joint is, the greater the tissue damage. Awkward joint angles, including end range of motion and excessive rotation should be minimised in order to reduce the physiological stresses.

The motion component of posture refers to whether the posture is static or dynamic. If the posture is static, there is no motion and the position must be held for a period of time. Static postures can cause tissue fatigue and microtrauma due to continual muscle firing and strain on the tendons and ligaments that are used to maintain a position. The amount of muscle recruitment and fatigue also increases with stressful postures. Dynamic posture, on the other hand, involves rotational forces of one body segment relative to another about a common axis or joint. Dynamic postures involve angular displacement, velocity and acceleration. Dynamic postures are preferred over static postures due to the ability to utilise multiple muscle groups, enhance circulation and prevent local tissue fatigue. Due to the physiological requirements to maintain muscle and tendon functions, no position can be maintained indefinitely. Hence, all positions have some dynamic component to them. The more stationary a position is, however, the greater the degree of risk for tissue fatigue and injury. Therefore, dynamic postures and the ability to vary a position while working are of utmost importance when considering reducing work-related injuries.

**Preventing Back Injuries with Ergonomic Controls**

Using ergonomic controls can be an effective method of preventing lower back injuries in the workplace. Ergonomic controls are control methods that reduce the duration, frequency or intensity of the ergonomic risk factor to the employee. There are three types of ergonomic control measures that can be used to prevent lower back injuries: engineering controls, administrative controls and work practices.

**Engineering Controls:** Engineering controls are control methods that involve modifying the work interface. Examples of engineering controls include modifying the work materials, workstation or the equipment and tools that are used. Engineering controls that improve back postures and reduce back strain are illustrated below:

- Adjust work surfaces to minimise awkward postures and ensure appropriate sitting and standing postures.
- Provide foot rests to standing and sitting workstations to improve back postures and reduce stress.
- Tilt work surfaces to bring the work closer to the worker.
- Make the work more accessible by raising or lowering the work to bring it closer to the worker. This can be achieved with lifts, platforms or scaffolds.
- Reduce the size and weights of the materials that are handled.
- Design the workstation for the target population. If target population consists of females, the work area should be designed with the target population in mind.
- Provide carts to reduce material handling activities.
- Install mechanical lifting aids such as lifting devices, reaching devices and pulley systems to counterbalance loads.
- Provide joint protection, anti-vibration or shock absorbance to reduce exposure to physical environment (vibration, concrete floors, cold). This can include anti-fatigue mats, gel insoles or anti-vibration seating systems.

**Administrative Controls:** Administrative controls involve modifying the work process, flow or organisation to reduce the exposure of the worker to the ergonomic risk factor. Administrative controls that will reduce the likelihood of back injuries include:

- Provide job rotation or alternating work activities.
- Limit employee overtime.
- Increase the number of employees available to perform a task.
- Alternate highly repetitive work tasks with less repetitive work tasks.
- Reduce production quotas or machine pace.

**Work Practices:** The third method of controlling work-related back injuries involves safe work practices. Safe work practices include general health habits, complying with safety rules and the practice of proper posture and good lifting techniques. The practicing of safe health and work practices can help minimise the occurrence of lower back
Injuries in the workplace. Examples of safe work practices are given below:

- Maintain good health habits.
- Participate in a regular exercise program.
- Following safety rules.
- Proper Posture: As illustrated above, stressful postures can contribute to the development of lower back injuries in the workplace. Therefore, reducing stressful postures and maintaining proper back posture throughout the workday is important in order to reduce lower back injuries. Proper postures are those postures that, due to the position of the adjacent body parts, the connecting joint and the degree of motion, result in the least amount of physiological stress and fatigue on the local tissues. Proper postures place the least amount of stress and strain on the working ligaments, muscles and joints and result in less tissues damage. Proper postures should be maintained during both static and dynamic activities. Examples of proper posture are illustrated below:
  - Sitting - Keep your head directly over your shoulders. Do not rotate or tilt your head. Keep your shoulders in a relaxed position resting close to your body. Keep your back well supported by the back of the chair. Keep your knees at the same height or slightly lower than your hips. Keep both feet on the ground or a footrest. Do not cross your legs. Sit as close to your work as possible.
  - Standing - Keep your head directly over your shoulders, and keep your shoulders relaxed at your side. Keep your feet approximately shoulder length apart. When possible, place one foot on a stool or rest bar to alleviate back strain. Move and stretch frequently.
  - Functional activities – Functional activities include reaching, bending, squatting, climbing, lifting, pushing and pulling to name a few. It is important to maintain a neutral back position when performing all of these functional activities. Keep your stomach muscles tight, and avoid excessive spinal twisting, forward flexion, extension and lateral flexion.
  - Proper lifting: Lifting not only involves both dynamic and static postures, but also the handling of a foreign object. Many lower back injuries occur due to manual material handling. However, many of these lower back injuries can be prevented by following these proper lifting techniques:
    - Do not twist or turn the body during a lift. If you must change directions, do so by changing the position of the feet as opposed to twisting the spine.
    - Keep the load close to your body; this reduces the joint forces on the spine by reducing the lever arm.
    - Keep lifting materials in small sizes. Using smaller-sized materials reduces the joint forces on the spine by reducing the lever arm.
    - Test the weight prior to lifting. Use an assistive device if the load is too heavy. This technique will also reduce injury from lifting an item that is much lighter than anticipated.
    - Clear the path to the final destination to prevent slip-and-fall injuries.
    - Use the legs in the lift and lowering of the item. Place your feet apart and close to the object. Keep the load centered, and bend at the knees as opposed to the waist. Use the legs to do the work as opposed to the back. Lift straight, in a slow and controlled manner, avoiding jerky motions.
    - Set the load down slowly in a controlled manner. Do not drop the load or let go of the load until it is on the ground.
    - Push an object as opposed to pulling the object.
  - Conclusion

Work-related lower back injuries continue to be a major health concern in industry. Ergonomic risk factors are job attributes that increase the probability of developing a work-related injury. Posture is an important ergonomic risk factor that contributes to work-related lower back injuries. Effective lower back injury prevention includes identifying the ergonomic risk factors and implementing ergonomic control measures to reduce the risk factors. The goal of the control measures is to reduce the employee’s exposure to the ergonomic risk factor by improving work postures and reducing lower back strain. The various types of ergonomic control measures include engineering controls, administrative controls, safe work practices that include proper posture and safe lifting techniques.

References:
2) National Bureau of Labor Statistics

Nicole Matoushek, MPH, PT has 15 years of experience in clinical managed care and disability management. She is founder of http://www.ErgoRehabinc.com. She has developed numerous managed care, ergonomics, return-to-work and injury prevention/management program and training materials. She is dedicated to helping others succeed. She has authored two books: “Acquired Hope: A Journey of Advanced Recovery and Empowerment,” and “365 Days of Abundant Hope,” both available on http://www.acquiredhope.com. Nicole lives each day in hope and is passionately dedicated to helping others succeed in obtaining abundant health, wealth and a fuller life!

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