

MASTERING S.M.A.R.T. TALENT MANAGEMENT

# THE RIGHT

SOURCING · MARKETING · ASSESSING · RECRUITING

# HIRE

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** **23**

Chapter 6 | Verifying the Candidate's Past with  
References, Education and Background Checks

## Verifying the Candidate's Past with References, Education and Background Checks

Making a successful hire can only happen when you have all the information you need. Without it, unnecessary mistakes are bound to be made – and they are going to cost you dearly. Part of the necessary accumulation of information to make a valid decision will need to come from reference and background checks.

### Checking References Will Help You Keep Out the Wrong People

Some managers feel that they can skip this step, even though they recognize the need for it. Avoiding this step, however, may easily allow unqualified individuals to slip into your organization. This step is important because it can enable you to see those who have falsified information and lied about their competencies. Knowing this information can keep those candidates out and let you select a more profitable and truthful candidate.

One well-known company, ADP, has performed more than 2.6 million background checks. What they found out about how often candidates might not tell the truth on an application is almost unbelievable. They discovered that:

- 44 percent of applicants lied about their work history.
- 41 percent of people falsely reported their education.
- 23 percent lied about what credentials and licenses they held.

When you check references and other background information, it enables you to confirm (or expose) the facts that are on a resume. You will see the accuracy of it in terms of employment dates, titles held, their educational status, and the accuracy of claimed accomplishments. Once you see the accuracy on their documents, it will also enable you to verify other information you hear directly from the candidate during the interview and selection process.



*Reference Checks gives You More Insight Into Your Candidates Performance and Character*

## Use Third Party Reference Companies for Reference Checking

An important consideration that I recommend you make is that you hire third party companies to handle the references and other information. They can do the...

- Criminal background check
- Credit check
- Verification of licenses and certifications
- Drug and alcohol screens
- Degree confirmations.

One of the best providers of these services can be found at [www.ScreeningOne.com](http://www.ScreeningOne.com). They provide thorough Pre-employment Background Screening Services and have an excellent customer service. They are also able to handle your alcohol and drug testing needs, too.

Another company that will help you with this is Checkster.com. They are a web-based software provider that can handle your outsourcing needs for preliminary reference checking, and will help you make better hiring decisions.

## Perform Reference Checks after the First Interview

I recommend that you look into the references given right after you have the first face-to-face interview with your candidates, and before the second one. The best place to do this is by asking them for references at the bottom of the SMART Skills Survey. Then, when you are doing the first interview, you can ask them for more details about the references they supplied. If more information or new references are needed, they can supply these to you before the first interview is completed.

You want to make sure that the references provided are work-related. They should not be from anyone from their social life – such as neighbors, personal friends, religious leaders, or anyone else from their personal life. References should be people that are capable of providing work information about the candidate, such as from a boss, a co-worker, or possibly even employees that worked for the candidate.



*Get Recent References That Are Work-Related*

You also want to ensure that you get references that are fresh – not people that the candidate has not worked for or seen within the last 10 or more years. When a candidate has worked at the same place for more than ten years, it may be difficult for them to come up with many references – at least not until the offer is accepted. If that happens, the job offer should be contingent upon the completion of the references.

## Get More References for Better Results

Instead of asking for the standard three references, you should ask for between 5 and 10. This will enable you to contact a minimum amount faster, since some of them are apt to be unreachable when you call. You also want to limit the references to types of people, such as current or past supervisors, subordinates, and peers.

If you need some samples of the types of questions you want to ask references, there is a reference release form on our website at [www.ropella.com/therighthire](http://www.ropella.com/therighthire). This is the same one we use at Ropella Group.

When you ask the candidate for references, ask them to put down one sentence for each reference that indicates the type of relationship between them and the reference. This will enable the caller to make a more professional approach and introduction, and it will also add credibility. The candidate should also supply information that indicates:

- The role/relationship the reference had with the candidate (supervisor, customer, peer, or subordinate).
- The name of the organization.
- The time period the relationship existed.
- Is there still a contact with the reference?

In case where candidates no longer have a present contact with the reference, or if they are not at the same organization, you still want to be able to get in contact with the reference for further information. Ask the candidate for all possible contact information, such as a current work phone number, a cell phone number, or an email address. Having this information will help to ensure that the reference checks are actually completed.

It is a good idea that you ask your candidates to talk to their references and let them know that you will be calling them. Ask your candidates to use the phrasing: "Please take their call because this reference call is a preliminary part of the continuing evaluation stage." This will help to ensure that your call will be received, and that the reference will be more relaxed when talking to you, as there's less pressure than if we convey "we are trying to make a final decision to hire or not to hire this candidate". You also need to repeat that above phrase when you get on the phone with the reference. Make them comfortable and you'll get much more and better information.



*Make Sure from Candidate that Contact Information is Correct*

If you find that references hesitate when talking about a candidate, you can be sure that this is a red flag. If you find that three references show reluctance to talk about an individual, then you can be sure that the candidate has some real performance problems. Sometimes organizations have a policy in their HR department that does not allow them to give references— period. If you find that to be true, then try other alternatives and get references from the candidate of those who may have worked around or with the candidate – such as peers or subordinates. Don't just quit on getting references, find a way that works by being creative.

References can be divided up and given to different people to make the calls. You can do this by first giving each one of them an A or a B grade in terms of importance. Secondly, divide them between different people to make the calls. I recommend that the hiring manager make at least one A call and that the human

resources representative make other ones. If you do not reach them at first, keep a record of the A-list references, and make other attempts to reach them. Don't just give up after one or two tries. This step is important and requires extra effort.

When you have an outside recruiter involved, it is okay to let them contact some of the references. You should, however, keep some for the hiring manager and HR in order to validate some of the information personally.

Many hiring teams place reference checking at the end of the selection process. Sometimes it is even performed after a hiring decision has been made – possibly contingent on the results. Although this will work at times, it certainly is far from ideal, because it definitely will not help you in the actual decision process.

## Reference Checking Is about Ensuring Performance Measures Up

Checking references is not to be looked at as the process to determine whether or not a candidate is telling the truth, but rather about performance. This is why it should be done in the earlier stages of the hiring process, so that you can determine whether you are getting the best candidate or not. By waiting until the end of the process, it is clear that your decision is made only on limited information – and it may not be enough to discern which of your finalist candidates is actually the best one. Performing reference checks out of formality at this point is often a waste of time.

Most companies use two interviews during their hiring process. The best time to check the references is between the two of them. Not only do you want to check the references on your best candidate, however, but you want to check all of them for your short list. Some of you will immediately write off that statement because you do not see the value of it – and you know what? Most organizations do not do it. The reason I am saying you need to do it anyway is because it will provide more information about each of the remaining candidates that can help you make a more informed decision that will let you end up with the best one of them all.

All the information you have obtained thus far (up to and throughout the first interview) about each candidate has helped you select the best ones for continued interviews. Now, by adding information obtained from the references, you can once again compare them with even more detailed information obtained from experienced sources who have actually worked with them. Then, in the final interview, you can direct your questions to find answers to any issues or red flags that may have appeared when you talked with their references.



*Let Specialized Reference Checking Companies  
Make the Calls for You*

Online tools are available to help you with checking references and making it relatively easy. There are even automated reference check processes that will let you combine personal calls to the references. You can also type up your questions and send them to the reference by email, asking them to get the answers back to you as soon as possible. The best question to use is an open-ended one that starts with who, what, when, where, why, and how.

## Protect Yourself with a Reference Release Form

Require each candidate to sign a reference release form prior to making any calls. It will protect you, and it will also serve as a qualifying tool. When a candidate takes several days to get it back to you, this should be seen as a red flag. It reveals that they probably do not want you to call their references, or it shows that they are simply a “tire kicker” and are not committed to making a job move.

## Reference Check Technology Aid

Another great way to complete preliminary rounds of references early on in the interview and assessment process is to employ the services of firms that specialize in conducting reference checks.

One of the best automated reference checking systems available is Checkster ([checkster.com](http://checkster.com)). Checkster is a web-based tool that saves you from losing precious time during the hiring process by automating the reference check process. And what’s unique (and even better for you) about Checkster is that the candidate does almost all of the leg work.

# THE RIGHT HIRE

“The most important decisions that business people make are not *what* decisions, but *who* decisions.”

- Jim Collins, Author of *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... And Others Don't*



**In most organizations, making the right hire means the difference between success and failure.** This book helps you recruit great people and keep them loyal to the organization by helping you understand, assimilate and execute today's best processes, programs and practices for Sourcing and Marketing to potential candidates, Assessing and Recruiting top talent, Retaining & Training employees and Transforming your organization for the better.

## What you will learn from this book

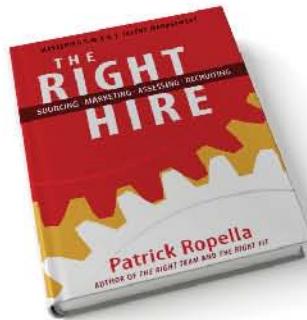
- How to successfully execute the all-important preparation stage of talent sourcing
- What to do to bring into alignment the whole interview-selection team
- Where to scout, network, and narrowcast in order to recruit the best candidates
- What techniques to use to screen and assess talent using proven tools
- How to use behavioral-based questions and interviewing techniques to uncover quality information that leads to great hiring decisions
- What can be done to dramatically improve the negotiations, offer, acceptance, start date and on-boarding processes
- And much, much more...

“People interviewing have choices, and *The Right Hire* presents the right things to do not only attract the top talent, but also to assess for culture fit, personal characteristics, experiences and credentials that will fit with your opportunity. With the growing need for companies to hire the very best talent available, *The Right Hire* is a must read.”

- Steve Watson,  
International Chairman, Stanton Chase

“Too often making the right hire is seen as a matter of luck. It should not be. Follow the steps in this book and it will improve your success rate dramatically.”

- Yves Lermusi, CEO, Checkster



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**Patrick B. Ropella** is Chairman & CEO of the Ropella Group, a 25-year-old international Executive Search, Leadership Transformation, and Corporate Consulting firm in Florida with clients among the world's most prestigious corporations. The Ropella Group focuses on working with mid-level management and executive-level leaders regarding their search, leadership, and/or consulting needs across most roles and functions. Patrick authored the book and web based training program, *The Right Hire – Mastering the Art of SMART Talent Management*. The SMART Talent Management System covers Sourcing, Marketing, Assessing, Recruiting, Retention, Training and Transforming top talent. Patrick's status as a thought expert, and writer on talent management & leadership has been promoted, featured and published in a wide variety of trade magazines and business publications, and leadership and executive search industry blogs and journals. Patrick regularly speaks at webinars, career fairs, conferences, trades shows and more. For more information about Growing Your Great Company through Ropella services, visit [www.ropella.com](http://www.ropella.com), or call Patrick Ropella at (850) 983 - 4777.