



REFERENCE  
RECRUITMENT  
**GAME PLAN**

If you impress the interview team and make it onto the shortlist of finalists, your references will be consulted.

Sometimes references are used to help break a tie—if one candidate's references say he's fine, while the other's references gush over her, it might become an easier choice.

But usually, reference checks are a "just in case" step:

- Is this person crazy?
- Have they done something horrible that we need to know about?
- Is there something they're hiding?
- Are they really as great as they claim to be?

References are contacted in order to minimize risk...but they can do so much more for you, if you're willing to ask.

Herein lies a key competitive advantage in the third tournament, because you can score points in ways your competitors don't even know about.

You need references who won't just speak well of you during a reference check. You need references who will mentor and advocate for you—and the time to enlist their support is now.

Don't wait until you need a recommendation letter within the next 24 hours. That's what most people do, and that's why most people get mediocre recommendation letters.

Give your references a heads up now that you'll be seeking a new leadership role in the future. Yes, this may be an awkward conversation, because you'll be communicating your intent to leave your current job. But if you're clearly on the path to a higher level of leadership and impact, your references will understand.

Set aside some time for a face-to-face conversation, and say something along these lines:

As you probably know, I've been planning to look for a \_\_\_\_ position, and I'll probably start applying when jobs are posted in \_\_\_\_ (month). I want you to know that I'm 100% committed to this school, and that this job has my full attention for as long as I'm in it. If there's a \_\_\_\_ job for me here, I'd take it in a heartbeat. But I also know there may not be an opening for me here, and becoming a \_\_\_\_ is a really important next step for me. I don't want to put all my eggs in one basket, so—and I know this is awkward to ask—I want to make sure I have your support as I take these next steps, even if it means going somewhere else, if that's where the opportunity is.

Between now and then, I want to make sure I'm demonstrating everything that you'd need to see in order to give me your highest endorsement without any hesitation. I know I'm probably not doing everything I could be, so I'd like to ask for your feedback now. What should I be doing to really make myself an outstanding candidate for \_\_\_\_\_?

And because I know it's always short notice when people ask for recommendation letters, what I'd like to ask for now is a draft—not something that's finished and ready to send, but just a rough outline of what you think of me and what I need to work on. Then, if you see me growing in those areas, you can revise the letter, and when I actually need to send one in, it should be a lot faster for you, because most of it is already written. Would that be OK? Could you write me a draft recommendation letter?

Most people won't make a request like this, because—let's be honest—it's an awkward conversation. But if you don't take the risk, you can't reap the rewards.

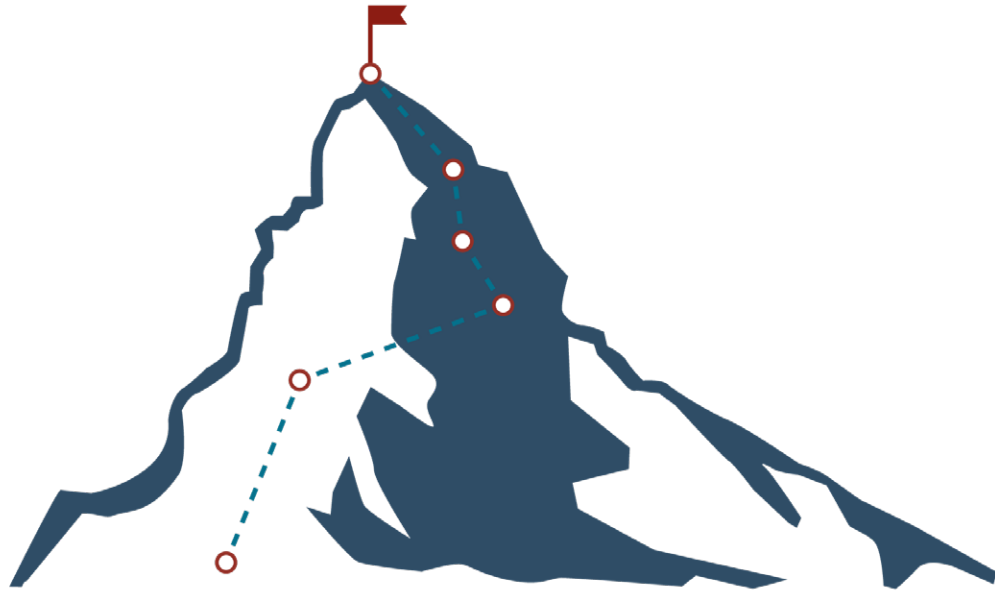
Is there a chance your reference will get upset? Is there a chance they'll say no? Of course. But that's true whether you ask now, or months from now when you're crunched for time.

The absolute worst time to get your references on board is when they get a call—out of the blue—from a district that's ready to snatch you away. If it's a surprise, they'll be caught off-guard, and they may be angry that you didn't tell them of your plans. They may panic at the thought of having to replace you, and they may feel betrayed. All of these feelings virtually ensure that you'll get a less-than-stellar recommendation.

So start now. Enlist their support. Get draft letters. Start acting on their feedback.

And as you start to get good recommendation letters from your references, include them in your applications. Most candidates don't do this, because it's not required, and because they haven't asked for letters yet. But it'll give you a huge advantage in the Application Screening tournament—and it'll virtually guarantee your success in the final Reference Checks tournament.

Strive to get 10 recommendation letters from your current supervisor, any former supervisors, other leaders you work with, peers, other contacts across the district, and even former students' parents. One of my key references when I was hired as a principal came from a director I briefly reported to while running summer school. Think of anyone you've worked with who'd be willing to help you move to the next level.



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