

Strong recommendations clinch your hire



By Joyce Lain Kennedy · Contact Reporter
Careers Now

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DEAR JOYCE: I've decided to look for a new job. I was going to line up recommendations, but I've been advised that recommendation letters are old school and not to waste my time. Agree? -- T. R.

No way. A recommendation letter or verbal praise from people who know the quality of your work backs up your claims to be qualified for a job. With a few new twists, recommendations continue to be a very big deal in landing offers of employment.

Lisa Quast agrees. Quast is the author of a spunky book filled with smart, strategic and sometimes cheeky career advice for job seekers and career changers: "Secrets of a Hiring Manager turned Career Coach: A Foolproof Guide to Getting the Job You Want. Every Time." (Career Woman, Inc., \$24).

Quast elaborates on your question: "Today, there are two main types of recommendations: formal letters, and the recommendations you can obtain using social media tools, such as LinkedIn.

"A recommendation is a statement of support from someone who knows you well and with whom you've had a business relationship, such as former bosses, coworkers, direct reports, clients or customers, or even vendors.

"The use of recommendation letters has changed over the last decade. In the past, it was a requirement of the job search process. Today, not as much. Now, this step is considered optional, but savvy job seekers understand that it can give them an edge when it comes to obtaining a position."

Find out much more about the book on Quast's website, www.careerwomaninc.com.

DEAR JOYCE: By accident, I discovered that my company is an inch away from being merged with a larger company. When I asked my boss about the impending merger, he was surprised and swore me to secrecy, saying that the leak would be traced and undermine the merger plan.

When I mentioned the merger to my wife and said how guilty I felt, keeping the likelihood of a merger from loyal co-workers who could be fired if there is, as likely, an excess of staff, she said I should immediately look for a new job. Agree? -- No Initials

Yep! And the sooner, the better. Why risk paying cat-and-mouse games when you're the mouse?

DEAR JOYCE: What are the best apps for finding a job? -- H.G.

I wish I knew. I haven't done a comparative study of job search apps for a couple of years. I'd like to hear from readers on the job search app topic: Write to me at jlk@sunfeatures.com.

DEAR JOYCE: Our very bright son is a high school sophomore and will be the first in our family to go to college. He plans to seek scholarships and other aid but, other than the U.S. News rankings, is there another reliable source that compares less costly colleges and universities? -- J.C.C.

In addition to the ProPublica resource I mentioned in my last column, check out a relatively new resource, The Washington Monthly College Guide (www.washingtonmonthly.com). This recommendation comes from Dr. Robert Reich, arguably the best ever U.S. Secretary of Labor, who is now a professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

DEAR JOYCE: I usually do well at job interviews, but last week my brain froze when the interviewer asked me a question that I never expected and I'm sure I fumbled the answer. What's a fail-safe answer in such a situation? B.G.

Take a deep breath, look the interviewer in the eyes and comment that the question is a good one that you'd like to reflect on and come back to later in the interview. The interrogator may forget to ask it again.

But if the question does resurface, and your brain remains stuck in first gear, say that being a careful worker, you prefer not to guess.

If you've otherwise done a good job of answering questions and confidently explained why you're an excellent match for the position, the interviewer probably won't consider your lack of specifics on a single topic to be an offer killer.

(E-mail your career questions for possible use in this column to Joyce Lain Kennedy at jlk@sunfeatures.com; use "Reader Question" for subject line.)

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