

# Questions to Ask Candidate's References



Never before has hiring the right person for your organization been so important. With such an emphasis on specialized skill sets and company culture, finding the perfect candidate is vital to the success of the entire company. While knowing what questions to ask and how to gauge responses during an interview is a necessary skill, there are other things you need to take into consideration as well. One facet that often goes overlooked is thoroughly vetting a candidate through their references. Sure, a person's references are most likely going to speak highly of them but if you ask the right questions, you'll glean some useful insight that you might have otherwise missed.

## What is Your Relationship to the Candidate?

If you ask this question at the outset of the conversation with a reference you gain context to process the information that is shared. Did the reference oversee the candidate in their previous job? If so, their insight might be especially valuable. Is the reference a co-worker that shared the same responsibilities? In this case, the information you get might be a little biased one way or another.

## Can You Verify A Candidate's Job Title and Dates of Employment?

While this question seems like a no-brainer, it's amazing how many hiring managers fail to ask it. Even this rudimentary information can tell you a lot about

a candidate. Were they in the same position with a company for a long time or do they show a history of never being in one spot for very long? Based on their job title, what were their responsibilities? Do these responsibilities align with what they would be doing in their new role with you?

## **Can You Tell Me About their Job Performance?**

It's easy for anyone applying for a job to beef up their resume with items like inflated sales numbers or claiming responsibility for managing a huge budget and large number of people. The only way to make sure the information on someone's resume is accurate is to ask. If a reference is able to verify the information, great! On the other hand, if there are gaps in the information, it's a sure sign you need to ask some tougher questions to get clarification.

## **What Are the Candidate's Strengths and Weaknesses?**

This question is worth its weight in gold. When you're considering hiring someone, you're going to want to know how they'll fit in culturally and if they have the skills needed to excel. Equally important however, is having an idea of what their weaknesses are. Weaknesses aren't a bad thing, everyone has them, but knowing what someone's shortcomings are will allow you to further deduce if they are a good fit. There's no more reliable source for this information than a previous employer who knows the candidate well, so make sure you don't let this question fall through the cracks.

## **What Was it Like to Work With the Candidate?**

When you ask a reference what it was like to spend a day working with the candidate you'll gain some critical insight into who they are as a person. Were they jovial and fun-loving? Or were they task-oriented preferring to keep to themselves? Did they get along well with others and demonstrate a willingness to work as a team? Or were they primarily concerned with fulfilling their own

duties? How well did this person take direction? Were they open to new ideas and ways of doing things?

## **Why Did the Candidate Leave Their Previous Job?**

While this question can reveal red flags like someone being let go from a previous job, it also gives you an idea of how long they might stay with your company should you end up hiring them. Does this person have a tendency to jump ship thinking the grass is always greener? Or have they demonstrated loyalty in their previous posts?

## **Would You Hire This Candidate Again, and Why or Why Not?**

If you only have time to ask one question, this should be it. A reference's response to this single question can sum up everything that might be revealed in a lengthier conversation. If the reference says they would hire the individual back in a heartbeat, you've probably got a quality candidate. However, if they say no or seem unsure, you might want to do a little digging.

Hiring the wrong person for the job can be costly. A 2017 survey conducted by Career Builder found that companies lost an average of \$14,900 for each bad hire they made. While there is no way to tell for certain how a candidate will perform until they're hired, consistently hiring the wrong people can be devastating for the bottom line. If you think it's difficult to manage with the position open, just imagine how difficult it will be to manage a bad hire.

If you ask the right questions in the interview and take the extra step to ask references some poignant questions, you'll arm yourself with all the information necessary to choose the right person for the job.

As a [Regulatory and Quality recruiter](#), I can help create a list of essential questions to send to candidate's references. I help life sciences employers in the [biotech, medical, and pharmaceutical industries in the Bay Area](#). Contact me, Jeff King, at [jkking@rqfocus.com](mailto:jkking@rqfocus.com) or (541) 639-3501.

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# How to Deal with Difficult Employees



If you're in a position where you manage an entire department or even just a small team you've certainly had to deal with a bad egg or two. Whether the individual wasn't a good fit with the company culture, chronically showed up late or had problems with authority, you had to deal with them somehow. Though it's never a fun experience, it's a reality that every manager is going to have to deal with at some point.

Sadly, many managers let these people hold them captive because they are afraid to take action of any kind to either correct a behavior or dismiss the employee if that is what is necessary. This hesitation can have negative consequences for both you and the people you manage. In order to keep that from happening we've laid out the best ways to deal with difficult employees below.

## Effective Feedback

Quality feedback, even if it is critical, is essential for handling employees that aren't performing up to standard. Where most managers spend weeks, months and even years complaining about employees and nothing else, good managers are willing to have difficult conversations and provide honest feedback if there are issues that need to be addressed.

How you go about providing this feedback is what makes all the difference

though. Screaming, yelling and personal attacks only serve to add fuel to the fire and usually put the subject employee on the defensive. If you find yourself in a position where you're left with no choice but to have a difficult conversation with an employee, make sure you do so in a way that doesn't put them on the defensive and gives specific information on how they can improve.

## **Document Everything**

If you're faced with having to reprimand an employee or even let them go, you're going to need documentation of behavior that provides grounds for disciplinary action. In addition to writing down detailed accounts of incidents that happened, you'll need specific dates, times and names of people that were witness to the behavior as well. While you might feel like you're being too negative about an employee by writing everything down, you have to realize it's the prudent thing to do.

## **Listen**

If you're frustrated with someone you manage it's easy to lose sight of what's really going on. You might find yourself blinded by irritation, the seemingly hopeless state of the situation and the thoughts you already have in your head about the person.

When the time comes to sit down with this employee it's vitally important to be in a space where you're able to see things through their eyes. The reality is that your only chance of finding a solution is having a clear understanding of situation in its totality; that includes the perspective of the employee.

When you actively listen to someone, you'll often be surprised about what you can learn. Maybe the employee is having problems outside the office and you can recommend a place to go get help. Maybe you were unaware of some legitimate concerns they have that need to be addressed. Perhaps all this employee needed was just a chance to be heard and voice their opinion.

# Be Clear and Consistent

You should create a plan of action for the employee to correct their issues and also ask for their input on what they are willing to do to fix it. This will get better cooperation from the employee if they have a say in the plan. When you set expectations make sure they are ones you can stick to as well. If you expect someone to perform a certain task by a certain time you have to hold them to it. If you hold employees to expectations sometimes and other times you let things slide, you send mixed signals and the results can be devastating for your team or organization.

# Don't Be Afraid to Set Consequences

If you've worked through the proper channels of trying to be proactive and nothing seems to have changed, it might be time to make some consequences known. The conversation might be something like the following.

**Manager:** "We identified (issue) a while back and but we haven't seen much improvement. I still believe you can turn this around, but we are at a point that if things aren't better by (specific date) than we won't have a choice but to (write you up, cut your hours, let you go, etc.)."

When people are faced with tangible consequences that could affect them negatively it's often the motivation they need to change. If not, as a manager you can rest assured you gave this person a fair chance.

# Stay Professional

When you're frustrated with an employee it's human nature to think negatively of them. You're going to be tempted to gossip or vent to your colleagues but that's the worst thing you can do. When you disrespect people behind their back you foster an environment of distrust and pollute other peoples' perception of the troubling employee. Simply put, avoid this type of behavior at all costs.

# Be Courageous

As a manager, you've assumed the responsibility of making tough decisions. There's nothing fun about having to fire someone but sometimes you're left with no other option. When you get to this point, don't put it off, don't make someone else do it and make sure you do it as professionally you can. Even though you're sure to feel bad, you have to remember you're doing the right thing and your team or organization will be better off.

No one is going to deny that dealing with difficult employees isn't any fun. As a manager though, this is part of your job. How you handle these tough situations is what makes all the difference. If you do nothing and continue let problems persist, you'll be causing yourself undue stress and you risk sabotaging your teams' morale and productivity too. You may even lose your best employees if the problem is allowed to persist. Instead, if you employ some of the strategies listed above, you'll set yourself up to handle these situations proactively and professionally in a way that is best for everyone involved.

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## Why You Need to Think Outside the Box



Maybe you've been in your current job for a number of years, or you've been on a long-term project. That flare and excitement you had when you started has slowly

dissipated. You're still engaged and the work you do has value, but for some reason you've lost the motivation to go the extra mile and you don't feel challenged. Maybe the days, weeks and months all seem to run together and you feel like a hamster on a wheel. No one can fault you for your seeming indifferent in the workplace.

If this sounds familiar the simple question you have to ask yourself is what can do differently to get yourself out of the rut?

Even though the answer might not be obvious, a good place to start is by thinking outside the box. Clearly repeating the same habits and routines isn't working so it's time to do something different. So what exactly does thinking outside the box mean? Quite simply that you're open to some alternative solutions to reach a desired outcome. Below we discuss some different ways to gain fresh insight and why doing so can be beneficial to your career.

## **Don't Be Afraid to Go Against the Grain**

If humans always stuck to the regimen of how things are "supposed" to be done, the word innovation wouldn't exist. History has proven time and again that our greatest breakthroughs in technology, thought and social change were sparked from people who questioned the status quo. Even more, some of the influential business people of our time are individuals that everyone thought was crazy.

If you find yourself feeling stuck, don't be afraid to take a leap of faith and do something completely different. If that means going back to school and starting an entirely different career, then great. If it means taking a few months off entirely, then go for it. Only you can truly decide what course of action is best for you. The important thing to remember is that while whatever you decide to do might seem scary, you'll be stronger and better off for it in the end.

## **Broader Perspective**

It's easy to exist in a bubble. It's safe there and where you feel most comfortable. The problem with staying in a bubble however, is that you lose out on different perspectives and fresh ideas. If you're willing to expose yourself to alternative ideas and ways of thinking, you gain tremendous insight and just might find a solution to whatever the problem is from a place you least expected.



When you make a conscious effort to welcome new ideas and consider different possibilities, you'll likely be pleasantly surprised by how quickly your situation improves.

## **Environment is Everything**

Take a moment and think about the environment you work in. Are you stuck in a cubicle cut off from the world? Or does your space encourage creativity and collaboration? When you're at work are you able to focus on the task at hand yet still have the freedom to share your ideas and explore new ways of doing things?

These are all important questions to ask when considering how the physical space around you affects your productivity. If you take the time to honestly evaluate where you work, you might just find that a simple change of scenery is all you need to get back on track.

## **Be Willing to Adapt**

The saying that the only constant in the world is change is especially true when it comes to your career. As technology advances, training becomes better and new ideas emerge that you're going to have to adapt to. Even when you don't agree with the direction something is headed, your ability to embrace change and learn makes a huge difference in determining your success. Even though it might be easy to just keep going about your business as you always have, if you're willing to learn and ask questions you'll set yourself apart from the competition.

## **You're Going to Stand Out**

Anybody can be just another face in the crowd that follows directions. Again, there is virtually no risk involved here and it's a comfortable place to be. However, if you're willing to ask difficult questions, share your ideas and aren't afraid of failure, you position yourself as someone that is capable of finding solutions to complex problems and that alone is invaluable.

Thinking outside the box can mean different things to different people. While it's important to make sure your decisions are grounded in an element of reason and logic, being afraid of what might happen if you take a chance is a crippling

thought that is only going to hold you back. If you feel like you're not where you want to be or the current way of doing things isn't working, make an effort to look at your situation through a different lens. If you keep an open mind, welcome new ideas and are willing to adapt, you're well on your way becoming happier and [more productive](#).

Contact Jeff King, [Regulatory and Quality Recruiter](#), for more information work happiness. He can find qualified individuals jobs in [pharmaceuticals, biotech, or the medical device industry](#).

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## Soft Skills that Employers Want in a New Hire



We've all been in the position of looking for a new job for one reason or another. Whatever the reason may be, searching for a job that fits your skillset comes down to more than having the best cover letter and updating your resume. Sure, those things might land you an interview but if you want to set yourself apart from the competition it's crucial that you demonstrate to your potential employer that you have the intangibles, or soft skills that it takes to do the job. Not sure exactly what soft skills are? You're in luck as we define them below and highlight the most important ones that employers are looking for.

# What's the Difference Between Hard and Soft Skills?

There's no denying that hard skills are needed in every job. These skills are teachable and quantifiable. Skills like language proficiency and computer programming may be essential for the job and your performance can easily be measured.

On the other hand, the term soft skills references things like your ability to show up on time, meet deadlines, communicate with clients and work in a team. Though they are tougher to measure on a standard review or evaluation, soft skills are noticeable and can make or break your chances of landing the job you covet.

## Solving Problems

Let's face it, the vast majority of jobs in the modern workplace entail far more than what is written in a job description. While certain tasks and expectations should be explicitly laid out in front of you, you're going to be expected to think outside the box and handle challenging situations in an effective manner. If you're headed in for an interview, you best be prepared to discuss situations in which you've had to be resourceful and overcome adversity in the past.

## Cultural Fit

Even if you have hard skills that jump off the page to a hiring manager it's equally important that you're a good fit for the company culture. Is the company one where both hard work and fun are valued? Are you expected to wear a tie every day or is denim on casual Fridays the norm? If you take the time to do some preliminary research about the company and its culture, you'll not only be better prepared for the interview but be able to gauge whether the company's core values align with yours or not.

## Dependability

One of the top skills that employers look for is dependability. Though they may seem simple, habits like showing up on time, meeting deadlines and being readily

available go a long way in determining your value as an employee. If you land an interview be prepared to honestly answer questions about your work ethic and share examples of how you've demonstrated dependability in previous jobs. This is also becoming more important as some employers are allowing employees to work remotely on occasion or on a regular basis. And if you seek a position that allows the flexibility to work from home, or should make sure you have some good examples of when you've done that and met your deadlines.

## **Coachability**

Let's say that you have all the skills and experience necessary to do the job you're applying for. It's easy to think that you'll jump right in be a catalyst for success. Even if such is the case though, it's a virtual certainty that the processes and systems you'll be working with are different from what you're accustomed to. Having an open mind and being willing to listen shows your employer that you're open to learn and can easily adapt. In my years of recruiting, I've seen numerous occasions where the person that was hired was not the one with the strongest technical skills, but the one that showed more enthusiasm and willingness to learn what they didn't know.

## **Being Open to Feedback**

If you're just starting out in a new job there's going to be a significant learning curve. It's almost a guarantee that you're going to make mistakes, and that's understandable. How you handle feedback however, is what can set you apart. Are you open to suggestions or do you shut down and see constructive criticism as a personal attack? If you take your ego out of play and welcome feedback from others, you'll quickly be seen as a team player that adds value to the organization. Conversely, if you take criticism as a personal attack, you may be viewed as someone who will cause problems within the group.

## **Taking Initiative**

While it's important to do more listening than talking when you first take a new job, employers value people who aren't afraid of taking initiative. During an interview you'll likely be asked to talk about a time when you came up with a new

idea and how it was implemented. If you can demonstrate that you're comfortable with thinking outside the box and putting those thoughts into action your employer will know that you bring a lot more to the table than simply being a task master.

## **Flexibility**

There's little doubt that rigidity can be the kiss of death in the workplace. Whether you're working in accounting or as an events coordinator you're going to be asked to adapt to change and reprioritize at some point. Do you become flustered or are you able to take everything in stride? Your ability to meet a deadline a day earlier than expected or change the scope of a marketing campaign at a moment's notice goes a long way in the eyes of your employer.

There's no doubting the value of a polished resume and being prepared to highlight your skillset in a job interview. What's going to set you apart however, is your ability to demonstrate the soft skills necessary to be effective in the workplace. Are you willing to listen, learn and adapt? Do you work well with others in a collaborative environment? Are you capable of voicing your opinion and implementing new ideas and methods? If you can answer yes to these types of questions and demonstrate soft skills to your employer, you'll set yourself apart from the competition and greatly increase your chances of landing the job.

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## **How to Increase Your Team's Productivity**



Leading a team of people in the workplace is a monumental responsibility. Not only are you charged with maximizing productivity and efficiency, but it's your job to keep morale high, have an open door and make sure expectations are clearly communicated. If you're in a position of leadership you're sure to encounter difficult situations that hamper the productivity of your team. How you handle these challenges can be the deciding factor in whether your team is successful or not. Below we discuss our best strategies for managing your team effectively and making sure productivity is maximized.

## Communication is Essential

At some point in your career, you've probably had a [manager](#) that constantly made you feel like you were walking on egg shells. You never knew whether you were exceeding expectations or failing miserably. Simply put, this individual didn't communicate and trying to do so with them was difficult at best.

If your team is going to succeed, it's paramount that you not only clearly communicate with each member of your team, but make clear the expectations of up-front professional communication to everyone involved. If communication happens through [appropriate channels](#) in a safe space, job responsibilities are clearly defined and people feel empowered to ask questions or seek help, cohesiveness can thrive.

## Know Strengths and Weaknesses

Whether you want to admit it or not, as a leader you have strengths and weaknesses. While being aware of your own skills and shortcomings is essential, knowing those of each team member is vital as well.

Maybe someone on your team is great with analyzing raw data and numbers. You probably don't want to employ this individual to strategize a creative presentation. Leave that to the outgoing creative person that thinks outside the box.

When you create an environment that allows everyone to stay in their lane and utilize their innate abilities, you foster a freedom that allows everyone to feed off of each other and be excited about the work they are doing.

## **Environment is Key**

It has been widely documented that the physical environment in which people work greatly affects how they feel. Does your team function best in an environment where everyone has their own office and a door they can close or is a shared space that welcomes creativity and sharing of ideas better? Whatever your team's work environment is, it should reflect the culture of the organization and allow people to comfortably go about their tasks in the most efficient manner possible.

While the physical environment in which people work is key, having the necessary infrastructure in place is equally important. Making sure that your internet connection is solid, that IT help is readily available and that all systems are functioning properly and up to date allows team members to do their job with limited interruptions.

## **Incentives**

There is nothing more motivating than [incentives in the workplace](#). While monetary bonuses and rewards are always popular, there are plenty of other ways to motivate your team with minimal cost. If a deadline is on the horizon or a sales goal needs to be met, incentivizing your team with things like paid time off, a catered lunch or skipping out of the office early on a Friday for happy hour can do wonders. Frequent rewards for a job well done keep everyone's spirits high, are motivating, and make people feel like they are working toward something greater than themselves.

# Stay Out of the Way

One of the struggles for almost every leader is striking a balance between managing and giving people the freedom to do their job. While it's important that you make sure each person on your team is performing as expected, creating the space for individuals to fully utilize their skills is important as well. When you build trust within your team and allow individuals the autonomy to do their best work, they do so with tremendous pride and your team can flourish as a result. This is also a key to keeping your best performers from looking for challenges elsewhere.

## Mutual Feedback

It's human nature to want to know how you're performing. Consistent feedback is crucial so that everyone is on the same page and expectations are met. Scheduling frequent reviews with each team member is a must.

During these reviews, it's important that the conversation be an open discussion about performance and anything that might be missing. This can go both ways however. As the manager of a team you need to have a conversation about a team members' performance, but taking it a step further and asking for feedback about the job you're doing as a leader as well can provide important insight. Ask them what you can do to help them be more effective in their job. You may learn about issues you hadn't even thought of. When professional back-and-forth dialogue exists that is helpful for all parties involved, your team only stands to benefit.

It's no mystery that leaders are needed in every organization. Without leaders to provide direction, motivation and oversight, most companies would perish. Some leaders are better than others though. If you find yourself in a position of managing a team or department, utilizing some of the tactics above can mean the world for your teams' productivity and set you apart as someone who is both respected and effective.

Do you want to learn more? Contact me, Jeff King, owner of [RQ Focus](#). I help business owners match with the right employee for their job opening in the [life science industries](#).



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# The Importance of Punctuality in the Workplace



The reality for many modern-day workers consists of constantly looking at their phones, checking e-mail and running from one important meeting to another trying not to be the last one in the door. In a world where technology reigns supreme and productivity is the yard stick by which success is measured, it's easy to see how information overload causes you to become self-absorbed and lose all track of time and what is going on around you. If you're looking to separate yourself from those around you however, punctuality goes a long way. Even though being fashionably late is expected for a date or social gathering, nothing could be further from the truth in the workplace as everyone's time is valuable. Below we discuss what being on-time means and why it is so [important](#).

## First Impressions Matter

If you're interviewing for a new position or are brand new on the job, there are few excuses to ever be late. Being early or on-time doesn't seem terribly difficult but it's truly amazing how many people lose out on jobs or opportunities simply because they show up even just five minutes after the scheduled time.

If tardiness is something you think is too harshly considered, imagine the following scenario. You are in negotiations of business arrangement with a potential partner. You do all your homework ahead of time and show up early to prepare and make sure everything is all set. You wait and wait and the other

party finally shows up 15 minutes after the scheduled time acting as if nothing is wrong. What are your immediate impressions of this individual? Are they reliable? If they can't show up in time for the first meeting can they be trusted to meet the demands of the proposed arrangement in the future? How will this behavior be reflected on by clients or customers?

Even though being late just once seems like a forgivable offense, it leaves a lasting mark that is difficult to overcome in the early stages of any professional relationship. If you truly care about [crushing an interview](#) or making a notable impression on your boss when you're first starting out, being punctual goes a long way in letting everyone know around you know you care.

## **Repeat Offenses**

Maybe you work in a job that requires weekly or monthly internal meetings that are mandatory for everyone to attend. You're probably not the only one that thinks these meetings are somewhat of a waste of time but continually showing up late for happenings that are on the calendar days or weeks in advance isn't a habit you want to get in to. Not only does this behavior show a lack of concern for the immediate issues at hand, it speaks volumes to your greater concern for your job and the organization and can significantly hinder your chances for promotion.

## **Meeting Deadlines**

Being on time isn't just about showing up when you're supposed to for meetings and events. It also speaks to your ability to manage the expectations set upon you. If you continually demonstrate that you meet deadlines and finish tasks in a timely manner it won't go unnoticed. Doing so let's everyone in your organization know that you care about the quality of your work and the overall success of the company. Being reliable builds trust quickly and can be the deciding factor in determining your movement upward.

## **Job Security**

Have you ever noticed that the first people to be let go are usually the ones that are consistently late? While this behavior may be a sign of other symptoms that lead to someone being fired, it alone likely stands out the most. Not only is being

late noticeable to everyone around you, it strongly conveys a lack of concern for the job you're doing, and a lack of respect of everyone else's time. In the event that your organization is forced to lay people off, being on time and working diligently to meet deadlines goes a long way in making sure your neck isn't on the line.

Even though some might not agree, the saying "five minutes early is on time and on time is late" still rings true. There's no disputing that the demands of the workplace today take a toll on everyone. However, if you consistently show up to meetings at or before the scheduled time and complete your work when expected, you send a strong message to those around you. It's a message that commands respect and let's everyone know you are to be taken seriously. This alone can separate you from others and can prove pivotal for career advancement and meeting your professional goals.

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## How-To Say No at Work



Do you find yourself not accomplishing everything you set out to do each day in the work place? Does the adage "not enough hours in the day" ring true on a regular basis? Do you constantly put the needs of others before your own? If your answer is yes to any of these questions you are likely what is commonly referred to as a "people pleaser." Helping others is a core value and certainly an admirable one but if you're not careful, it's one that can be dangerous for your productivity, state of mind and physical health. If you frequently find yourself stressed and burned out at the end of the day, learning to tactfully say NO is a skill worth developing.

## **Make Yourself a Priority**

You probably make it a habit to help others and go the extra mile. But when was the last time you made it a priority to take care of your own needs before someone else's? In order to be at your best, you have to be in the right spot to do so. Prioritizing things like exercise, getting enough sleep and taking a day off all go a long way in helping you recharge and stay fresh.

## **Set Healthy Boundaries**

By nature, the word "no" carries a negative connotation that most people are afraid to express. However, it has many positive benefits that not only will find you in a healthy frame of mind but being more productive as well. The first step to saying no is setting healthy boundaries and sticking to them. This simply means clearly stating your priorities and limits and communicating them to those around you. If you make this behavior a regular practice, it lets people know that you can't be taken advantage of and they will respect you for it.

## **Check Your Schedule**

You're probably inundated with requests to take on more work or help with items outside the scope of what you normally do. While it's easy to immediately say yes to helping out with something, it's perfectly acceptable to let someone know you need to look at your schedule and will respond accordingly. If you have the time to fit something extra in great, but if you're already committed then letting people know is reasonable as well.

## **What's in it For You?**

While asking the question of what potential gain you might receive in return for helping someone out might seem selfish, it's important to consider. There are plenty of people out there that are all too ready to accept help but unwilling to return the favor in the future. Before you commit to taking on work for someone else, ask yourself the question of the likelihood of that favor being reciprocated.

# **Ask Someone You Trust if You're Unsure**

We are all asked to help out from time to time. If you find yourself on the fence of saying yes or no however, take the time to seek the opinion of someone you can confide in. By verbalizing your concerns, you not only gain a valuable outside opinion, but allow yourself to consider all the options more clearly. Even if you don't take the advice, you'll at least have more information to help you make the decision that is best for you.

## **Delegate**

The demands of the modern workplace can be overwhelming. Trying to accomplish every task on your own can lead to burnout in the office and negatively effect your health and relationships outside of work as well. If you work on a team or within a specific department, realize that your colleagues are there to help. By delegating tasks or projects to the people around you, you not only save yourself time, but demonstrate to others that they are valuable and can be trusted. This spells good news for everyone involved.

## **Provide Context**

One of the most critical components of saying no is providing context. If you simply tell someone no you risk coming off as aloof or not caring. But if you make it a point to honestly explain to the person requesting your help that your plate is already full and that you are willing to say yes in the future, you come across as respectful and honest.

## **Say Yes to the Person and No to the Task**

Empathy is a sign of high emotional intelligence. If someone asks for your help and you simply don't have the time or resources to do so, tell them that you understand the situation they are in but that you simply can't this time around. Saying no in this manner makes it clear that you value the person in question and are willing to help in the future.

Saying no is counterintuitive for most people. However, learning to do so in a

tactful manner when it makes sense goes a long way toward increasing your own productivity and well-being. If you take the steps necessary to make yourself a priority, set professional boundaries and evaluate all your options before you say yes or no, you'll be in a position to make the best decision for yourself and those around you.

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## Should You Take that Promotion?



From the moment you finish your formal education, it's ingrained in your mind that you should always be looking to move up in whatever company you go to work for. The idea that if you show up early, stay late and consistently go the extra mile to set yourself apart is the key to getting promoted is what we are taught to believe. While getting promoted is usually equated with higher pay, more responsibility and a clear sign that your hard work has finally been noticed, there are a host of factors to consider before you sign on the dotted line.

Are you 100% ready to take the promotion? The obvious answer for most people is "absolutely". Even though getting the news that you're being promoted is sure to bring about feelings of elation in the immediacy, it's important to look at the opportunity from every angle as accepting could be life-changing. Below are some questions to consider with a clear head before you take the plunge.

## **Do You Have the Necessary Experience?**

Maybe you've been in your current role for a while and have proven time and again that you have what it takes to do your job. With your pending promotion however, do you have the skills and experience that will be required to meet the demands of the new post? For example, maybe you've been working in a role that doesn't require management skills and now you'll be charged with overseeing an entire team or department. If you plan on "figuring it out as you go," you may want to seriously consider the impact taking the promotion might have on you, the organization and your team.

## **Will You Receive the Necessary Training and Support?**

The truth is that not everyone who gives a promotion does so with consideration for what life will be like for the person in the new role. More often than you might think, managers don't have the clearest idea about what it takes to do the job effectively on a daily basis. This can result in a lack of necessary training and support which can not only make your life more stressful, but have devastating effects for the morale and productivity of the organization. So, before you dive in head first, make certain that you'll have access to the training, resources and support you need.

## **Is the Promotion Aligned with Your Goals?**

You have probably given some serious thought to the things you want to accomplish both professionally and personally. Maybe you want to become an influential leader but need more time to sharpen your skills or want to spend more time with your young family but the demands of the new job will have you spending your weekends at the office. While prestige and more money are alluring, your best bet is to carefully consider the implications the promotion will have on life as you know it before you make a decision.

# **Does the Promotion Fit with Your Strengths and Passions?**

Taking inventory of what you are good at and truly enjoy is a crucial step in deciding whether or not to take a promotion. Maybe you love working one-on-one with customers and colleagues and enjoy seeing the tangible difference you make, but your new job all but eliminates the opportunity for you to utilize your skills in a way you enjoy. What if you'll be chained to a desk away from the day-to-day or have to travel more than you'd like? Once again, it's easy to get excited about the benefits the job could bring in the short-term, but failing to realize the effects it might have on your core values in the long-term is a mistake you don't want to make.

## **Have You Asked the Right Questions?**

Just because you're up for promotion doesn't mean it's always your best option. Before you take on added responsibility, make sure you do some thorough research and ask the right questions. Was the previous person in the role fired? Is your promotion part of a reorganization? Does the new position see excessive turnover? What do your trusted colleagues, family and friends think about the opportunity? If you take the time to examine all the different dynamics of why you're being promoted, you might find some red flags that cause you to think twice.

Getting promoted is exciting, there's no doubt about it. It's a sign that your hard work has paid off and managers feel like you have the skills to take on more responsibility. Not to mention you're going to be compensated accordingly. While it all seems wonderful in the short-term, it's essential that you consider every implication taking a new job will have before you make a commitment. If you take the time to look at the entire picture as objectively as possible, you'll be in a better place to make a decision that is best for you and everyone involved.

If you do decide the promotion is not right for you, let your manager know you really appreciate being offered the new position and explain what you like about the opportunity, and what your concerns are. This discussion will let your manager know you've seriously considered the opportunity and may help



determine a training plan moving forward.

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# How to Be Taken More Seriously at Work



Maybe you're known as the life of the party, the fun guy or just someone that anyone can come to for some needed levity in the office. You're loved by your colleagues for this reason, but something seems to be lacking. You show up early, do more than is expected and stay late. While you're happy to be the lively one at work, you wish your professional efforts received the recognition they deserve. The good news is that you can still let your shining personality make the office fun for everyone AND be recognized for your merits as a valuable employee.

## Be Assertive

Maybe you're the one that your colleagues come to for advice or help in difficult situations. You always find yourself giving and expect nothing in return. This is a wonderful quality to have but if you're sick of being a pushover, don't be afraid to show your confidence. Doing so doesn't mean being the cocky person that toots their own horn, but giving yourself and your team credit and confidently displaying your expertise is contagious. When you adopt this attitude you'll garner the respect of everyone around you and you'll start to feel valued and appreciated.

## **Confide in a Mentor**

If you find yourself struggling to ask others for help, you're not alone. If you want to grow, you're going to need help along the way. Coming to this realization and seeking out a mentor that genuinely has your best interests in mind is invaluable. If you make the effort to let someone experienced know that you're passionate about learning more and becoming more skilled in your job, it can help catapult your career and you'll quickly set yourself apart from other colleagues in your same position.

## **Be Prepared**

There's nothing that lets others know that you care about your work like being prepared ahead of time. Whether it's getting a presentation done in advance or staying an extra hour late to finish up an important project, the smallest of extra efforts and preparedness don't go unnoticed. If you consistently show that you're not just on top of things, but ahead of the game, everyone around you will take notice and your level of respect will go up immediately.

## **Set Professional Boundaries**

While you take pride in the fact that you can be there for anyone at any time, setting boundaries is crucial to your health and that of those around you. It's all too easy for professional and personal lines to become blurred when you're too accessible. Having an open-door policy is great for everyone in your organization but should you find yourself participating in someone's personal affairs, do the professional thing and recommend help outside of the workplace.

## **Look the Part**

As much as we all would like to admit that appearances don't matter at work, they do. There is something to be said for the way you dress as dictated by the environment in which you work. Whether it's a suit and tie or jeans and button-down shirt, people notice the way you dress. Your attire alone isn't going to win you that coveted promotion but making sure your clothes are clean and appropriate for your work environment goes a long way toward earning the

respect of those around you.

## **Look for Opportunities to Help**

There is nothing better in a manager's eyes than someone that offers to help. Whenever you have the chance, offer to lend a hand with a difficult project or assignment. Doing so shows not only your willingness to go the extra mile, but sets you apart as a collaborative leader that is willing to take on challenges to learn more, and are capable of doing more. By performing tasks that don't necessarily benefit you directly, you make it known to everyone around you that you're reliable and care about the greater good of the team or organization.

## **Follow Up**

It's one thing to complete a task on time and to the best of your ability. Following up is an entirely different story. If you complete a project you have only satisfied the initial needs. Making it habit to check in every so often to ensure that all needs are met doesn't go unnoticed and can win you long-term relationships that prove invaluable down the road. If you find yourself scattered, give yourself email reminders or alerts so that you can precisely time all follow up communication.

## **Remember Names**

Think about the times you walk into places where you are a repeat customer. Having someone remember you by name sets your experience off on the right foot. Though it's a difficult task, especially if you have a large number of people or vendors you work with, recognizing people's names is paramount. Even though much communication takes place electronically, there is no substitute for the personal touch of addressing someone by name.

Being taken seriously at work is something we all crave. You want your contributions to be noticed and valued. If you find yourself in a position where you feel that your diligence isn't being praised, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Chances are that if you implement a few new practices and adjust your attitude accordingly, you'll find yourself on the fast track to more success before you know it.

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# The Do's and Don'ts of E-mail Etiquette



If you're like most people, email plays a major in your life. Maybe it's the first thing you look at when you wake up in the morning and the last thing you check before you go to bed. While personal emails between you and your buddies might not require much decorum, such is not the case when communicating electronically with colleagues, clients or anyone work-related. Even though you may not like it, how and when you communicate via email for professional purposes can have a tremendous and lasting effect on your reputation. To ensure you send emails that are not only professional, but set you apart from your colleagues, we've compiled our best list of Do's and Don'ts below.

## Introduction

If you're emailing someone for the first time, it's imperative to get your introduction right as it can make or break the entire conversation. Using a proper salutation such as "Good Morning" or even "Hello" is better than "Hey" or "Hi". From here, get right to the point of who you are and why you're reaching out. The tone of introductory emails should always be upbeat and courteous while remaining highly professional.

## **Subject Line**

You probably receive dozens of emails every day. Chances are you probably skip over the ones that aren't flagged as important or whose subject lines don't catch your eye. The same goes for emails you send as well. Using subject lines like "FYI," "Circling Back," and "Hi" ensures that your emails won't be read either. Your subject line should be concise and effectively communicate what your email is about. Subject lines like "Board Meeting Minutes" and "Time Off Request" directly communicate to the recipient what your message is about and are more likely to be read.

## **Speaking of Concise**

Professional emails aren't for sharing your thoughts and feelings in most cases. Instead, they are intended to communicate necessary information in an orderly, easy-to-read fashion. If you have several items to discuss in your note, use headings, short sentences and bullet points. Avoid using too many adjectives and excessive flowery language. Remember, your message is one of many that is going to be read so get to the point.

## **Don't Hit Reply-All**

Sometimes you'll get emails from C-Suite Executives or Administrative Assistants addressed to 10 or more people asking for your availability to volunteer for a community event or something similar. When responding, make sure you reply **ONLY** to the original sender. The entire thread doesn't need to know that you're committed to your kids' soccer game and can't make it.

## **Why Are You Forwarding This to Me?**

The forward option in email is a great way to share ideas and gather input quickly. Whether it's something you're passing along to another department, HR or a colleague, take the time to write a sentence or two explaining the reason you're forwarding the message. Failing to take this simple step will leave your recipient either clueless or guessing at the intent of your forward.

# The Power of One

As we've discussed, email is a form of communication that is meant to exchange information quickly and efficiently. While being concise is paramount, limiting the subjects you cover to one per message avoids confusion and makes organization easier for everyone involved. If you find yourself sending a message with multiple topics, make them brief and list them out in bullet point fashion.

## Emojis

When you're sending a professional e-mail, you're not telling your boo how much you miss them. At all costs, avoid using emojis. Though you might think you're being funny or playful, all you're really doing is causing people to question your competency.

## Why are You Sending Me This?

Make sure that the intended recipients are in the right fields before you hit send. There are plenty of stories of people that sent an email to the wrong person and the consequences can be devastating. Even if you're sure your message is bullet-proof, take the necessary time to give it a second look.

## Grammar Police

While you might not care if someone uses "u" instead "you," others might. And even if they don't, you're always better off being safe than sorry on this one. Taking the time to use the right "there" or "their," commas and semicolons goes a long way in avoiding confusion and conveys intelligence to your reader. Though the occasional grammar mistake is forgivable, repeated or blatant offenses can damage your credibility.

## All Caps

Writing in ALL CAPS is something you should never do in an email. To your reader, it seems like you're shouting. Can you imagine reading a line in an email that says "NEVER BE LATE AGAIN"? Using all caps communicates unrest and is

seen as confrontational. If you need to make a point, do it professionally and avoid language that incites anger or fear.

## **Read Receipts**

When you send important emails, you want to make sure they are read. Utilizing the read receipt option lets you know that your message has not only been seen, but read as well. This eliminates any potential breakdown in communication.

## **Before You Hit Send...**

Once you hit send whatever you've typed is gone forever. There are no do-overs. Before you hit send, take the time to thoroughly read what you've written to make sure that you are communicating the right message. Did you answer all the questions the original sender asked you? Were your directions clear?

Whether you hate e-mail or love it, it's not going away anytime soon. Being unprofessional or lazy in your electronic communication can prove costly. On the other hand, taking time to make sure your messages are professionally written, intended for the right recipient and communicate necessary information in a concise manner will set you apart from those that fail to make the effort.