ASK ELLEN – reference when former supervisor no longer works for former employer

5/30/12

Q: When you are job searching and the employer asks to contact your previous supervisor who is no longer at that workplace, how do you handle this question?

A: If you are still in touch with the supervisor and on good terms and you know that he/she would say positive things about you (be sure to ask first!) then I would explain that the person is no longer employed where you used to work but you have his/her contact information.

If you are no longer in touch with the former supervisor who left that place of employment, then you have no choice but to say so. After you give that information, though, it would be good to offer other people as references, especially if those references include someone else at that workplace who supervised you and/or can talk about your work, work habits, character, etc.

Understand though, that whatever you say about the availability of a former supervisor, the prospective employer may contact your former workplace anyway, to see what information they can get about you.

It is always a good idea to stay in touch with the former supervisors and colleagues with whom you have a positive relationship. Chances are, down the road, you can be of assistance to one another.

Thank you and good luck!

Ellen Mehling
Director, Westchester Program and Internships
ellen.mehling@liu.edu