ASKED&ANSWERED: REFERENCES WHO AREN'T SUPERVISORS

Can I list someone as a reference who is not a supervisor?

The quick answer is “yes” but you should know that hiring managers and human resources departments strongly prefer references from a current or recent supervisor.

Hiring managers want to know what it is like to supervise you. One of the things they are trying to assess is how well you’d fit in at their workplace. While coworkers and library school professors may have wonderful things to say about you, they know you in a different way than a current or former boss does.

If you don’t want your current supervisor to know you are job hunting, you won’t be able to list him or her as a reference; employers understand this and that alone won’t be a red flag. If none of your references are supervisors, though, that may raise an eyebrow.

Keep what I call “unofficial references” in mind as well. These are colleagues whose names you don't specifically provide but who may be in receipt of a call from your prospective employer anyway. The LIS world is smaller than you might think; if an employer is seriously considering hiring you and the hiring manager or a member of the hiring committee knows someone you used to work with, that former colleague may receive a call.

Former supervisors and/or co-workers can also be found via LinkedIn. The antidote to a former boss who may not have 100% positive things to say about you is at least one other supervisor who is strongly supportive of you.

Whether you are an LIS student, new library school graduate, or an experienced information professional, you should cultivate new references and maintain contact and positive relationships with current ones. You never know when you may need their assistance and endorsement.

Here are more tips on references.