

Beware overly positive references: employment lawyer

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Recruiters should exercise extra care when it comes to checking resumes in 2010, as an increasing number of candidates with "over-inflated" references could be entering the job market, says workplace relations practice manager Brad Swebeck.

Swebeck told *Shortlist* the global financial crisis meant managers in many industries were forced last year to retrench good staff - often people with whom they had formed close friendships in the workplace. "There are lot of people whose resumes are now hitting the market again, and I'm sure many of those will be going to their old employers asking for references. It could be that old employers who have had to let good people go, are feeling sympathetic and are trying to get someone back into the industry. So there's a possibility that some of those references that are starting to float around are just a bit hyped up."

Use the employment contract to protect against dodgy references

Swebeck said he wasn't aware of any disputes over unreliable references that had reached court so far. However, in recent times he had drawn up employment contracts for a number of clients which sought to deter candidates from using inflated references.

"[The contract] will have a provision in there saying that if any of the information the employee has provided is materially false then their employment will be immediately terminated."

Referees, he added, should focus on the facts of the candidate's employment, and stay away from personal opinions about their merits, which could be coloured by the social relationship between the two people.

"If someone's very good at what they do, it's not hard to describe that in a reference in an objective way."

Swebeck said his stance on reference-giving was not designed to limit the flow of information available to recruiters and hiring employers, but rather "to distil, from a whole lot of information, the true nature of the applicant standing before you".

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