Sample Reference Questions

(Feel free to choose any of the questions below.)

Basic Reference Questions

- What were the beginning and ending employment dates for this individual?
- How long have you known this individual and in what capacity?
- What was this individual's beginning and ending salary?
- What positions did the individual hold?
- Did this individual earn promotions?
- What were the individual's most recent job duties?
- Why did the individual leave your company?
- How many days was he/she absent from or late to work in the last year? (By law, you cannot inquire into medically related absences.)
- Is there any reason why your company would not rehire this individual?
- Would you recommend this individual for a position at another company? Why or why not?
- How did this individual's performance compare to other employees with similar job duties?
- In your opinion, what are the individual's strengths? Weaknesses?
- How would you describe the individual's overall performance?
- Is there anything of significance you’d like to add?
- What kind of job is best suited for this individual's abilities? Do you think this individual will perform well as a [job title]?
- On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 as low and 10 as high), how easy was he/she to supervise?

Interpersonal Skills

- Describe (candidate’s) interaction with management and peers. Did this individual get along well with management and peers?
- Describe (candidate’s) work style in interacting with supervisors, subordinates, peers and people outside the organization.
- How would you describe (candidate’s) ability to work successfully with others toward a set of shared goals? Can you provide a specific example of a time when you felt he/she specifically contributed to a successful outcome? What was this individual's role relative to that of others?
- Would you describe (candidate) as a team player? If so, why?
- Give me an example where the outcome was unexpected or not what he/she hope for. How did he/she handle it?

Leadership

- How would you describe (candidate’s) motivational style? Was this individual a motivated self-starter?
- How would you describe the individual's leadership, managerial or supervisory skills?
- Did the candidate supervise other people? How many? How effectively? Can he/she create a team effort?
- Describe his/her interaction with subordinates. Was the individual respected by subordinates?
- Describe the individual's ability to attract and counsel top talent.
- Describe the individual's ability to manage crisis, pressure or stress?
Communication/Planning

- How would you describe his/her communication skills both orally and in writing?
- How would you describe (candidate’s) ability to actively listen and understand the needs of his/her constituent groups and deliver quality services or effective systems to meet those needs? Can you tell me about a time when you observed his/her strength in this regard?
- Give me an example of how he/she sells ideas and projects to others.
- Can you describe a situation where (candidate) needed to influence others in order to achieve a goal or objective? What were the circumstances? What was the outcome?
- In the (job specialty?) area, how would you rate (candidate’s) ability to understand complex issues and prepare clear and accurate presentations, project plans and proposals to meet those issues/challenges? In your experience, can he/she make a compelling business case?

Judgment

- How would you describe his/her decision making process? Did the individual make sound and timely decisions?
- How well does he/she make decisions, particularly when dealing with incomplete or ambiguous information? Can you give me an example?
- There are times in complex and culturally diverse organizations like ours when one may need to get things done without being able to rely on formal lines of power and hierarchy. Can you tell me about a time when (candidate) needed to get something done and it just didn’t seem viable to work through a formal process? How did he/she handle that? What was the outcome?

Dependability

- Describe some of this individual’s core professional values. Did the individual demonstrate honesty and integrity?
- How do you rate the individual's ability to plan short-term? Long-term?

Performance

- How would you describe the individual's technical skills?
- In consideration of his/her work style, can you give me an example of his/her ability to focus and complete projects and work in a timely and through manner?
- What did you find that motivated (candidate) to do his/her best work?
- How would you describe the quantity and quality of output generated by this candidate?
- How does he/she respond to directions?
- What was the greatest challenge in supervising?
- From what I’ve told you about this position, what do you perceive as (candidate’s) greatest learning curve coming into this position?
- Would you comment on (candidate’s):
  - Organizational skills
  - Attention to detail
  - Ability to adapt to changing priorities