

## **Check Employee References**

*Adapted from “Managing Technology & Resources” presented by  
STEPHEN Z. BALLEEN, BALLEEN & COMPANY, INC.  
Certified Public Accountants*

It's time to hire a key employee. You've thought long and hard about what this person will do, the responsibilities they will shoulder, the benefits they will bring to the organization. You place an effective ad in the newspaper that generates a flood of responses. In a state of euphoria, you separate the wheat from the chaff and begin the interview process. After many interviews, you think you've found the right candidate for the job. You're ready to make an offer. Forget anything? If you've failed to check references, you have neglected the final essential task and, in the process, placed your company at great risk. We have assisted clients in hiring accounting personnel at various levels – from controllers to data entry clerks. We have, on occasion, been utterly confounded when an otherwise desirable candidate is found to have lied about his/her education and credentials. Absent the education and credentials, would we have hired the individual? With good work history and experience, maybe yes. But, in the face of falsifications, we counted ourselves lucky to have exposed the ruse. It is our assumption that if a candidate lies on his/her resume, there is little reason to believe another lie in the future, this one threatening to the organization, will not be committed to save face, cover-up an error, steal or take credit where none is due. The easiest background check involves education and credentials. Educational institutions and professional organizations willingly provide verification of graduation dates, degrees, certificates, etc.

Obtaining meaningful references from past employers is more difficult in our current litigious environment. In instances where there is a reluctance to provide enough useful information to make a decision try obtaining from the candidate and providing to the past employer a request to release all non-medical information pertaining to the candidates performance. Be wary of candidates who claim that, for a variety of reasons, they are unable to provide references from past employers. In general, remember to dig beneath the surface. What you find will either make you feel better about your decision or have you shaking your head in disbelief at the ease with which you could have been taken had you not checked references.