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## HOW TO WRITE A LETTER OF REFERENCE

Have you ever been asked to write a letter of reference for a co-worker, employee or former employee? Generally, a letter of reference is used to help obtain employment, apply for higher education, or as a character reference for those seeking a government position. This is an important request, as a well-written letter can be the reason the candidate receives the offer he or she is hoping for.

In all likelihood, you won't be asked to write a letter of reference for someone you don't know or get along with very well. But, if you have any doubts about writing a recommendation for this person, you should decline the offer and suggest they ask another person. Only write a letter for someone whom you would truly recommend.

A letter of reference doesn't need to be long and wordy. In the first few sentences, explain how you know this person (co-worker, neighbor, business acquaintance) and for how long. Mention any shared any experiences such as coaching the same basketball team, singing in the church choir or working on a project together at the office.

Think of two or three major character traits to describe this person that would be pertinent to the reason you are writing the reference. Are they honest and dependable? Do they always finish what they start? While Mike may be the best guitar player you know and can recite lyrics from songs written twenty years ago, chances are these are not reasons he'll get that job offer. Think of what you would say if you were asked to make a toast to this person during a special occasion.

A short anecdote describing how this person handled a difficult situation will make your letter stand out from the rest. Think of an incident that made you see this person in a new light. Finally, add a short statement that draws the letter to a close.

Here's a sample letter of reference.

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to write this Letter of Reference for Mike Smith. I have lived next door to Mike for ten years, and we both have served on the XYZ Neighborhood Watch Committee for the past three years.

Mike is a pleasure to work with on this committee. His drive and determination to make our neighborhood a safer place was the catalyst in getting our local government to install a traffic light at a busy intersection in our community. Once, during a power outage in rush hour, and risking life and limb, Mike took the initiative to direct traffic himself rather than risk an accident at this intersection.

Mike's perseverance and genuine concern for his fellow citizen are perfect examples of why it is my privilege to recommend him for a position with your company. I feel confident he will be an asset to your organization and will add to your continued success.

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