

Contractor doctor: do agents require references before putting forward my cv?

Dear Contractor Doctor,

I've finally decided to go contracting, have handed in my notice and am now looking for a contract. After putting my CV on a few job boards I'm getting quite a few calls from agents for contract positions. But lots of them claim that they need references before putting my CV forward for interviews.

I've no real problem with this, but my former boss, with whom I'm friendly with, is getting inundated with calls from agents who are using the pretext of getting a reference as a way to drum up business with the firm. Some haven't even asked him about me!

Is this normal practice? If I refused to give references would the agents not offer me work?

Thanks

Giles

Contractor Doctor says:

Agents have a right to ask for references. As a spokesman for the [Recruiting and Employment Confederation](#), an agency organisation, says: "Just like any other recruiter, an agency dealing in contractors has the right to be sure about whom they are sending on to clients."

But, as the REC says, agents do not have the right to make use of this to try and get leads or to make sales. "Using the references call as a sales call is not ethical," the REC spokesman insists. "We will sanction it if one of our members does it and you complain about it."

So if you find agents who are 'confusing' the two, do complain to the REC if you can.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't use the job boards, which are the absolute best way for you to find work. Just filter out the rubbish: the agents who offer fake jobs to get your CV for their database; the agents who have real jobs, but then [send your CV out without your permission](#) to a slew of other potential clients; and the agents who try and use your call as a means to get other leads. You'll run into all of this, and you'll learn to sort it all out.

But you should know that agents are almost certain to put you forward even if you hold back on references. Agents make their money by placing you. A good agent will get you the interview first, and then if it is necessary, check your references when it looks like you'll get the job.

As you don't want to offend legitimate agents while looking for contracts, here's an easy way to be diplomatic about not giving references:

Say that your boss has requested that you do not give reference information out until you have been offered a position, and you have to respect these wishes. Tell the agent that if there is an interview and offer, you will provide not only references, but also the names of some firms that might be looking for contractors. They will be able to read between the lines. If they then put your CV forward without references it is a real job. If you were suitable for the position, and they don't, then you can assume they were just on a fishing--or rather a phishing--expedition.

Good luck with your contracting!

Contractor Doctor

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