HIRE BETTER, FASTER — SESSION 8

Verbal Phone Reference Questions

Never Ask These Questions. Ask These Instead.

Never Ask	Ask This Instead
Age, date of birth, or anything implying age	*"Is there anything that would affect their ability to work a standard schedule?"*
Marital status, children, or family plans	*"How was their attendance and punctuality record?"*
Disability, medical conditions, or health history	*"Were they able to meet the physical demands of the role?"*
Religion, political views, or national origin	—
Salary at their previous employer	*"Did they complete projects through to the end?"*

The Reference Call

Applicant's Name: _____

Name of Supervisor for Reference: _____

Phone Number: _____

Once you have confirmed that you are speaking to the right person, say:

> *"Your name has been given to me by [Applicant's Name] for a verbal reference. He/She has applied to work with us. May I ask you a few questions about [Applicant's Name]?"*

a)	What was the approximate period of employment?
b)	And the duties?
c)	And the reason for leaving?
d)	Was [applicant] honest?
e)	And was [applicant] always punctual?
f)	And reliable?
g)	Did [applicant] have any sick days? If so, how much notice in advance of the rostered-on time was given?
h)	And did [applicant] take any days off as holidays?
i)	Was [applicant] ever late to work, or ever went home early?
j)	Would you re-employ [applicant] again if he/she applied for the same position now? Why? *→ A conditional or hesitant yes tells you almost as much as a no.*
k)	How did you rank [applicant] as a member of your team (top, average, bottom)? *→ The pause before the answer is as telling as the word itself.*
l)	And what was the reason for being at this level? *→ A vague answer is protective. A specific example is gold.*

Say:

> *"Great, thanks very much for your time. That answers all of my questions about [Applicant's Name]. Bye for now."*

Reading Between the Lines

Listen for how the answer is given, not just what is said.

What You Hear	What It Likely Means
Long pause before answering	Choosing words carefully — they have something to say
Enthusiastic praise, no examples	A social reference, not a professional one
Very short answers	Doing this as a favour — likely has reservations
A qualified yes ('for the right role')	A conditional endorsement — ask what the right role is