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TORC TECHNIQUE IS ETHICAL!

Good grief! Occasionally someone challenges the most powerful method for inspiring interviewees to be totally honest! In this short Topgrading Tips I'll refresh you on how the TORC (Threat of Reference Check) works, what is the criticism, and, ahh!, 6 ways to satisfy your sense of ethics.

What is the TORC Technique?

You tell candidates, at the first opportunity, that in order to get a job they will, at a mutually agreed-upon time, arrange for the reference calls with former bosses (and possibly peers, subordinates, and customers). At the end of the tandem Topgrading Interview you and your tandem partner have heard descriptions of all bosses plus others and you (not the candidate) choose which people *you* want to talk with.

Simple enough and C players stay away, because they want you to only call the references they submit -- their next door

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neighbor, insurance agent, and priest. A players *want* to arrange the reference calls, because they know their former coworkers will sing their praises, making them a more attractive candidate.

Hey, *your* company has such a policy and *you* have violated it by talking to hiring managers of former A players, right? The reason -- you knew you'd be saying nice things and maybe a couple of small negatives, so you knew that there was no risk that your former A player would sue you! After the call, you probably told your former A player what you said in the reference call, and got an appreciative *thank you!*

For the past 25 years thousands of managers have reported that candidates arrange the interviews and 90% of the references are actually willing to talk. It works, and when a company gets a reputation for requiring candidates to arrange the reference calls -- to repeat -- C players stay away, A players are attracted to the company, and all candidates are honest in the interviews, knowing you will be talking with their coworkers.

Ethical challenge to the TORC Technique: "We'd be hypocrites! Almost all companies have policies *forbidding* managers from taking reference calls (other than HR confirming dates of employment, etc.) and since *we have such a policy*, isn't it wrong to have candidates ask former bosses?"

How to use the TORC Technique ethically:

1. Talk to former bosses (or others you choose) who are no longer at the company where they worked with your

former A player. They are not violating any company policy. Easy.

As a practical matter, A players tend to include bosses in their list of references, and some of those bosses have *permission* to talk, so although they are still at the company, they are not violating their company policy. Why would the "company" (President, HR) permit the reference call with the boss? Because they'd love it if the former A player would return to the company, and by doing the person a favor now, maybe in the future the person would come back. And, the President and HR know there is zero risk of a law suit.

FACT: In 25 years, with thousands of managers asking candidates to arrange reference calls, I have not heard of a single law suit.

2. If the A player *wants* to ask a former coworker to take the reference call, don't fret too much. If that coworker is willing to take the "risk," then be honorable and promise a confidential discussion, and be sure it is *confidential*.
3. Make it a "personal reference." One of the largest companies in the world has a General Counsel that concluded, "As long as our managers ask candidates to arrange *personal* reference calls with former bosses, not "*job reference checks*," it's ethical. It's as though this is a *character* reference, and that makes it seem okay.

4. Don't stretch ethics -- if you're uncomfortable, don't ask candidates to possibly ask their former coworkers to violate company policy. All is not lost,
5. Simply determine who has left the company that would be worth your while to talk with -- someone who was a peer, subordinate, or higher level. And remember, customers can always be contacted.
6. Conduct the few remaining reference calls *after* you hire the candidate. Sure, that's like closing the barn door, you get it. However, think about this a second. After the person is hired, the purpose of the call truly can be developmental: "Thanks for taking the time to share your confidential thoughts about Tiffin. As you know she joined us two weeks ago, and by getting your thoughts about her, as well as those of 7 others, we can help her assimilate into ACME smoother, and we can have more information to help her formulate a developmental plan, which we do with all new hires." This really is an "oral 360 interview" for development.

And here is the subtle benefit: when candidates realize this is what you'll do, they sure as heck don't want to be embarrassed because you hear more negatives than you expected, so they are *still* apt to be much more honest and forthcoming in the selection interviews than they would have been without #6.

FACT: I know of hundreds of times #6

has been used, and there have been no major negative surprises, and no job offer has been rescinded.

Satisfied? I hope so! If you have any comments or questions on reference checking, please shoot me an email. The TORC Technique is so important in Topgrading, I hope you tweak it and somehow use it! Best,

Brad

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