

# When (and when not to) vouch for a friend

So, a friend or ex-colleague has asked you to put in a good word at your current workplace and you're not sure what to do? We ask two HR experts whether it's ever a good idea to put your reputation on the line to vouch for a friend.

## If they're good, vouching for a friend can be a great thing

If you objectively consider your pal a good fit for your company and the role that's on offer, you'll be looked upon favourably by the business for recommending a quality applicant, says Simon Bennett, Principal Consultant at Glide Outplacement and Career Coaching.

"Some workplaces even give referral bonuses, as they value the networks and knowledge their staff have within their chosen industry," he says.

It's important you can give a reference that is applicable to the skills required by the job they are applying for – including specific examples of ways they demonstrated the skill when you worked together, Bennett says.

## Unsure if they're the right person for the job?

If you're on the fence about your friend's suitability and not convinced you'd be a good choice as a referee, while it can create an awkward situation, it's not worth the risk to your professional reputation.

"Honesty and trust is key to any relationship, and it needs to be applied here," says HR specialist Karen Gately, of Corporate Dojo.

Her golden rule is to never give a dishonest reference. She says not only does it do a disservice to the employer, it does a disservice to your reputation, and it does a disservice to your friend.

"Helping someone get a job they are not right for, or not qualified for is setting them up for failure," she says.

She says how you tackle it will depend on your relationship with your friend. "Some people will be fine with a blunt 'These are your strengths and weaknesses as I see them, and I will have to be honest if asked.' Others will need a softer approach," she says.

In this scenario, Gately recommends taking a depersonalised approach, for example, “I know what this job involves and what the company culture is like and I am concerned your skills, interests and career goals aren’t a good match,” It always helps to provide examples to illustrate your point, such as what they would be doing in the role, how they would work with other team members or elements of the role you fear they would struggle with or not enjoy.

## **What if you don’t want to be their referee?**

If the person that is asking you to be a reference is someone you’d rather not put your reputation on the line for, then don’t.

“It can take years to build a solid, professional reputation, and a very short space of time to ruin it,” Bennett says. He adds exaggerating or lying to help out a pal who then gets the job, only to fail, brings your professional judgement into question. It could also put a strain on your friendship.

If you’re not comfortable letting them know you don’t think they are a good fit and you would not be a good referee, Bennett suggests a tiny white lie could help you both through an awkward moment. “You could always say it is not corporate policy to provide a reference for a friend,” he says.

“Always remember the kind of people you put forward says a lot about you,” Gately says. “If they hire someone on your recommendation and they take a bit of time to learn some skills but become a valued member of your team, that is rarely an issue. But if you put forward someone that lacks a good work ethic or is unpleasant or difficult to work with, that could tar you with the same brush.”

## **Would you want to work with your friend?**

Lastly, before deciding whether to recommend a friend, it’s important to consider how you’ll work together. If you already communicate well, being buds could be a big benefit, but give thought to how it could change your relationship – this in itself is likely to be influenced by how closely you’d be working together and how or if you would report to each other. Regardless of how well you feel it could work, it’s worth having a pre-emptive conversation to brainstorm potential issues, expectations and how you would handle any issues before diving in.