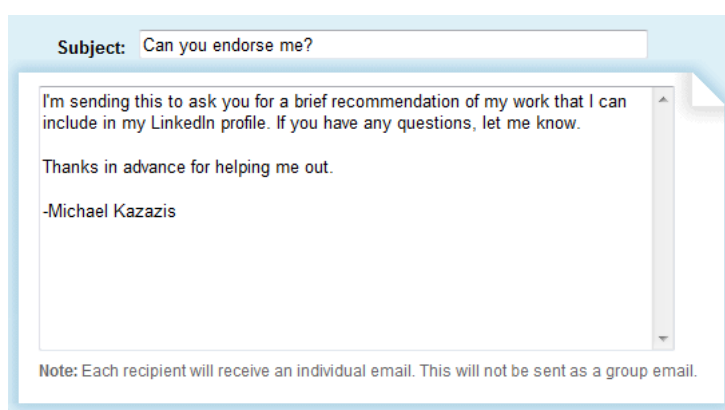


The Power of the LinkedIn – Before You Write That Recommendation

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As a regular user of LinkedIn, you are bound to get one of these requests at some point. In this economy and job market, your connections are striving to have a “complete” profile and this requires the daunting task of collecting a minimum of 3 recommendations. When asked for one, take a moment to evaluate the request before you respond!



The value of a recommendation on a profile

We all would like our profile to provide evidence of a sterling employment history, admirable work ethics, and desirable talent. Recommendations certainly help make one's LinkedIn profile more personal and dynamic than a printed resume. In addition:

- An employer can read all of your recommendations and get a picture of the value you would bring to their company.
- An employer can see the quality of who is recommending you and can follow up directly with them.
- Unlike a letter of reference which is usually written for a specific opportunity, the LinkedIn recommendation will be around for a while and could come in handy when you least expect it.

There are plenty of available articles showing you how to request a recommendation and how the process works. But let's instead look at what to do when you receive a request to write one.

Should I write the recommendation?

First off, never feel obligated to write one. How did you get the request? While LinkedIn has the automation to generate the request shown above, hopefully your connection took the time to write a personalized request. Better yet, maybe they sent an email to you outside of the platform or made the request in person? Assuming that it was a more personal request, consider the following:

- Do you have a relationship with the connection where you personally witness demonstrated the attributes that you will endorse? (*Has Joe actually completed an outstanding consulting engagement for me, or do I just know that he is a consultant?*)
- Are you comfortable in articulating how you know the person? (*Joe and I never worked together, but he actually lives next door to me.*)
- Will you be able to add business or professional value to the recipient? Unlike Facebook, this is not going to be a passing comment. The recipient will utilize a good recommendation as a professional endorsement of their brand. (*I hired Mary as a consultant and she successfully completed the engagement faster and for less than she projected.*)
- Consider the impact of the recommendation to your own profile and reputation. People will be directed to your profile from the recipient's in order to validate the integrity of the recommendation. Your contacts will also see the recommendations that you have written...this might have some impact that you might not have even imagined. (*Should I provide a reference for someone in a key position for a competitor's firm?*)
- Are you going to be one of a handful or one of 100+ recommendations?



What to write?

Before you start writing, understand what your contact would like to accomplish. You can ask them if there is something they would like to see emphasized. Maybe they are seeking the recommendation for something specific (e.g., a transfer to a project management position and requiring attention to detail). Check to see if there are other recommendations - who are they from, and what do they focus on?

With the world of social media, we're in an environment of 140-character snippets of data where you are challenged to communicate effectively within strict boundaries. What you write will require a focus on quality over quantity....one paragraph, maybe two as a max. Here are the key points you want to make:

- How you are related to them – show that you are qualified to offer the perspective.
- You are looking to emphasize one or two strengths that you observe. Use specific examples instead of adjectives.
- Some recommend that you also include an additional unexpected attribute from the person (e.g., “As a volunteer for a local high school, Kay formed a scholarship research team to help disadvantaged students obtain over \$60,000 in scholarships to date.”).
- Your statements will be more effective if you write about this person's qualities in the present tense. If Dan “was very organized when he worked for you” he hopefully wants you to convey that he is still organized.
- What you write should not be so over-the-top that it loses credibility.

Caution!!!

Watch out for these red-flag issues:

Too many recommendations? It is definitely possible to do more harm than good with your use of recommendations. Have you given too many recommendations...or maybe you have too many posted on your own profile? If you don't pick the most appropriate people, or if you use too many people, it might scare off potential employers who might look at those recommendations with disbelief rather than as a helpful vote of confidence. Have you ever seen someone with 300 recommendations? That's way too much noise...five quality ones would be much more effective.

Reciprocal recommendations. This is easy to identify and also calls to question how genuine the recommendations are. While it is not unusual for reciprocal recommendations to occur, if a pattern is identified (i.e., each recommendation has a reciprocal one to the author) a potential employer is likely to dismiss all of them.



NOTE: Some companies have policies (with good reason) concerning what you can say about a former employee. Check with your HR department before you agree to provide one.

Try it out!

If you have not provided a recommendation before, take a look at your contacts...you might find someone worthy of (and extremely appreciative of) receiving one from you. Go for it.

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