

# Nepotism done right

Many parents are too cautious about tapping their own networks

BY SANDRA SWANSON

Will Isherwood, director of human resources at Itasca-based AIT Worldwide Logistics Inc., has 20 years' experience in personnel and recruiting. Most job seekers would welcome his advice. But in the last five years he's been shrugged off by three college graduates—his children.

"I've been in this profession my entire life, but it's hard to get your kids to listen to you," says Mr. Isherwood, 54.

It's not an uncommon problem: successful business people with ample experience in career moves find themselves flummoxed when it comes to helping a child find a job. The questions abound: How to impart your wisdom without sounding didactic? How to take advantage of business contacts without asking for personal favors?

The answers aren't as complicated as you might think. When you want to give career guidance, respect your progeny's ambitions, but don't be shy about doling out advice based on your experience.

"Ask your child, 'What do you

## RAVE REVIEWS

*Want to provide an effective reference for a job candidate? Consider these tips from recruiters:*

### Respond only to the questions asked.

When you ramble, you do so at the candidate's peril. "You might inadvertently say something harmful," Thomas Gimbel says.

**Don't go to the other extreme and give one-word responses.** "When the reference is non-communicative and doesn't want to expand on anything, it becomes a little disconcerting," Karen Bloom says.

**When asked about weaknesses, dodge the question.** Instead say something like, "I suppose he has some weaknesses, but none come to mind—and the reason I'm referring him is because he has so many strengths," Will Isherwood suggests.

**Avoid the one-to-10 trap.** Recruiters sometimes ask references to evaluate a candidate's performance on a scale of one to 10. Don't. "Tell the recruiter you realize everyone evaluates scales differently, so you'd rather discuss the person's quality without assigning a number to it," Ms. Bloom says.

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want to accomplish? How can I help you?" says Roger Gansauer,

58, vice president of talent management at Oak Brook-based executive search firm Kensington International Inc. "Then you can say, 'Here are some thoughts I have.'"

## DON'T BE SHY

Many parents are too cautious about tapping their business network on behalf of a child. "A lot of people have the feeling that they don't want to use business connections for personal reasons," says Thomas Gimbel, 33, CEO of the LaSalle Network, a Chicago recruiting firm.

He emphasizes that parents can simply ask business contacts to meet with their children. "You're not asking for a job; you're just asking for some of their time."

Karen Bloom, 53, owner of Bloom Gross & Associates Inc., a Chicago recruiting firm, says that no matter how established parents are in business, many hesitate to get involved in the job search.

"We don't place entry-level people, so I meet with [clients' children] out of courtesy," she says. Ms. Bloom has polished résumés and planned job-search strategies for about a dozen children of clients.

## OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE

Often, the best way a business associate can help is by giving honest feedback.

Two years ago, a client asked Mr. Gimbel to meet with his son, a recent college grad. When the young man arrived for the meeting, Mr. Gimbel was not impressed.

"I told him looked like he hadn't shaved in two days, his sleeves were rolled up like he was getting ready for happy hour, and he wasn't very humble," he says.

That level of candor can help your children improve their first impression before the real thing.

Parents tend to be either too hard or too easy on their kids, Mr. Gimbel says, so meeting someone with an outside perspective is essential.

"I tell clients with kids, 'Put together a list of all business contacts—vendors, buyers, bankers, anyone you can think of,'" he says. "Have your child call and say something like: 'I'm a recent college graduate, and my mom said you've done business with her in the past. I'd like to meet with you and get your opinion on some things.'"

Finally, keep in mind that not everyone will have the time or inclination to meet with your child. When that happens, you shouldn't take it personally.

"If you're too aggressive about referring your child, that's when it gets to be like a land mine," Ms. Bloom says.

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