Obtaining job or graduate school recommendations is a daunting undertaking for many people. Students often express concern that they have not had the opportunity to develop relationships with faculty members and other professionals who can provide letters of recommendation. However, recommendations are essential for either the job search or graduate school application process, and their importance should not be overlooked. Follow these four steps for obtaining recommendations.

1. Cultivate relationships with people who can be of assistance in providing you with letters of recommendation. Some examples include: faculty members, especially in smaller classes where they can get to know you and your work; employment supervisors, both past and present; and advisors for extracurricular activities such as clubs, organizations, sororities, and fraternities.

2. Contact the individuals and ask them if they are willing to provide positive recommendations for you. You do not want your references to be surprised by telephone calls or other requests from your potential employer or graduate school, so obtain permission from the references prior to giving their names to anyone. Understand that they will probably need for you to give them permission in writing (via email is fine) to speak or write about you to a third party.

   NOTE: When you are requesting a reference from a Mock Interview Program supervisor, a faculty member, or an employment manager, please provide a minimum of two to four weeks notice if you are asking someone to complete a form or write a letter.

3. Prepare your references to help you by providing them with copies of your resume, cover letter, and/or application. You can also write down key points you would like them to include or even draft a letter which outlines accomplishments, strengths, and personal characteristics critical to your success as an employee or graduate student. Give your references copies of the job description or graduate program for which you are applying. Ask your references if they are willing to give you copies of the information they send. Provide any recommendation forms which your potential employer or graduate school requires, as well as stamped and addressed envelopes for all recipients.

4. Follow up with your references by writing them thank you letters for the recommendations that they provide. Keep them informed of your progress, and thank them again after you have accepted a job or been admitted to graduate school.