



Recruiting & Search  
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## **Do You Know Who You're Hiring?**

In this fast-paced, ever-changing world of business, finding the right candidate for employment can be a challenging and difficult task. Add the question of whether to reference check and the task can become even more arduous and time consuming. Many past employers won't provide information other than dates of hire and last position held as a perceived safeguard against being sued by their former employees. As a result, hiring managers feel the process is pointless and may decide to hire without verifying previous employment or education. Others don't want to know whether the individual they've selected as their first choice has sound references due to fear of starting the hiring process anew if the reference check proves negative. Whatever the excuse, this mistake is avoidable by simply verifying the potential employee's previous job history, performance and education.

Based on a survey of 2.6 million job applicants, 44% lied about work experience, 41% lied about education and 23% fabricated credentials or licenses. Out of these surprising statistics, one of the easiest areas to verify is a candidate's educational background. Candidates often fabricate not only whether they've received their post high school degree, but whether they've even attended a specific college or university. This lie most frequently occurs when the employer is using the possession of a degree as part of the initial resume screening process. If an organization has identified a specific degree as important to success in a particular role, it is crucial that the candidate actually possess the degree to help ensure a stronger likelihood of fit within the new position. This verification process is not difficult and simply requires a phone call to the college or university, where you may also request a copy of the individual's school transcripts.

The most frequently fabricated area is work experience. Often candidates will fabricate the length of time they worked for an employer in an effort to cover up gaps in their employment or create the impression that they possess required experience. Some will even indicate they worked for an employer that has gone out of business or where there's been restructuring, believing they can substantiate their employment claim because it's likely a contact doesn't exist to complete the verification. These issues can indeed make the reference checking process more difficult, but not impossible. Employers can, and should, request that applicants provide verification through a former co-worker or manager, especially if the previous employer and position is critical to the candidate's experience and ability to perform successfully in the job. More importantly, if the applicant would lie about their experience or education, is this someone you want working for you? Probably not!

### **Getting the Information You Need**

So, what questions should you ask a former employer and how can you get them to provide more information than a simple verification of dates and position? Many employers will have the applicant sign a release form along with the application that is then sent to the former employer, allowing them to release additional information, such as performance issues. Often the form will contain questions you as a potential employer are asking the former employer to complete. Other times the form simply proves that you've received the release

phone: 920-432-7444  
920-738-7055

2611 Libal Street, Green Bay, WI 54301  
54 Park Place, Suite 200, Appleton, WI 54914

fax: 920-436-2966  
920-738-1842

[www.thehsgroup.com](http://www.thehsgroup.com)

and will be calling for more specific information. Because this can be a time-consuming process, it's important that you ask pertinent questions and don't waste the former employer's time with irrelevant questions.

A few questions that may be asked in addition to standard dates of hire and position held may be:

- Why did the individual leave your employment?
- What was your relationship to the employee?
- Was a performance appraisal completed on the individual within the last year of their employment and did they meet the performance expectations of the position?
- What do you feel was accomplished due to his/her involvement with your company? What changed as a result of his/her employment?
- How well did he/she relate to other people? How well did he/she work with superiors, peers and subordinates? Was he/she a team player?
- How did he/she deal with conflict and/or difficult work situations?
- What were this employee's greatest strengths?
- Where was this employee's greatest need for further development?
- Did the employee meet the attendance requirements of your company?
- Would you re-hire this employee if you had an opportunity to do so?

It's up to you as the potential employer to ask follow-up questions to gain the information that will assist you in making an informed hiring decision. If a red flag is raised by the response to any one of these questions, further probing is essential. Hiring mistakes are very costly to employers, as turnover can be as high as two times the new employee's salary. These potential costs make a thorough reference check crucial to reducing the likelihood of making an avoidable mistake and knowing who you're adding to your team.