

The Pinocchio Factor is alive and well with Job Applicants

I am sure it comes as no surprise to those of you that have been conducting background checks for a while that applicants lie on their resume, job applications, during interviews and reference checks. What may be surprising to you is that many managers are still willing to hire these applicants that stray from the truth.

A new study by Checkster of ethical standards in the hiring process found that an alarming (78%) of applicants misrepresent themselves and a great number of hiring managers (66%) are willing to accept these lapses in ethics. The study included applicants, hiring managers, HR professionals and recruiters.

According to the article 'Are You Hiring Charlatans?' applicants in the Checkster survey revealed widespread willingness to misrepresent information during the hiring process, with 60% of applicants claiming mastery in skills they had basic knowledge of. Over 50% reported working at some jobs longer in order to omit an employer. Other inflated claims included: made-up relevant experiences (42.25%), false reason for leaving a job (45%), using a director title when the actual title was a manager title (41.25%), and a degree from a prestigious university instead of their own (39.25%).

Another study by Office Team in 2017 reported that nearly fifty percent of workers knew someone who has lied on a resume. This number is up 21% from a similar survey in 2011.

On the most recent Office Team survey, 51 percent of men reported knowing someone who had lied on their resume while 39 percent of woman affirmed knowledge of this behavior. Interestingly, telling the truth during the hiring process is not associate with the age of the applicant. The Office Team survey reported the following spread of lies on resumes by age:

Age Group	Lied on Resume
18-34 55%	Yes
35-54 41%	Yes
55+ 36%	Yes

According to workers, the following information is most commonly misrepresented:

76% Job experience

55% Job duties

33% Education

26% Employment dates

In contrast, the following shows 'How often managers think job applicants include false information on their resumes:'

12% Very often

41% Somewhat often

38% Not very often

10% Never

Yves Lermusi, CEO, Checkster, an online reference checking company, said, "It was disturbing that most companies do not weed out these fraudulent applicants during the hiring process and especially revealing that 99% of the hiring managers and HR professionals would hire someone who engaged in at least one misrepresenting behavior."

According to the Checkster study, "Hiring managers said that faking references is the worst thing a job applicant could do in the hiring process. Fifty-four percent of hiring managers said they would never hire someone who gave false references."¹

The behavior that hiring managers were most lenient about is inflating GPA by more than half a point, as a whopping 92% reported that they would still consider hiring the person. The age of the hiring manager was also a factor in ethics lapses. Checkster's survey found that young people were a little less strict in their hiring decisions. On average, 69% percent of individuals younger than 35 reported that they would hire dishonest applicants at least some of the time compared to 60% of individuals 45 and older.

The survey highlighted where the 'rubber hits the road' and "on average 14% of the time individuals would hire someone despite inflated claims if they couldn't find any other good candidates. This means that these individuals most likely recognize the behavior isn't ideal, but are willing to sacrifice their moral standards when in a pinch to hire someone."²

The Office Team study reported that "More than 1/3 of managers said their company has removed a candidate from consideration after discovering the person lied on his or her resume."

The above information highlights two challenges for employers; the first is to identify applicants that are misrepresenting their background and the second is once identified what is the appropriate action for the organization to take. It has been presumed by many that it's a 'one strike' and you are out game, however, these studies show that hiring managers and HR professionals are more lenient regarding misrepresentation behaviors than previously assumed.

At this point, employers overwhelmingly know how to meet the first challenge (identifying discrepancies) since the Professional Background Screening Association (PBSA) annual employer survey reported that 96% of employers conduct some form of background check. In addition, one of the most effective ways to catch liar is by conducting reliable and insightful references. This provides you the opportunity to cross-reference the skills and experience candidates speak about in their interview with their previous managers. Added, to this arsenal of pre-screening techniques is 'social media screening' which also can give hiring managers an insightful glance into the behaviors of an applicant that cannot be gained elsewhere.

An emerging technology solution that can help identify the fraudster as well is a Reference Checking Fraudster Detection Software. The software platform has a built-in tool for potential fraud detection that monitors candidate and referee actions for any unusual activity during the reference check. It then has the ability to crosscheck where the candidate and referees are when they access the reference checking platform, monitor what devices they use and keep track of the times at which they carry out a step in the process. The software will flag any suspicious activity so that the employer has all the information they need to take the matter further with either the candidate or referee, before making a more informed decision about how to proceed.

Here's a real example of how the software rooted out a lie. "A candidate had informed us that her referee was overseas, but the fraud detection software flagged that the reference had been completed from the same IP address as the candidate. Given this, there was no doubt that the reference had been completed fraudulently."³

Given that the heretofore mentioned surveys have shown that despite managers and HR professionals knowing applicants are misrepresenting their backgrounds circumstances may dictate that the hiring manager make less than an optimum decision to fill a position. The reality of this situation is probably even more true in a tight employment market when good candidates are scarce.

Now may be a good time for you to let your clients know that there are additional tools available to help them better identify applicant fraudulent behaviors, e.g. social media screening and reference checking fraud detection software, however, this begs the bigger question. Once they have identified an applicant has misrepresented their background what action are they going to take. It may be helpful to suggest your clients have this discussion internally between their management, hiring managers and HR professional so that they can move toward consistent decision-making and hiring across the organization and this not be left to individual views of the respective parties.

About the Author



W. Barry Nixon is the COO, PreemploymentDirectory.com the leading background screening information portal and online worldwide directory of professional background screening firms and Suppliers to the background screening industry. He co-authored the landmark book, [Background Screening & Investigations: Managing Hiring Risk from the HR and Security Perspective](#). He also is the publisher of award-winning newsletters, *The Background Buzz* and *The Global Background Screener*, and the author of the Backgrounder column in PI Magazine.

In addition, Barry is a past recipient of the elite 'Top 25 Influential People in Security' by Security Magazine and past Co-Chair, International Committee for the Professional Background Screening Association (PBSA). He also served as a Global Ambassador for PBSA for many years.

You can contact Barry at 1-949-770-5264 or online at wbnixon@preemploymentdirectory.com

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