Becoming A Resume Lie Detector

Insights
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Society of Human Resource Management studies show that 53% of job applicants lie on their resumes. Other research has placed the number at between 30% and 50%, with one 2011 study saying that 80% of resumes are – at a minimum – "misleading."

Whatever the accurate statistic, it's clear that resume fabrication – from inflated salaries to embellished job titles to trumped-up education claims – are rampant. And the liars have help: Several websites offer tips for "smart ways" to manipulate or outright fake resume details.

Common Sense And Substantiation
But hiring managers aren't without their own "lie detectors." Common sense is the first line of defense in ferreting out resume deceit. If, for example, a resume asserts that the applicant earned a Harvard Ph.D. in 1995 but also says he or she worked for a Texas company from 1993 to 1996, common sense says that one of those statements may not be true.

If you're recruiting for an open position using an online job board, many job-seekers will be aware that if their resumes include certain keywords, they'll rank higher on your list of potential candidates. That's all the incentive some of them need to exaggerate their skills and experience. To validate their claims, ask applicants to detail their expertise in an expanded resume, explaining whether they've attained the asserted skills through training courses alone or through on-the-job experience, and when and how they applied the skills in previous positions.

Verifying other information, such as previous employment dates and education, requires old-fashioned legwork: online research to make sure a listed company or university actually exists if you're not familiar with the name, and phone calls to verify employment and graduation dates. (Hundreds of websites offer to supply the "highest quality custom replicated diplomas," so don't accept a proffered diploma as irrefutable evidence of a degree.)

To make sure an applicant isn't covering an employment gap by claiming to have been self-employed, ask for names and numbers of – and then call – former clients.

The Application Advantage
A customized application serves as the second means to uncover resume falsehoods. Drafted skillfully, an application can unearth information that a resume won't. Most people, for example,

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wouldn't volunteer information about a criminal conviction on a resume, but, on an application, would be forced either to address the question or leave it blank, which is a red flag in itself.

While a resume typically provides information about dates of employment and may list job responsibilities and achievements, an application can ask for the reasons the candidate left a previous position. An application also can request the names and phone numbers of previous supervisors, whom you then may contact to verify claims made on the resume. You also may get more information from the supervisor than from the previous employer's HR department, where personnel probably are well trained in dispensing no more than "name, rank and serial number."

Make sure the candidate completely fills out and signs the application. If he or she has completed the application online, a signature on a hard copy must be required during an interview. The signature provides confirmation of the statements and agreements on the application and can be important in the event of later litigation. Never fill in blanks on the applicant's behalf.

Let The Applicant Speak

Use the interview to clarify and test the truthfulness of information on the application, and to learn about the applicant's personality, character and motivation. You achieve that goal by letting the job-seeker talk, rather than spending the interview selling your organization. Certain responses can be telling – for example, if applicants talk negatively of their prior employers, you can expect that in six months they will be badmouthing your organization, too. As in the application, of course, avoid unlawful interview questions about age, ancestry, religion or other issues that could be used to discriminate against a candidate.

If you suspect the applicant has falsified information on the resume or the application, or simply may have made an error in the submitted information, don't hesitate to ask for an explanation. But don't accept the response as a truthful representation of the facts without verifying its accuracy.

Hiring someone who has lied on their resume can contribute to costly employee turnover, endanger customer relationships, increase the risk of litigation, and hurt your company's bottom line. You can avoid those potentially negative consequences by clarifying, verifying and becoming an insightful lie detector.

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