

Passing A “Comprehensive” Pre-Employment Background Check

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I encounter many frustrated and dejected career seekers who are having a hard time securing employment. The career seekers I counsel associate their shortcomings with failing a pre-employment comprehensive background check. Submission to a pre-employment comprehensive background check is a condition of employment required by many companies. From our conversations, many career seekers believe their career search shortcomings are 100% because of the existence of a criminal record. However, there is more to a comprehensive pre-employment background check than checking for the existence of a criminal record.

Employment Verification

Employment verifications verify the dates of employment, title and pay of candidate's previous employment. To collect this information, employers request that candidates provide the address, city, state, zip, phone number and supervisor's name for all relevant previous employment. From working one-on-one with many career seekers, I am often faced with people who cannot provide accurate details for previous employment: dates of employment (as MM/YYYY – MM/YYYY), title, supervisor's name and the previous employer's contact information including address, city, state, zip and phone number.

The inability to provide accurate information for previous employment not only prevents career seekers from thoroughly and accurately completing an employment application (which may be the reason for not receiving callbacks), but also is the reason many career seekers fail background checks (because of the employment verification). In addition, the inability to provide accurate information for previous employment may send the message of being disorganized, unprepared or dishonest to a prospective employer. The information provided in this section must be explicit and not indirect.

Career seekers who do not have this information readily available should collect this information immediately. Peruse the internet by conducting Google searches and checking the company's website to collect the information. If your previous employer is no longer in business, provide the correct information for the company during your tenure. Employment tenures at a company no longer in business can be verified by tax documents (W2, 1099, Schedule C) or colleagues that now work at another company. Additionally, include experiences and skills acquired while working as an independent contractor or entrepreneur. This experience can also be supported by tax documents, colleagues or customers.

It is the career seekers' responsibility to provide accurate information that can be verified.

Education Verification

Education verifications verify high school, college, graduate school, training and continuing education accomplishments listed by candidates. This includes obtaining industry licensures and certifications. Candidates should be able to provide the institution where the training was

received and the entity that issued the licensure or certification. Be aware that the institution that provided the training and the entity that issued the licensure or certification may not be the same. For example, career seekers can attend education classes at a college or university to prepare for and take the Professional in Human Resources (PHR) exam but the PHR certification is issued by the HR Certification Institute.

Additionally, career seekers must distinguish between being *certified* on a subject matter or skill and receiving a *certificate of completion* on a subject matter or skill. For example, in Chicago there are many community agencies that offer technology training on Microsoft software. These community agencies may provide students who successfully complete the course with a certificate of completion, or certificate of achievement, and not a certification. Microsoft Corporation issues a certification for their products, which requires completion and passing of their exam. So, candidates who state they have a Microsoft certification but did not complete and pass Microsoft's exam rather than saying they have a certificate of completion, or achievement, for completing Microsoft classes at XYZ Company can have an adverse hiring decision made against them for inadvertently misrepresenting information.

It is career seekers' responsibility to provide accurate information that can be verified.

References Check

Many prospective employers request that candidates provide three professional references; even going as far as saying no family members or friends. Professional references include previous supervisors, colleagues, and college professors. References attest to a candidate's character, skills and work ethic. For young job seekers with little to no experience, references should be a teacher, a coach of an extracurricular activity, or an overseer of a volunteer/community project that they have worked on. Candidates with strong references can strengthen their candidacy. Career seekers that are looking to increase their candidacy should not take the power of strong references for granted. If an employer has interviewed two equally good candidates for the same position, the next obvious step to be taken is to contact references to determine if the candidate's words can be backed up by someone else.

The information that career seekers provide for a reference should be straight forward and easy to follow: name, title, relationship to you, company, address, telephone number and email address. If a company email address is not provided to employees, provide a personal (but professional) email address. Before providing any contact information for a reference, get permission. A sample reference would look like:

Jane Doe, Program Director (direct Supervisor at XYZ Company)
XYZ Company
1123 S. Main Street
Chicago, IL 60611
(777) 777 - 7777
jdoe@xyzcompany.com

Career seekers should contact their references prior to listing that person as a reference. Career seekers must avoid the mistake of providing references that cannot be contacted, answer the phone in an unprofessional manner, cannot remember the career seeker's name, or do not meet the prospective employer's preference for non-family members and non-friends. Most importantly, references should say glowing things about career seekers, strengthening career seeker's candidacy.

It is career seekers' responsibility to provide strong references that can be contacted and will provide positive information.

Credit Check

Many employers execute a credit check to determine career seeker's employability. Many will make the argument that with the economy of the past few years, it is hard for people to keep up with bills due to high unemployment, stagnant wages and inflation. What does credit have to do with one's ability to perform a job? Nothing! However, a credit report says a lot about candidate's ability to manage personal finances, pay bills, be honest and make good decisions. Additionally, many employers utilize credit reports as an effective tool in protecting the company, customers, data and employees.

Career seekers can obtain FREE credit reports from www.annualcreditreport.com. Career seekers can access all three credit bureau reports in a matter of minutes once every 12 months for free (no strings attached). Career seekers should peruse their credit reports annually and dispute all discrepancies.

It is career seekers' responsibility to ensure that information on their credit report is accurate.

Social Media/Internet Check

According to a survey published by the National Association of Colleges and Employers in 2009, 70 percent of U.S. recruiters and HR professionals say they have rejected candidates based on information they found online.

What an employer sees on social media or the internet can be used to determine the strength of career seeker's candidacy and can have an adverse impact on their candidacy. From researching career seeker's online presence, prospective employers can see things about candidates not listed on a resume that includes character, lifestyle, attitude and imagery. Prospective employers may think someone is perfect for the job from the candidate's experience and interview but may have a complete change of mind after researching and reviewing their online presence.

Most information found about candidates online is self-posted. Therefore, career seekers must be selective when deciding their online brand and imagery. Career seekers should be knowledgeable of a website's privacy and sharing policies.

It is career seekers' responsibility to manage their online presence.

No Excuses

In addition to the aforementioned, a comprehensive pre-employment background check, depending upon the company and what is permissible in a career seeker's state of employment, includes: driving records, vehicle registration, court records, workers' compensation, bankruptcy, neighbor interviews, medical records, property ownership, military records and state licensing records. Items that cannot be included in a comprehensive pre-employment background check include: bankruptcies after 10 years; civil suits, civil judgments and records of arrest, from date of entry, after seven years; paid tax liens after seven years; accounts placed for collection after seven years; and any other negative information (except criminal convictions) after seven years. Career seekers should research the policies and laws in their area and industry.

Nevertheless, it is career seekers' responsibility to accurately and thoroughly provide all requested information to a prospective employer. Misrepresented, unsubstantiated or unverifiable information has caused many career seekers to have adverse hiring decision made against them. Most companies will not allow career seekers to change information after an application has been submitted or see the discrepancy as an honest mistake. Career seekers must be resourceful in acquiring vital information that will be provided to prospective employers as well as provide honest, forthcoming information.

Being prepared and organized strengthens the career seeker's candidacy as well as decreases the likelihood of long-term unemployment caused by failing comprehensive background checks.