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BLOGS

Archives; Hiring & Firing; Workplace Policies

Verifying Previous Employment: Worthwhile or Waste of Time?

During a recent training that I provided on hiring dos and don'ts, one of the managers attending the training asked if his company should continue to call previous employers for references. The manager expressed frustration that most often, previous employers will only confirm dates of employment. He wondered whether it is really worth the effort to continue to make these calls. Short answer: I believe it continues to be a worthwhile step in the hiring process.

Although it is frustrating to a prospective employer to be given only basic information, there is a reason it happens that way. The former employers are doing just what their attorneys are advising them to do when responding to a reference check. They are refusing to give out any information that could be considered defamatory or could otherwise lead to legal liability. Because employers have been sued for saying more, most consider the risk and benefits and to limit the information they give out to dates of employment and previous job titles.

Despite the fact that previous employers will generally only give out such limited information, I believe it is still worthwhile for prospective employers to go through the exercise of inquiring. You may be surprised to learn that there are applicants who will lie on their application, so it is important to confirm basic employment history. And every once in a while, a former employer will be willing to provide some additional information especially when they have strong positive or negative feelings. Also, if you ever find your company in the position where it is defending a negligent hiring claim, it will serve you well to have documented your efforts to obtain information about an individual's previous employment. For these reasons it is advisable to not only make the calls but carefully document your efforts, even if the information you obtain simply confirms the information provided to you by the applicant.

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