



MY ACCOUNT CARDS TRAVEL REWARDS BUSINESS

United States (Change Country)

Search for Articles, Advice, and Business Owners

SIGN IN

JOIN NOW

Explore Topics

Extend Your Network

Ask a Question

Post Advice

ARTICLE

LEADERSHIP • OCTOBER 16, 2014

How to Tell if a Job Candidate Is Lying to You



Geoff Williams

freelance journalist and author, freelance journalist and author

Follow

Save to Favorites

Comments (0)

Hiring the best employees for your small business is critical to your success. Here are 4 ways to suss out the liars and keep job candidates honest.

28 **OCTOBER 16, 2014** Most employers don't expect job candidates to lie in an

interview. After all, in this day and age, when it's so easy to do a background check, why would anyone take a chance and lie about something you can confirm with a few mouse clicks?

Still, you have to expect it. "It's naive to think that all job candidates are going to be truthful," says Cathleen Faerber, managing director of **The Wellesley Group Inc.**, an executive search firm.

Richard Brenner, owner of **Chaco Canyon Consulting**, an organizational and employee performance consulting firm, agrees: "Technically, an exaggeration is a lie, but most people don't see it that way, so most people exaggerate." But it's not the exaggerations you need to be

Email

Learn From Other Entrepreneurs

Find people like you, follow their activity & discover how they succeed. Browse the member directory.



Angela Prilliman

Employee N. 011, FiveStars

Follow



Josh Sprague

President/CEO, Orange...

Follow



Sean Dawes

Co-Founder, Rocket Dove...

Follow

Topics To Follow



Marketing

2507 followers

Follow



Social Media

57480 followers


Follow



Customer Engagement

45115 followers

Follow

 concerned about. According to Brenner, you don't need to figure out the "exact truth." As he explains, "All you need is a handle on the extent of the exaggeration."

So while some lies may be little more than white lies, it's the ones that are more blatant that can end up causing future problems. Kirk Johnson, managing director of [Kirk Johnson Executive Search](#), says, "I've had job candidates customize a resume with fictitious employers ... and candidates who claimed they were still employed by their most recent employer when, in fact, they were let go months ago."

If you can't believe everything you're told during an interview, how *can* you tell if a prospective employee is flat-out lying? Try the following four tips for catching candidates in an out-and-out lie.

1. Verify What You're Told

You may not feel you have time to verify everything, but you should spot-check as much information as you can, especially the closer you get to feeling that this is a great hire and you're going to extend an offer.

Barry Maher, owner of motivational speaking firm [Barry Maher & Associates](#), has consulted on "far too many hires to take anything at face value," he says. Maher has a handy tip for catching inconsistencies on a resume: "I always tell the candidate that I'll be checking them out myself with a fine-tooth comb," he explains. "Then I ask in a completely neutral, non-accusatory voice, 'Is there anything I might uncover that's different from what's on your resume that you might want to explain now?' It's astonishing what people will tell you then."

But Maher says you'll find out even more interesting facts when you start making phone calls. "Some candidates fudge their references by substituting the name of a company friend for that of their immediate superior," Maher explains. "Call to check the reference, and the friend will tell you the candidate is a cross between Jack Welch and Mother Teresa. That's when the fun begins, especially if the candidate wasn't smart enough to send the friend a copy of their resume."

That's when Maher digs deeper to confirm the information the candidate supplied on the resume. At that point, he'll look at the resume, such as the line showing that the employee made \$70,000 a year when he worked at the company he's speaking with. Then he'll ask

You Might Like

On Target: How to Identify, Attract and Keep Your Ideal
Barry Moltz

Keep Your Eye on the Ball And Don't Ignore Your Digital Footprint
JJ Ramberg

Fueling the Hustle in Your Business
Erika Napoletano

VIEW ARTICLES IN [LEADERSHIP](#) ▶

Dig Deeper

best hiring tips hiring mistakes
interviewing tips Job Candidates
lies on resumes



SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY.
NOV 29

WELCOME CUSTOMERS IN WITH
FREE SIGNAGE AND MORE

[Start Now](#)
Terms Apply

SHOP SMALL **FOUNDING PARTNER** 

something like, "So, can you verify that the candidate made \$125,000 during their last full year there?"

"It was right around there," the friend will often say, thinking he's being cagey. "Maybe a few dollars more, a few dollars less, but that's in the ballpark."

2. If Something Looks or Sounds Off, Probe Deeper

If a red flag goes up as you're reviewing a candidate's resume or during the job interview, don't ignore your gut feelings—dig a little deeper to get the answers you need. And don't feel bad questioning the truthfulness of what a job candidate may be telling you: As their potential employer, it's your right to know what the facts are, after all.

Paul Millard, who owns the technology and engineering executive search company [The Millard Group](#), recalls interviewing one candidate who looked great on paper except for the three-year gap on his resume. When Millard asked about it, he says, "The candidate was a bit too ready to explain this gap in almost too much detail."

Millard's radar went off, and he later Googled the person. "Lo and behold, there was some jail time served during this gap," Millard says. "On to the next candidate."

While that may sound cruel to an entrepreneur who likes the idea of giving people a second chance—after all, they might think you'd never hire them if you knew the truth—it could also be a neon sign of shoddy character, and this ex-jailbird could have shown some if he'd simply told the truth.

In any case, what you never want to do is dismiss a blatant lie if you discover one. [Dennis O'Neill](#), who runs an eponymous executive coaching and assessment firm, remembers one candidate who was vying for a finance position and was just two credits shy of having an MBA. On his resume, however, the wording used to describe his academic achievements was awkward, and it gave O'Neill the sense that he might not have it.

So he asked the candidate about the wording and emphasized that the job didn't require an MBA. The candidate was emphatic, however, that he had one. Unfortunately, when O'Neill looked into it, he discovered that he didn't.

"Had he just stated that he was two courses shy of his degree, not only

would he have gotten the job, but the company would have paid for the two outstanding courses," O'Neill says. But nobody wanted to take a chance with someone who was willing to offer up an outright lie.

3. Test the Candidate

If you suspect an interviewee doesn't really have the necessary job skills despite what's on their LinkedIn profile, give your candidate a pop quiz. If you don't have enough experience to decipher the readings on the BS meter—maybe you need somebody who can create source code, and all that jargon is Greek to you—have someone more knowledgeable speak with your interviewee.

"Ask about their experience, [as well as] the details of certain situations—how they handled it, why they handled it that way and what was the outcome," suggests Steven Raz, co-founder of [Cornerstone Search Group LLC](#), a life sciences executive search firm. "By getting into this level of detail, and [especially] if you have a functional expert interviewing the person, you should be in good shape."

Frank Green, president of [ExecuSource](#), a staffing firm that specializes in accounting, finance and IT, agrees that you need to drill down to see if you've struck oil (or found a rock). "The easiest way to discover if a candidate is lying is to simply get into the nitty-gritty mechanics of it all," Greens says. "Through the course of the conversation, push the candidate to explain how a specific project in which they claim to have been the head coordinator actually worked."

4. Interrogate

If you've decided you need to dig deeper, don't be mean or relentless. After all, plenty of job applicants presumably aren't lying, and you don't want to turn off a terrific hire because you've become paranoid that everyone's lying to you. But you should ask questions until you're satisfied with the answers. "Dishonest people aren't consistent," Faerber offers. "I'll go back to clarify information and ask the same question but with a different twist."

Charles Mitchell, who co-owns the recruiting and hiring firm [All About People](#) with his wife, Sherri, emphasizes the importance of follow-up questions or asking for an example when someone tells you how great they are at a certain skill. "If the candidate stumbles through the example, you can assume there are holes in their story," Mitchell says.

"We also often ask a candidate to walk us through the daily tasks of their previous job to get a better sense of the depth of their knowledge in a particular area or function."

And if you do catch someone in a lie? What you decide to do at that point is really dependent on your own comfort level. For instance, you may want to point out the fib to see what they say. As Faerber notes, "I never let it slide. I ask for clarification and probe for the truth ... It's important for people to understand that lies or embellishments aren't acceptable."

But it's also perfectly acceptable to make some polite chitchat as you show them the door. Let the fact that you didn't offer them the position do the talking for you.

Just be careful if you decide the lie (or lies) aren't important and you make a job offer, anyway. If you do, and something detrimental happens later with that employee, you'll be sure to look back at this decision as one of your less-than-finer moments. After all, you may be a softie, but you should never take a lie lying down.

Read more articles on hiring & firing.

Photo: Getty Images

Save to Favorites

Comments (0)



Geoff Williams
freelance journalist and author, freelance journalist and author

Hi there, you can call me Geoff. I'm freelance journalist and author at freelance journalist and author and I'm based in Cincinnati Area.

Follow

Comments From The Community



Have something helpful to add?

[Sign In](#) or [Join Now](#) to comment.

EXPLORE MORE

LEADERSHIP

3 Big Reasons Small-Business Owners Should Cast Their Ballot



Kelly Spors
Editor, Writer & Content Strategis...

NOVEMBER 4, 2014 • Today's midterm election could have a large effect on the issues that matter most to small-business owners.

[READ ARTICLE](#)

MARKETING

The Secret to Landing New Customers Fast



Angela Stringfellow
Chief Ideation Officer, CODA Conc...

NOVEMBER 14, 2014 • Have you ever been desperate to find new customers for your business? These four tactics can help you attract new business in a flash.

[READ ARTICLE](#)

MORE IN LEADERSHIP OR EXPLORE WHAT'S NEW

MARKETING

Bernard Katz Glass: Using Social Media to Shape Small Business...



Phaedra Hise

NOVEMBER 7, 2014 • The store's co-owner shares her tips for successful social media marketing to help spark sales both on Small Business Saturday and for the rest of the year.

[READ ARTICLE](#)

Welcome to OPEN Forum

Exchange advice. Make smart decisions.

[Join Now](#)

Already a member?
[Sign In](#)

Users of this community bound by OPEN Forum Community Terms of Use [NEW](#)

If you need help or have feedback, please contact us at help@openforum.com

Important Note: Articles, comments and any other materials available on or through the OPEN Forum site do not reflect the opinions or analysis of the American Express Company or any of its affiliates, subsidiaries or divisions. American Express is not responsible for, and does not validate, any information, opinions, assertions or statements expressed in any such materials, or the identity or credentials of the individuals communicating through the site. Information available on the site does not, and should not be relied upon to, replace the advice of your own professional legal, tax and financial advisors.

TOPICS

- Customers
- Leadership
- Marketing
- Money
- Technology

FEATURED SERIES

- Small Business Saturday 2014
- Local Business Stories
- Getting New Customers
- CEO BootCamp
- Government Contracting
- MSNBC Your Business

CONNECT WITH US

- [NEW: Mobile App](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

[ABOUT AMERICAN EXPRESS](#)

[INVESTOR RELATIONS](#)

[CAREERS](#)

[SITE MAP](#)

[CONTACT US](#)

[PRODUCTS & SERVICES](#) | [Credit Cards](#) | [Small Business Credit Cards](#) | [Corporate Cards](#) | [Prepaid Cards](#) | [Gift Cards](#)

[LINKS YOU MAY LIKE](#) | [Membership Rewards®](#) | [Credit Reports](#) | [Serve®](#) | [Bluebird®](#) | [Accept Amex Cards](#) | [Refer a Friend](#)

[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Center](#) **New** | [AdChoices](#) | [Card Agreements](#) | [Security Center](#) | [Financial Education](#) | [Servicemember Benefits](#)

All users of our online services subject to Privacy Statement and agree to be bound by Terms of Service. Please review.

© 2014 American Express Company. All rights reserved.

