

Help! Save My Career!

by Donald Asher, America's Job Search Guru

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Dear Guru Don:

Help! I made a hiring mistake, and it's put me in a bind both as a manager and as an employee. I want to know what I should have done, so I can make sure this doesn't happen again.

I'm being groomed in a "high potential" program. For our company that means I go to a lot of soft-skills training on how to communicate, how to make client presentations, how to negotiate, advanced PowerPoint, and even what to wear. It's all rather vague, really. What I'd actually like more training on is how to do my job.

After three years as a supervisor, I recently got promoted to manager. For the first time, I have hiring authority. I got about ten minutes of training on how to conduct an interview and how to set up a new hire with H.R. It was all a blur, really.

I didn't have a good idea how to decide which person to hire, so I went with my gut. There was one person who was just head and shoulders above the other candidates. Better education, more experience, bright attitude, and plenty of confidence. So I chose her. I checked her references, registered her with H.R., and boom, I thought the hiring part was done.

I told all the other candidates that we'd made a hire, and I appreciated them, blah, blah, blah.

Then the trouble begins. My H.R. officer calls me and says, "I don't think this woman has a degree from [this elite liberal arts] college. I went to this college, and we all got bachelor of *arts*, even in physics and biology, and she's claiming a bachelor of *science* degree." To make a long story short, the H.R. officer called the college, and they said they'd never heard of my new hire.

So I called her up, and said we may have a problem, and lined it all out for her. She was perfectly calm, like this was no issue at all. She said she used to be married, and she got the degree under her maiden name, and if I had any problem with any part of her background to let her know, as she was all on the up and up. I felt like a fool, and told her to come in as scheduled on Monday. That was Friday.

When the H.R. officer tried to verify her degree under this new name, the college also said they'd never heard of her under *that* name. Never attended, never graduated, never heard of her under either name. My H.R. officer insisted that we don't tell her anything, and just let her come in on Monday.

On Monday, my H.R. officer met my new hire at the office and acted like it was great to meet someone from the old school. In about five minutes, she said she was sure this woman was a fraud. The new hire didn't know any professors, any buildings, the layout of the campus, nothing. So we challenged her, "You've never gone to [that school], have you?" This woman was escorted off the property, insisting all the way that she was a graduate of that school! It was bizarre.

Now I'm six weeks behind on my hiring project, and the whole company is talking about this incident that doesn't show me in a good light.

What should I have done?

Sign me,

Upset Gut

Dear U.G.:

Well, you have been blindsided by a resume liar! Don't feel alone. My investigations on this topic turn up that somewhere between 10% and 70% or more of resumes have substantive misstatements on them (that's another term for lies). All the studies I have read lately indicate that this problem is getting worse.

This research is conducted regularly by employers, recruiters, and academics. Depending on how the research is designed, you'll get slightly different ratios. It is frightening to note that in two recent surveys, 10% of respondents flat out admitted that they lied, so the real number has to be much higher than that.

I've been tracking this for two decades, and my aggregate feeling is that around one quarter of executive resumes have at least one blatantly nonverifiable claim on them.

To be clear, I'm not talking about an applicant who exaggerates his role in an accomplishment, or claims to be fluent in French when he'd have trouble ordering a salad in Paris. I'm talking about people who fabricate educational accomplishments and employment experiences out of smoke and thin air.

The problem is compounded by the phenomenon of diploma mills, which will mail back a seemingly legitimate diploma for a few dollars, suitable for framing. Some of these fake schools will answer the phone *and verify the accomplishment* to any caller. This situation is exacerbated by those diploma mills that actually pretend to give assignments and grade them, which in some cases even fools the "student" into believing he or she has an earned degree. There is a famous relationship guru who has one of these doctorates, and he is shameless about claiming it to this day, in spite of being outed repeatedly over it.

Finally, to make the whole thing stink worse than a skunk in a microwave, there are web sites dedicated to *helping* people fabricate resume items, the most famous of which is

[www.fakeresume.com](http://www.fakeresume.com). It is hard to tell if this site is a spoof or not, but in either case, the advice is clearly usable by those seeking to fabricate!

So, what should you have done to make a better hire? Here're my recommendations:

First, trust your gut. As Malcolm Gladwell has so thoroughly established in *Blink*, the gut is a fine decision-making instrument. *But* you have to back up the gut decision with good old fashioned rational verification. As Ronald Reagan said about making deals with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, "Trust, but verify."

There are four things any hiring authority should verify for every new hire:

1. Education
2. Title
3. Dates
4. Salary

I keep a list of accredited colleges and universities on my web site:

[www.donaldasher.com/colleges](http://www.donaldasher.com/colleges). If the school isn't listed there, that's a big warning flag. Next, with the person's name, date of graduation or attendance, and social security number, call the registrar of the university and ask to verify the education claim.

The H.R. office of old employers will readily verify dates of employment, and almost all will readily provide the official title the employee held. Most will not provide salary info, but will answer questions like this: "She is claiming a salary of \$62,000 per annum. Can you confirm or reject that number as accurate?"

Finally, the references provided by a jobseeker are just "level one" resources. An effective recruiter tracks down people who are not provided by the applicant, and asks them for "off the record" information.

Yes, this creates more work for you as a hiring officer, but you can't afford to hire the wrong people, and people who lie to you coming in the door and going to be lying to you all the way along.

Oh, and one more thing: Don't tell the other candidates you've hired someone until they have survived a week on the job. That way you won't have to start over next time.

My best wishes for your continued success,

Donald Asher

Send your career emergency to [don@donaldasher.com](mailto:don@donaldasher.com), and watch this space for Asher's response.

BIO: Donald Asher is a nationally known writer and speaker on careers and higher education. He is the author of eleven books, including *Cracking the Hidden Job Market*;

*How to Get Any Job: Life Launch and Re-Launch for Everyone Under 30; Graduate Admissions Essays*, the best-selling guide to the graduate admissions process; *Asher's Bible of Executive Resumes; Cool Colleges for the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late Blooming, and Just Plain Different*; and *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why* (named Business Book of the Year 2008 by national career columnist Joyce Lain Kennedy). Asher speaks over 100 days a year from coast to coast, to college and corporate audiences. He is eager to hear your career emergency.

#### SIDEBAR INSERT

##### Hot Books Tip:

Learn how to hire by reading these two books:

*Hiring Smart! How to Predict Winners & Losers*

By Pierre Mornell

*Hire with Your Head*

By Lou Adler