

Background Checks

By Lancelot Larsen

How many times have you heard that life is short? How many times have you thought, "Hey, I know life is short, stop reminding me!" The reason you hear all the time that life is short is because it's life's way of telling you that you don't seem to remember it often enough. You know life is short, which is why you change jobs all the time because you want to get the most out of life because life is short. So, you make the rounds and look for some new way to transition your exemplary skills and experience to new challenges. While conducting this tedious process of job-hunting, you may come across some employers who want to perform a background check on you. Most of us feel we rightfully don't have anything to hide and sign the authorization form without hesitation. We pass the form along with a toothy grin and ask, "What me worry?" Why do we do this? Because life is short, and we want to get the ball rolling fast towards that new former career. Yes, life is short. But keep in mind that neglecting to take seriously the background check could work against your job search and prolong the process. Being unemployed makes your life feel very long indeed.

Be prepared.

Sometimes background checks reveal information about you that's neither relevant nor correct or could just be taken out of context. These background reports could also provide information that is unlawfully used in the hiring process.

Obviously, employers just want to know that you are telling the truth; more than half of work applicants lie or alter information on resumes and applications regarding graduation and dates worked. The least a background check will do is verify your social security number. But it can go so far as to analyze your work history, obtain a full credit report, and look into your driving and criminal records. These days, background checks are more common because employers are being sued more frequently for negligent hiring (not checking an employee's background carefully enough). When someone gets hurt as a result, the employer is liable. Also, with the dawn of the Information Age, it is much more convenient for these background checks to get processed.

If you apply for a job, and the potential employer contacts a former supervisor, it is unlawful for that supervisor to say anything deliberately to interfere with your job search. They can say anything candid about your performance, but most employers are bound by policies to only reveal dates, incomes, and other objective information. All documents in your personnel file are open for viewing, except your medical information. Otherwise, you have a right to be informed when a background check is requested. A written authorization must be presented to the applicant. This measure is take also for credit reports, which reveals a lot about the applicant—outstanding loans, bankruptcies, liens, court cases, and judgments for actions up to ten years. But the credit bureau will not reveal references to marital status, age, race, religion, and medical information.

Employers cannot by law use certain information during the hiring practice. These include criminal history, arrest information, workers' compensation, and bankruptcies. They are available for viewing, but are limited to how they can be a deciding factor. For example, an employer can only use information from a workers' compensation claim only if the injury will interfere with job performances. Yes, the law is the law, but it's only illegal if they get caught. You have no idea what employers are really saying or discovering about you.

The following is a list of selected sources employers use for background checks:

- Driving, credit, criminal, court, education, medical, military, and State licensing records
- Social Security
- Vehicle registration
- Property ownership
- Workers' Compensation
- Bankruptcy
- Employment verification
- Character references
- Neighbor interviews

These companies are used to conduct background checks: Avert, Equifax Employment Services, CDB Infotek, Information America, Trans Union, and IRSC. Employers may also look in the phone book under "Investigators." Three web-based services for background checks are www.knowx.com, www.informus.com, and www.conficheck.com. Clearinghouses are also methods used by employers to screen potential employees. They are data exchange programs used by a group of employers to share information about employees. Some examples of clearinghouses are Employers Mutual Association (retail), DAC (truck drivers), and Employers Information Services (oil-rig workers).

If this process concerns you, the best thing you can do is order a copy of your credit report. This way, if something is not accurate, you can immediately attempt to rectify it with the credit bureau before explaining it to the interviewer. If you have an arrest record or have been to court, check your public record files to ensure accuracy. If you are applying for a job that requires driving, get a copy of your driving record from the DMV.

Moreover, do your own background check and, if necessary, hire a related company to conduct one for you. This is the best way to vouchsafe precise and truthful data on your behalf. You have the right to check your personnel file from your old job—use it.

Remember, refusing to agree to a background check will more likely than not endanger your chances of getting the job you seek. Be prepared.

ON THE NET

Background Check: Employment

jobsearch.about.com/cs/backgroundcheck/a/background.htm

Employment Background Checks: A Jobseeker's Guide

www.nickwright.com/careers/employee-law.html