

Tips for Candidates About Background Checks

BY LAURA WHEELER

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY SOUND

You've submitted your resume and received a call back. Now, several grueling interviews later, you have been offered a job—contingent upon a background check, of course. Naturally, you want to know what information the prospective employer may obtain about you, and how it might be used in the decision-making process.

A background check is a more familiar term for what is known legally as a “consumer report” or an “investigative consumer report.” This is important because there are laws that govern the procurement and use of these reports. The federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), the same legislation that governs the use and procurement of credit reports, applies to these types of reports when they are used for employment purposes. California has its own version of the FCRA, which is more stringent and affords the consumer or job-seeker more protection under the law. Under both federal and California law, the employer must disclose to the candidate that a report is being ordered and the candidate must sign an authorization, allowing the employer to receive information. Under California law, the candidate has a right to receive a copy of the report. If an employer decides not to hire a candidate based on information obtained from the report, the candidate must receive a copy of the report as well as notification from the employer that they were denied employment based on information provided in a consumer report, along with the name and contact information of the agency that provided the information. This gives you an opportunity to correct any erroneous information that may have been reported.

What information is available, and what facts are typically verified? There are many different types of verifications or checks

that are available to an employer, but it is important to keep in mind that an employer really wants to know one thing: How truthful has this candidate been in filling out the application and in answering questions in the interview process? To assess that, employers may request a verification of residence history, criminal history, motor vehicle record, credit history, past employment, and education as well as references from previous supervisors, to name a few of the more common components of a consumer report.

Candidates may wonder how they can adequately prepare themselves to undergo such scrutiny. The process is really far less invasive than it sounds. And it is important to remember what employers are really trying to uncover. Since most employers are simply trying to ascertain how honest their candidates have been, the best way to prepare for the process is to fill out the application as honestly as you can and to represent your qualifications, credentials, and experience in an accurate way. If you feel there is an issue that may be of some concern, most employers will appreciate hearing about it directly from you prior to receiving the information in the report.

Hopefully, this has given you a clearer understanding of the role of the consumer report or background check in the employment process as well as the legal rights afforded to you as a consumer. Think of it as a tool to assist you in validating the information that you have already presented and to further demonstrate that you are the most qualified and competent candidate for the job.

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Your First Day on the Job

BY NICOLE RIVARD, SPHR

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY SOUND

We took a holiday hiatus, but we're back with more tips for job-seekers as well as employers about navigating the employment process. If you'd like to catch up on our previous columns, please visit the Santa Barbara Human Resources Association Web site at www.sbhra.org and look for Santa Barbara Daily Sound along the right-hand side of the main page.

You have made a positive first impression on the hiring manager and the human resources manager, and you are now gainfully employed. On your first day, just as you did for your interview, put your best foot forward, dress appropriately, and arrive on time and ready to start. You will need to provide your employer with the appropriate identification documents to verify your eligibility to work in the United States. Make sure you are prepared to provide these documents on day one.

Your first day will mark your first impression on the rest of the staff. These are the people you will be interacting with every day and may be working very closely with. Try to establish a positive image and rapport with your coworkers from the beginning. You want to create a solid foundation of camaraderie. Learn names and working relationships as quickly as you can. This will help make your transition into your new job run smoothly.

Typically, your first day will consist of meeting your coworkers, getting acclimated to your work environment and the company culture, and filling out all necessary new hire paperwork. It is likely that your first day will include a company orientation and tour. If it does not, be sure that you ask

questions to clarify work rules, policies, and procedures so that you know how things operate at your new company and can find your way around the facility. Focus on listening more than talking. Avoid talking too much about your previous workplace – badmouthing it will make you sound negative, and talking about how great it was will probably irritate your new coworkers. Also, avoid complaining about aspects of your new job or employer; you do not want to develop a reputation as a whiner.

Starting a new job can be intimidating and nerve-racking. Remember, it is only your first day and your new employer is probably not expecting you to change the world on day one. Most likely, it will be an easy eight hours, so try to relax. Give yourself time to become familiar with your new working environment and company culture. Do not be afraid to ask questions. It is better to find out the answers than to be worried about not having them.

Finally, it is possible that your new employer, though eager to bring you on board, may not be quite ready for your arrival. If this is the case, take some initiative in starting on assignments and asking coworkers how you may proceed and possibly assist them with their assignments. Make your new coworkers your allies. You may have your new manager sold on how wonderful you are, but your new coworkers will probably still need some convincing. Show them that you are someone they want to work with.

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