



Integrity Vetting of Key Executives: The 16 Most Common Resume Lies, Misrepresentations & Material Omissions

By Christopher T. Marquet, Senior Partner, Veritas Assurance Partners
April 4, 2023

The curious and extreme case of recently elected US Representative George Santos (R-NY) has brought to the fore once again the issue of fraudulent misrepresentations in the background of executives.¹ It also illustrates the total failure of the vetting process by both political parties which is hard to understand in the current political climate.

In today's highly competitive business environment, success or failure most often rests on the judgment and actions of those officers and directors with whom investors and CEOs place their trust. For nearly 4 decades I have helped organizations of all stripes by conducting sophisticated and detailed integrity due diligence investigations into the backgrounds of prominent senior level executives.

I have noticed over the years and most recently with Veritas Assurance Partners, a number of common categories where executives have most often embellished their resumes and/or omitted certain key details that would not reflect positively on them if disclosed. In this article, I outline the 16 most common resume lies, misrepresentations, & material omissions and how to spot them.

¹ <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/23520848/george-santos-fake-resume>

The Statistics

First – some statistics to illustrate and frame this problem:

- According to a survey conducted by StandOutCV in 2022, more than 55% of Americans have lied on their resume at least once and that 30% claimed that they have not been caught.²
- Another study from 2022, conducted by ResumeBuilder, found that 72% of respondents admitted to lying on their resumé and that 35% of Americans have lied in the hiring process.³
- An earlier survey, conducted by Checkster in 2020, indicated that as much as 78% of job seekers misrepresented – or at least thought about misrepresenting – themselves on job applications and resumes.⁴
- A 2017 study by HireRight found that 85% of survey respondents found a lie or misrepresentation on a candidate's resume or job application during the screening process.⁵

These are sobering statistics for business owners and recruiters demonstrating the need to verify credentials, particularly for senior level executives and those who would have fiduciary duties within an organization.

The Top 16 Resume Lies

In my experience, the falsehoods, misrepresentations, lies and material omissions fall into at least 16 categories:

1. Fraudulent Educational Credentials

The falsification of educational credentials, including institution attended, degrees, majors, GPAs and graduation dates is one of the most common resume lies. The number of prominent executives who have perpetrated such a misrepresentation is legion. My favorite example is the case of Marilee Jones, the former Dean of Admissions at MIT. Jones resigned from her position in April 2007 after it was revealed that she had fabricated her

² <https://standout-cv.com/usa/study-fake-job-references-resume-lies#how-many>

³ <https://www.resumebuilder.com/1-in-3-have-lied-in-the-hiring-process/>

⁴ https://www.checkster.com/are_you_hiring_charlatans

⁵ <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20170419005191/en/10th-Annual-HireRight-Benchmark-Survey-Finds-48>

academic degrees.⁶ Ironically, Jones had co-authored a guide the year before on the college admission process: Less Stress, More Success: A New Approach to Guiding Your Teen Through College Admissions and Beyond. Lying about your undergraduate or graduate degrees or other academic credentials is a sure way to lose your job and one of the easiest things to verify through third-party verification services and/or contacting Registrar Offices.

2. Fraudulent Employment History

Employment background misrepresentation, such as fabricating or omitting past employers, is also one of the most common resume lies. An interesting example of this is the case of Al “Chainsaw” Dunlap, the former CEO of Sunbeam Corp in Florida. Dunlap was removed from his position amid accounting irregularities at Sunbeam which had been subject to shareholder litigation and SEC enforcement action. During the discovery process in the litigation, it was revealed that Dunlap had omitted two earlier positions from his resume because he had been fired from those jobs including one in which his prior employer had accused him of accounting fraud.⁷ Ironically, Dunlap also wrote a memoir entitled, Mean Business: How I Save Bad Companies and Make Good Companies Great. Once again, this is a relatively easy fraud to uncover by contacting prior employers or reviewing public records and corporate announcements.

3. Manipulating Dates of Employment & Employment Gaps

A subset of the above fraudulent employment history and perhaps the most common resume lie, is the manipulation of employment dates. This is typically done to cover gaps in employment history or obfuscate a bad shortly held position. When verifying the facts by contacting prior employers, alarm bells should ring when the dates of employment given by the applicant do not match the dates of employment in the records of the employer. What is the applicant hiding – a job from which they were fired or even jail time?

⁶ <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2007/4/26/mit-admissions-dean-resigns-after-fake/>

⁷ <https://www.afr.com/politics/al-dunlaps-disgrace-20010721-j6zti>

4. Fraudulent Job Titles, Duties & Responsibilities

This resume fraud is also a subset of employment history misrepresentation where job duties, responsibilities and titles are inflated, embellished or in some case made up out of whole cloth. This is typically done to make a candidate appear more experienced than they actually are. It is also quite common for applicants to tailor a resume to a specific prospective position. Confirm actual positions held, titles and responsibilities through interviews of colleagues and superiors.

5. Misleading Skills, Experience & Qualifications

Candidates may exaggerate or embellish their skills and qualifications to make themselves appear more qualified. Skills such as technology skills, operating experience and financial qualifications are common areas for misleading statements. The vetting of prospective executives should include testing and verification of key skills necessary to perform their responsibilities.

6. Faking or Exaggerating Honors & Awards

Integrity due diligence of key executives should include the verification of honors and awards they claim have been conferred upon them.

Organizations have often been embarrassed by an executive who has made a fraudulent claim for an industry or academic award. Christopher Massimine, who resigned as Managing Director of the Pioneer Theater Company in Utah after media outlets revealed him to be a serial liar, is a good case in point. Massimine reportedly lied about not only his background, education, employment history, experience, but it was also revealed that he had fraudulently claimed to have received the “Humanitarian of the Year” by the “National Performing Arts Action Association” in 2019.^{8 9}

7. Fraudulent Certifications & Licenses

Candidates may falsely claim to have certifications or licenses to make themselves appear more qualified. Professional licensing and certification can be verified relatively easily. Make sure that professional licenses (such

⁸ <https://www.fox13now.com/news/fox-13-investigates/fox-13-investigates-high-paid-university-of-utah-executive-lied-on-resume-published-fake-articles>

⁹ <https://www.sltrib.com/news/nation-world/2022/11/29/can-this-man-stop-lying/>

as for attorneys, accountants, broker-dealers, medical professionals, etc.) are current and in good standing. It is also important to check that there have been no complaints, censures, disciplinary actions or debarments. A 2022 malpractice lawsuit filed in New Jersey by a client against Thomas Fieger Jr. alleged that Fieger falsely claimed that he was admitted to practice law in that state.¹⁰ Sadly, this type of misrepresentation is all too common.

8. Inflating Salary History

Candidates will inflate their salary history in order to negotiate a higher salary upon hiring. Requiring legitimate documented proof, such as W-2 forms helps deter this kind of fraud. One public case involves Steven Mandala, who obtained a position as a broker with Merrill Lynch in 2009 wherein he received a hiring bonus based upon the fraudulent salary history he provided.¹¹ Mandala also provided phony documentation from FINRA¹² in support of his salary claims. He was charged with theft and ordered to repay the bonus and other fees.

9. Falsifying Military Background – Stolen Valor

Sadly, there are those who fabricate or embellish US military service and military decorations awarded. This type of fraud is known as “stolen valor” and is a criminal offense under the The Stolen Valor Act of 2013.

Christopher Crawford claimed to be a combat veteran wounded by an improvised explosive device in order to get a job as executive officer of American Legion Post 568 in Pennsylvania from which he was later arrested for embezzlement.¹³ Crawford was briefly enlisted in US Army but he was actually discharged under “other than honorable conditions” after he went AWOL during basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. He was later criminally charged and sentenced to at least six years in prison. We should note that Military service can be a difficult part of a resume to verify. Most historical military records are maintained at the National Personnel Records

¹⁰ <https://www.law.com/njlawjournal/2022/03/08/malpractice-suit-says-pennsylvania-lawyer-falsely-claimed-he-could-practice-in-new-jersey/>

¹¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/merrilllynch-mandala-idCNN2318925620110523>

¹² FINRA, The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, is a private American corporation that acts as a self-regulatory organization that regulates member brokerage firms and exchange markets.

¹³ <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/02/26/pennsylvania-man-found-guilty-of-stolen-valor-and-theft/>

Center in St. Louis, Missouri.¹⁴ However, the turn-around time for obtaining military records on an individual can take weeks. Given the lag time, it is advisable to make employment offers contingent upon the receipt of verifying military records. Current US military service is verified through the Defense Manpower Data Center's (DMDC) Military Verification service.¹⁵

10. Fraudulent References

Candidates have provided fake or false references to make themselves appear more qualified. A 2014 survey by SocialTalent.com revealed that 17% of employee respondents had provided fake references when applying to their jobs.¹⁶ I was involved in an integrity due diligence investigation on an up-and-coming executive which went fine until it was determined he had provided a reference which was actually a telephone number that he answered and provided a glowing reference for himself. Be sure that references provided are independent. The vetting team should also contact “non-references” – individuals who have direct knowledge of the subject but not provided as specific references. These people are typically identified in the background investigation, and would include other former colleagues, supervisors, business partners, litigants and the like.

11. Falsifying Reasons For Leaving Previous Job

A 2020 survey by Checkster revealed that a full 45% of respondents provided false reasons for leaving a prior employment position.¹⁷ Candidates may provide false or misleading reasons for leaving a previous position, such as claiming to have resigned when they were actually terminated for cause. Contacting prior employers and determining whether an individual is eligible for rehire is key to this verification process. Since HR departments are generally limited to providing only “name, rank & serial number” regarding prior employment verifications, many details are not going to be disclosed. However, the rehire eligibility factor is one of those points that can be provided. Additionally, a poor employment experience may be disclosed in other public records such as in a lawsuit filed by or against the former employee.

¹⁴ <https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center>

¹⁵ <https://scra.dmdc.osd.mil/scra/#/home>

¹⁶ <https://www.socialtalent.com/blog/recruiting/fake-references>

¹⁷ https://www.checkster.com/are_you_hiring_charlatans

12. Concealing Criminal History

It is understandable that an executive under consideration for a key position within a company would not want to disclose if they had been convicted of a felony. Obviously, such obfuscation is not in the interest of the potential employer and a thorough vetting includes independent searches for criminal matters on both the federal and state levels. One recent example was revealed in a civil lawsuit filed 2023 by the Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City against Lee Brown, who had been hired to oversee the agency's finances in 2015. The suit alleges that Brown had misappropriated \$2.4 million from the agency and that he had a concealed his prior criminal history, including forgery and theft convictions and that he lied about his degrees and Certified Public Accountant licensing, among many other critical resume lies.¹⁸ There are limitations on using criminal records as the basis for not hiring an individual, which varies from state to state.¹⁹ Generally, felonies within the prior 7-year period are acceptable determinants but each state must be checked for their respective limits.

13. Not Disclosing Bankruptcies/Liens & Financial Issues

Applicants with potential critical fiduciary duties must be vetted thoroughly to include whether they have had a history of financial troubles both personally and in their prior employment positions. These public records are readily available and must not be overlooked. A new CFO should not have a stack of tax liens filed against them or personal bankruptcies without valid reasons.

14. Not Disclosing Relevant Civil Litigation

Key officers, directors and executives should not only be free of criminal matters, but certain civil disputes may also reveal poor prior actions or experiences with other organizations with which they have been affiliated. For example, a lawsuit filed by a former employee against an executive alleging theft of intellectual property or sexual harassment should be a huge red flag.

¹⁸ <https://www.kcur.org/news/2023-01-27/lawsuit-says-kansas-city-development-agency-controller-lied-about-his-past-stole-millions>

¹⁹ <https://www.goodhire.com/resources/articles/how-far-back-do-background-checks-go/>

15. Inflating Volunteer Experience

Volunteerism and charity involvement is an important characteristic for executives these days. Falsifying or inflating this experience reflects poorly on the character of a prospective corporate officer and should be verified. Sadly, this happens from time to time as evidenced in a 2014 case, wherein a group of students in Illinois were caught in a scandal in which they had lied about local volunteer work, including forging signatures which put their graduations in peril.²⁰

16. Overstating Language Skills

Candidates may exaggerate their language skills to make themselves appear more fluent and qualified. Obviously, this is critical for officers posted in overseas locations as expats or otherwise conducting negotiations with countries where English is not the primary language.

The bottom line is that President Ronald Reagan's old adage – "Trust but verify," is still highly valid when hiring/acquiring or otherwise bringing a key officer into the fold of an organization. In fact, we at Veritas have simple three-step program for conducting integrity due diligence investigations on senior executives: Verify, Verify and Verify. By doing so, organizations will increase the quality of their management team, decrease the potential for fraud, waste and abuse and increase the probability of success.

Note About Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) Compliance

Employers conducting background checks, known as a "consumer report," for the purpose of hiring decisions are subject to complying with the Fair Credit Reporting Act.²¹ Simply put, it requires consent by the applicant to conduct the check, and the right to review the report and provisions for contesting adverse information that may have been identified and potentially erroneous. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has published a summary of these rights.²²

²⁰ <https://patch.com/illinois/oaklawn/dozens-of-students-might-not-graduate-in-bizarre-cheating-scandal-at-illinois-high-school>

²¹ <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-ga/pages/fair-credit-reporting-act.aspx>

²² <https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/employer-background-checks-your-rights>

About the Author

Christopher T. Marquet is Senior Partner of Veritas Assurance Partners, an international investigation, business intelligence, litigation support and risk mitigation firm, based in Miami, Florida. Chris began his investigative career at Kroll Associates in New York in 1983 and has been an industry executive and thought leader for many years. He has held executive positions at Kroll Associates, Citigate Global Intelligence (co-founder), Marquet International (founder), SunBlock Systems and Vance International. Chris has written and lectured extensively about issues such as ethics in investigations, privacy issues, white collar fraud, integrity due diligence, workplace violence and risk mitigation. Chris is regularly quoted in the media on such topics as major embezzlement cases, Ponzi schemes, white collar fraud and resume fraud. He has managed thousands of integrity, risk, security and investigative projects around the world over the course of his lengthy career. These matters have been diverse and include integrity due diligence; litigation support fact finding; investigations into intellectual property theft, counterfeit & diversion of products, environmental disputes, white collar fraud, threats & workplace violence, employee misconduct inquiries; hostile takeovers and proxy battles; competitive intelligence, corporate compliance & security; executive protection; crisis management and insurance disputes. Chris is a 1983 graduate of Dartmouth College with an AB degree in Physics, Economics and Philosophy. He can be contacted at cmarquet@veritasap.com or (617) 733-3304.

About Veritas Assurance Partners

Veritas Assurance Partners (“Veritas”) is an integrated team of professionals including former US government executive level officials, long-time respective investigative & risk consultants and world-class financial investigators supported by foreign former senior level officials with successful careers in private industry and government. Team members’ careers include banking, finance, commerce, law, politics, economics, law enforcement, investigations & intelligence, military, diplomacy, medical, journalism, corporate security, risk mitigation and others. Since 2010 Veritas has provided actionable business intelligence, complex problem resolution, risk mitigation, crisis response, global business advice, independent fact finding and project execution support to a wide range of prominent companies and law firms. The team of experienced US and foreign experts is led by three managing partners, including the two co-founders of Veritas, Manuel Supervielle, former US Army Colonel and lawyer; Billy Marlin, a Certified Fraud Examiner, and former managing director for large investigative and risk consulting firms such as Kroll Associates, Pinkerton and Navigant Consulting; and industry veteran & investigative expert, Chris Marquet, a former senior executive of Kroll Associates, Citigate Global Intelligence (co-founder), Vance International, Marquet International (founder) & SunBlock Systems. Collectively the three team leaders have nearly 100 years of experience uncovering facts, analyzing issues and solving complex problems. For more information, visit www.veritasap.com.