

Beware of job hunting scams

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

With high rates of unemployment nationwide, almost everybody knows someone who is out of work and actively looking for a job. Adding insult to injury, many scammers are now taking advantage of this opportunity to prey on these job seekers, according to the Better Business Bureau (BBB).

“The dismal employment rate means that a lot of people are desperate for work and may be grasping for any job, which creates a great opportunity for scammers,” said Stephen A. Cox, President and CEO of the Council of Better Business Bureaus. “Not thoroughly researching a job opportunity can make a bad situation even worse and a victim can lose hundreds or even thousands of dollars to any number of job-related scams.”

The experts at the BBB recommend looking out for these red flags when searching for a job:

—The employer offers the opportunity to become rich without leaving home. While many legitimate businesses allow employees to work from home, there are also many scammers trying to take advantage of senior citizens, stay-at-home moms, students and disabled workers looking to make money conveniently at home. Job hunters should use extreme caution when considering a work-at-home offer and always research the company first.

—The salary and benefits offered seem too good to be true. Phony employers might brag about exceptionally high salary potential and excellent benefits for little work and no experience necessary, in order to lure unsuspecting job hunters into their scams.

—Employer e-mails are rife with grammatical and spelling errors. Online fraud is often perpetrated by scammers located outside the U.S. Their first language usually isn't English and this is often evident in their poor grasp of the language.

—The employer is quick to ask for personal information. A typical scam involves awarding someone a job without an interview and then asking for personal information, such as Social Security or bank account numbers.

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A job applicant should never give out his or her Social Security or bank account numbers over the phone or e-mail. It should be done in person, even for a telecommuting job, and only after he or she has confirmed the job is legitimate.

—The job requires one to wire money. Many phony jobs require the employee to cash a check sent by the company through the mail and then wire a portion of the money on to another entity. Reasons given for this requirement vary from scam to scam. The check might clear the employee's bank account but will eventually turn out to be a fake and the employee is out the money he or she wired back to the scammers.

To make sure one is working for a legitimate company, ask to speak with the previous person in the position, do a quick Internet search for the company, and check with the local Better Business Bureau. Employees also can visit bbb.org for more tips and information.