

## CV problems

### Background

You are reviewing the performance assessments of a number of graduate trainees within your firm and also have been reading their CV's with a view to offering one of them a position in your department, when they complete their training. The name of Tom catches your eye because he was a contemporary of your son's at school, before going on to a different University, from which he appears to have graduated with a good degree. He has received excellent reports from the various attachments that he has served and you feel that he would make a good addition to your team. However, because of the highly decentralised nature of the firm you do not meet all of the trainees and have not seen Tom since your son introduced him briefly at a school function.

Consequently, the next time you are talking with your son, you mention to him that Tom is now working in your firm and that he seems to have done well at University. Your son expresses surprise saying that he had heard that Tom had dropped out of university after the first year to go travelling, following the death of his mother from cancer.

As a result, you contact HR department and advise them of your potential interest in offering Tom a permanent position, but tell them of the apparent discrepancy in his CV and suggest that they should investigate this.

After a few days a senior HR manager comes to see you to discuss Tom's CV and thanks you for bringing the matter to his attention. He says that there appears to have been a breakdown in procedures as Tom was offered a job on the graduate training scheme following employment, originally on a temporary basis, which had not required him to be a graduate. Consequently, Tom has been employed for the past two years without complying with this requirement.

You are told that this matter has now been pursued, as a result of which Tom has told HR that he is not able to produce the required certificate as he had not actually graduated. You are told by HR that Tom, at the end of his first year and following his mother's death had been allowed to suspend his studies for a year and he had left university, with a view to spending a bit of time "clearing his head" but fully intending to resume his studies.

In the event, on returning from travelling, Tom, being short of money, had started work as a temporary employee in a branch of your firm, telling HR that he had been at University before going travelling. Somehow this had been translated on his file into his being awarded a degree and, after impressing the people with whom he worked, he was encouraged to apply for the firm's graduate training programme and, after interview, was accepted on to it. Although he was apparently asked about his time at university, he was careful to avoid stating that he had graduated and he maintains that he believed that everyone knew the true situation.

## **The dilemma**

This situation appears to have arisen as a result of an internal error within the firm, although you get the impression that Tom was actually aware of this but did nothing to discourage the misconception. Accordingly, you are in something of a quandary as how best to proceed.

## **Optimum solution**

You feel that there are four potential courses of action open to you or the firm:

- You feel sympathetic towards Tom because of his personal loss and, since it was the firm's fault that they did not require him to produce his degree certificate, the current situation is their fault. Consequently, Tom's employment should be allowed to continue.
- You consider that Tom, although he has not been overtly dishonest, has not been as open and honest as a position with your firm requires. Therefore, regardless of the circumstances and his good performance as a trainee, he should be asked to leave the firm.
- Tom was employed as a temp, without being required to have a degree. Because he has performed well and the firm is not blameless, he should be allowed to remain as a full time employee, but outside the graduate programme.
- You will tell HR that this is a recruitment issue over which you have no jurisdiction. Therefore you have no intention of becoming directly involved, and HR should be guided by your firm's employment policies.

## **Considerations**

There is a difference between exaggerating the importance of your position and resultant responsibilities on a CV and telling a deliberate lie. Whilst putting the best gloss on your employment and education history is understandable, and because the actual role for which you are applying is unlikely to have been spelled out in detail, a degree of role/achievement inflation is inevitable. However, saying that you have achieved something or been awarded something which you have not, is dishonest.

Notwithstanding the above, you may feel sympathetic towards Tom's personal situation and, because he was a school friend of your son, you may be tempted to take a more subjective view than otherwise you might. Nevertheless, if you simply allow his employment to continue, it does send the wrong message about standards of honesty. And how might this decision be viewed by those people who have actually achieved the necessary qualifications and have not been offered a job? The most positive aspect is that Tom has performed very well at the jobs that he has been doing, but the fundamental point is that the judgement is about standards of honesty, not competence.

Alternatively and, perhaps, more appropriately, you judge Tom solely on his standard of honesty, which has been found wanting. Accordingly, you consider that the firm has no real option but to dismiss him. The fact that he is at an early stage in his working life should make much simpler his choice of what to do next, which might even include going back to university!

The option of allowing Tom to continue to work for the firm appears to be an attractive alternative, although it does duck the issue of whether you consider that Tom, in fact, has been dishonest. If that is considered to be the paramount issue, then this is not an option but, if the consensus view is that the firm is as much to blame as Tom, then this represents a reasonable compromise.

Finally, you may feel that this problem has arisen only because of someone else's short-comings; therefore it is a matter solely for them. However, the fact is that it is a matter in which you have become involved and, whilst you may not be the final arbiter, it is entirely appropriate that you have a view, which you should make known.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly a degree of blame attaches to the firm in that it has failed to adhere to its own procedures. Additionally, Tom has demonstrated that he can perform on a par with the other members of the graduate training scheme. However, his performance is not the issue, which remains about standards of honesty. It may be felt that whilst Tom has not been actively dishonest, he appears to have done little or nothing to discourage the misconceptions about his degree status. Therefore the most appropriate course of action is for the firm to tell Tom that he is unable to continue on the graduate training programme but, because of his satisfactory performance whilst on the programme, to offer him the alternative of continuing with the firm, but as a member of the mainstream staff.