

A Sermon on Employment Paranoia

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for November 5th, 2023 (and beyond)

Apparently, job seekers and employers alike have much reason to fear. In 2021, the FTC received 21,848 valid complaints about employment scammers seeking to scam job seekers. Source: <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2023-01-12/job-scams-skyrocket-linkedin-indeed-pandemic> 85% of such fraud goes unreported. Source: <https://www.theglobaltreasurer.com/2015/03/23/85-of-fraud-and-cybercrime-unreported/#:~:text=85%25%20of%20fraud%20and%20cybercrime%20unreported%20%2D%20The%20Global%20Treasurer> This suggests 145,653 employment scams went unreported. They target online job search services like Ziprecruiter.com to give the appearance of legitimacy or a false sense of security. And, sometimes they ask for personal information you shouldn't share with anyone such as your full social security number and claim they won't consider applicants desperately seeking work who don't provide it. Some mislead applicants asking they agree to full background checks and won't consider those who refuse even where such background checks are unlawful or only permitted under very limited circumstances where it has been established that the applicant was convicted of a crime within the last 10 years. 111,755 job seekers had their identity stolen by employment scams in 2022. Source: <https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/identity-theft-statistics/> It looks like maybe the job seekers may want to run background checks on all prospective employers before considering applying even if in desperate need of a job and trying to stay optimistic.

Arguably paranoid employers exhibit this by unlawfully requiring background checks out of compliance with state laws where limited to only those convicted of a crime and requiring drug screening where not required by law. The reasons employers would do something so arguably stupid and unethical:

1. They are unlawful, incompetent, and unethical. Their goal is to create a hostile work environment where employees are confused and morale is low since everyone is treated like a suspect. Smart employees will know that that background check question "Do you agree to a full background check in compliance with state and federal law?" was unlawful unless a follow-up to a question regarding criminal conviction being answered in the affirmative within a specific time-frame, and that the way they went about getting consent was deceptive or coercive and may wonder how much more dishonesty and disregard for the law they might expect going forward. That question could be read as giving consent to it being done if answered in the affirmative. No would automatically disqualify an applicant from further consideration.
2. They have been a victim of crime and are hyper-vigilant with severe trauma and trust issues they've not yet learned to manage without treating everyone like a potential threat. They feel they need to know everything they can about everyone they may interact with right now. Otherwise, they just can't. They filled out a form that gave a list of questions or suggested possible questions they could re-word if they wanted to add as further info on applications and liked that one. They didn't know there were limits to when they

could legally ask it or perform such a background check. As such, totally horrified that they are not in compliance and victimizing others inadvertently.

In regards to drug testing, only 10% of the US population has ever had a substance abuse/use disorder ever in their lives. Source: <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/10-percent-us-adults-have-drug-use-disorder-some-point-their-lives>

“Approximately 2.9 million Californians (9%) age 12 and older had a substance use disorder in the past year. Six percent reported symptoms that met the criteria for abuse of or dependence on alcohol, and about 4% reported meeting criteria for abuse of or dependence on illicit drugs.” Source: <https://www.chcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SubstanceUseDisorderAlmanac2022.pdf> That means 90-96% of applicants probably drug-free or drug-free within reason. So, a company paying to test and background check all applicants when 4-10% may even meet the criteria for being suspected and 90-96% totally not an issue for them is spending: \$50-\$650 per applicant or employee per drug-screen (minimum \$50) and \$30-\$50 per employee full background check. A minimum of \$80/applicant or employee each time where the odds either will be an issue are 1 in 10 or less. As I've said before, if there were an 8-10% chance of rain, would you bring an umbrella? Rephrased, if there were a 90-96% chance of sunshine, would you wear sun-block? #TaoFu. What if the umbrella was a rental and cost \$80 minimum each use and there was always only an 8% chance of rain, would you rent one daily just in case?" It's just stupid, fiscally irresponsible, indicative of unethical, unlawful, and/or incompetent practices, and I really don't care what everyone else is doing according to anyone who would make that argument because not everyone else does it, so that just shows immaturity and doubling down on stupid to even make that argument under the circumstances.

How transparent do we actually need and want everyone to be including ourselves professionally and personally? Are you holding others to standards you don't yourself meet? If you are an employer, would a prospective employee see your practices as deceptive, coercive, and demoralizing before they've even met you for a first interview? Would the opening of this sermon be reason for excellent candidates to avoid you if your first impression on them was that you assume everyone's a liar and acting in bad faith so want to invade their privacy before you've even met? If you are a prospective employee, do you find it indicative of being bad at capitalism if an employer spends \$80 or more every time there is a slim chance of it being helpful and of it resulting in their being investigated for violating state and local laws where they may be potentially fined or shut down? To me the risks to the business in terms of being demoralizing, where low or poor morale can kill a business, and any unethical or unlawful policies or practices that facilitate hostile or demoralizing environments that may result in regulatory actions including fines and loss of any licenses to operate, outweigh any benefits of being out of compliance and creating such a toxic work environment.

But, we'd all feel better if we knew or could know the whole story and any violations already reported on any company we may consider applying to if seeking work. In fact, savvy job seekers might do their own research and find a company's history of lawsuits, regulatory violations, and/or current unlawful or unethical practices even in the hiring

process, reason to look elsewhere, leaving only the least favorable or most desperate candidates for those employers to choose from in the first place which would explain their vigilance in demanding more transparency from their potential employees. It could also be that such owners or hiring managers are abusive and feel any state laws abuse their property rights by holding them to any standard so visit the same abuse on their subordinates on some power trip because in some way the state has made them feel impotent.

Have you eaten at Jack In The Box since the E Coli issues or Subway since their former spokesperson Jared was convicted of sex crimes? Would you work at either business? Would you invest in a franchise opportunity with either? What about Amazon.com or Microsoft where both have been investigated and/or prosecuted for antitrust violations? And, those are the ones we feel most secure applying to for jobs because we know them. Then, we read about or experience how there are employment scams where people claiming to offer jobs mean to criminally harm us by stealing our identities and more.

We can all treat everyone like drug addicts and/or criminals whether seeking employment or to employ, and we can all make the case for doing so. But, it isn't fiscally responsible, practical, nor even interacting with the free market in good faith to do so. It is also unreasonable given 90-96% of all applicants are acting in good faith. 40% of employers are penalized each year "for failing to deposit withholdings, depositing the wrong amount of withholdings, or for incorrect filing." Source: <https://www.surepayroll.com/resources/terminology/payroll/payroll-penalties> And, that's just one noncompliance issue and the percentage that are out of compliance with that each year. But, 60% get that one right annually and we shouldn't judge all based on the 40% who are prone to error and require correction.

In closing, those who believe only 3.8% of the United States is unemployed at this time due to the misunderstanding of what the reported unemployment rate indicates, which is the percentage of the population receiving unemployment benefits, not the actual number of job seekers, let me clarify. I understand why some would think background checks or drug screening of the small percentage of unemployed might be warranted if only 3.8% of the United States was unemployed, but where unlawful and/or unethical still ill-advised. 142,577,000 individual income tax returns were filed total for the 2022 tax year. Source: <https://www.efile.com/efile-tax-return-direct-deposit-statistics/> Now, even the retired or disabled receiving Social Security or Social Security Disability Insurance benefits have to file tax returns even if they have no other income. This means many of those filing income tax returns are not currently employed, but are retired or disabled. The US population is 331.9 million people of which 74 million are minors under the age of 18. 55% of minors 16 and older are employed, but may or may not file income tax depending on whether they meet the threshold, their legal guardians claim their income on their returns, or they believe they are due a refund for taxes withheld from wages. That suggests 40,700,000 minors/youth are working and they may or may not file tax returns. That means 33,300,000 children/minors/youth are unemployed. So, before I give you the number on adults that have no income and don't file income tax returns, I'll first subtract 33,300,000 unemployed children from the entire US population before

giving a number or percentage on the actual unemployment rate in terms of the percentage of the adult population that is unemployed and has no income. That subtraction leaves us with a total US potentially working/individual income tax filing population of 298,600,000, but only 142,577,000 have any income whether from a retirement benefit like Social Security or from current wages or salaries. That means 47.7% of the US has an income right now and 52.3% have no income right now.

Even incarcerated people have to file tax returns and so assuming convicts or drug addicts are making up the majority of the job seeking public seems excessive or even paranoid. Source: https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/reentry_council_mythbuster_federal_taxes.pdf

And, the majority of addicts are addicted to alcohol, not any illegal/illicit substances. Even if you assume all the ex-convicts and addicts are actively looking for work and applying, it's likely about 6% of applicants that might be eligible for a background check, given around 2% of convicts are currently incarcerated at the local, state, or federal level. 40% of ex-convicts are employed within the first year of their release. Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/06/business/economy/jobs-hiring-after-prison.html#:~:text=An%20estimated%2060%20percent%20of,are%20unemployed%20a%20year%20later>. So, 40% of 8% is 3.2% meaning 4.8% of ex-convicts potentially make up part of the 52.3% seeking work right now. You may remember about 2% are currently incarcerated and may also be paying income tax thereby making 2.8% of the total potential applicants possibly eligible for a background check and/or drug screen. And, that's a small fraction to go to so much trouble and expense to weed out because you don't trust your own judgment, references provided, nor those who apply and believe you are likely to hire one of the 2.8% if you don't do that at the same time showing no concern for how it impacts morale or the overall perception of your company to applicants nor any legal issues it may cause for you or your company both in private suit and regulatory non-compliance penalties.

To each their own. Often those who find everyone suspect are suspect themselves.

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.