

What lies beneath: Why Due Diligence is becoming the phrase nobody can afford to ignore.



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I've been involved in senior appointments for more than thirty years (as an HR Director, a Head Hunter and a Cabinet Office Independent Public Appointments Assessor) the saying that 'reputation is hard won but easily lost' has never felt more relevant? Appointing people without proper scrutiny, and rigorous due diligence persists, and the fall out continues to dominate the news cycle. Senior leaders should know better. So should the people appointing them.

Have you ever 'embellished' your CV? Most of us have. But in an age of AI-powered screening, increased transparency and ever more rigorous due diligence, now is the time to make sure

your record is absolutely water tight.

Recent high profile appointments demonstrate how quickly questions over integrity can overshadow years of achievement. A Parliamentary inquiry concluded that the process leading to Peter Mandelson's appointment as UK Ambassador to the United States was deeply flawed and failed to apply the normal checks and balances expected for such a sensitive role. Questions continue to be raised about the quality of the vetting, the due diligence undertaken and the overall appointment process.

Former Chancellor Rachel Reeves faced persistent criticism over claims that she had spent "a decade" at the Bank of England. Subsequent reporting showed that her actual tenure was closer to five and a half years, including a period spent studying at the London School of Economics. There were other discrepancies too. And let's not forget the high-water mark of sleaze, Matt

Handcock appointing his lover now partner, Gina Coladangelo first as an adviser and then as one of his paid Non-Executives on the board of the Department of Health and Social Care.

The former Chair of the King's Foundation and the Lloyds Bank Foundation, the dynamic and charismatic Ann Limb, appointment to the House of Lords attracted significant scrutiny after reports that she had claimed academic qualifications, including an MA and a PhD, that had not in fact been awarded. The explanation given was that these were errors, and the peerage ultimately proceeded.

Martin Thomas, the Government's preferred candidate to become Chair of the Charity Commission, resigned before taking office after allegations of bullying and misconduct became public. Subsequent reviews highlighted concerns not only about disclosures made during the

appointment process, but also about the quality of the due diligence undertaken by DCMS. References had not been completed before the appointment was announced and key checks appear not to have been carried out. It was a stark reminder that due diligence only has value if it is undertaken properly and at the right stage of the process. The public appointments process continues to fail amid the supine oversight of William Shawcross.

And still headline news, Cambridge sociology professor Jason Arday resigned amid allegations of plagiarism and questions over his fabricated back story. These are not junior figures. Mandelson, Reeves and Limb are among the most experienced and high-profile names in British public life. Jason Arday, was Cambridge's youngest Black professor and a high profile success story. Whatever the merits of each individual case, they all underline the same point: senior leaders should know better, and all organisations should be carrying out better due diligence.

I am still amazed that appointments are

sometimes made after just a briefest of conversation and announced, despite still being 'subject to confirmation' or 'satisfactory references'. Due diligence and verbal references should not be the final hurdle. They should be a key part of the decision making process and fully assessed when an appointment is being finalised. If you are being supported by a search firm, they should be triangulating this for you before a final panel interview, not as an afterthought. Claims of experience should always be tested. If academic and professional qualifications are required, they should be checked! This is not rocket science or trying to navigate HMRC or Social Care!

Always have multiple steps and stages. Do a 'Press Test' and examine actual and perceived conflicts of interest. Just because an appointee is 'senior' or a 'catch' they should never be given a free pass. I won't list all the other checks you can consider. I'm a big fan of verbal referencing (not relying solely on carefully curated, written testimonials, which are pretty worthless these days). 360 referencing, speaking not only to a political/Non Executive

leaders of different political hues, but also peers, board colleagues and direct reports. Often, the most valuable insights come from those who have worked alongside a candidate day to day. There is a skill in doing this, not something that should ever just be delegated to junior staff.

The lesson is simple. Organisations need to improve their due diligence. And, assume that everything on your CV, LinkedIn profile and public biography could be independently verified tomorrow. Because increasingly, it will be. Don't be the next headline.

#DueDiligence
#Governance #JasonArday
#Leadership
#BoardAppointments
#Trustees #Chairs
#NonExecutiveDirectors
#Chiefexecutives
#ExecutiveSearch
#CharityGovernance
#Recruitment #Attenti
#Reputation
#PeterMandelson
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