

Life Letter *mature*

Now is the time to be especially wary

Uncertain economic times and rising rates of unemployment are creating a new breed of desperate people. Some are turning to frauds and scams as a way out of their troubles. Others are becoming more susceptible to schemes they had hoped would help but are being bilked out of their dwindling cash reserves instead. Hard times tend to bring more frauds and scams out of the woodwork.

Fraudsters are becoming more and more creative at their craft. This comes at a time when financially desperate people are more likely to fall prey to scams as they seek a way out of money trouble. You can protect your hard earned resources by being wary.

Karen got a phone call from someone claiming to be from a charity she often supported and was told they were having a fundraising drive. When she asked for a donation form to be mailed to her so she could mail a cheque, she was told they were only doing over-the-phone transactions by credit card. Karen agreed to donate \$20, but was then told the charity would only give tax receipts for amounts of \$25 or more. She reluctantly agreed.

She felt uncomfortable as soon as she hung up, so Karen called the charity directly to enquire about their fundraising campaign. She was told that they weren't conducting one. She called her credit card company right away and told them what happened. Her credit card was flagged instantly for suspicious transactions and was cancelled by the credit card company shortly afterward as there was a flood of fraudulent transactions.

Robert was laid off and seeking new employment. His searching triggered a call from someone claiming that, for a fee, they would find a position for him. They also offered to navigate a government website for employment positions for a fee. Fortunately, Robert was aware of this type of scam. First, the fraudster collects a fee and does nothing more than send Robert listings of help wanted ads that he already had free access to. Second, there's no trick to doing the website searching for job postings himself.

The lesson we can learn from Karen's experience is to be skeptical of any phone solicitations. It can be tempting to fall for this one as charities are exempt from the new Do Not Call List. Fraudsters know this. If you are contacted by a charity and want to donate, look up their phone number yourself and call them directly, or visit their website.

Robert had posted his resume on several websites; the scammer had viewed it and was able to glean enough information to almost convince him to part with some cash. When posting resumes, keep the info to a minimum.

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Shelley L. Bertram

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