

I came across this company - Uniongates (www.uniongates.com) via ZipRecruiter. Job opening was for a front desk receptionist. Saturday (09 December), I received my first communication from them. The email explained the nature of the company (humanitarian foundation originally based in Australia and this is their first time to open an office in the States), what my job entailed if I get hired, salary offer, and an explanation that the local office (which was supposedly in Long Beach, per the post on the job board) was still under construction and due to be finished within the week so if all went well, we'd be moving in the office the week of the 18th.

There was also a link in the email that redirected me to an online application form for my details. After accomplishing that, I clicked "submit" and got an email acknowledging the submission. Sunday morning (10 December), there was another email with interview questions which I needed to finish within 40 minutes. I put off accomplishing the questionnaire as my parents and I were leaving to hear Mass and to see a movie.

After Mass, while at the mall, I received a text message. It was her, the CEO who had been writing me, checking that the phone number is working. I acknowledged and she said my first assignment would come on Tuesday.

Surprised, I texted back, "So I'm hired?" She said yes and proceeded to give instructions for me to expect a FedEx delivery of a check for the office.

That evening, back at home, I accomplished the online interview and submitted it. Monday morning, I got a new email with a link for the employee contract. Thing was, when I clicked the link, it redirected me to a page that my browser blocked because it was suspicious. I wrote her and told her about the difficulty and I asked if they could just send me a file I can open with Acrobat or MS Word. She replied that she hadn't sent me anything and the contract may have been sent by mistake. She also promised to see to the contract and email me ASAP.

Tuesday came and I got another text saying the FedEx delivery was delayed and to expect it instead the following day, Wednesday. It did arrive around 10am, and it contained a check amounting to \$695, with me as the payee.

I updated her via text, that I received the package and she instructed me to have it deposited in my bank account. I emailed her asking why she wanted me to use my bank account, informed her that I wasn't comfortable mixing company funds with my personal money. I also questioned why (she mentioned in her text) that of the 695 amount stated on the check, I was entitled to 40 as commission when I was supposed to be a salaried employee. She clarified that it wasn't commission, but for expenses I may incur carrying out the errand.

In the same email, I also followed up on my employment contract and she assured me that she'll send it before the end of the week and to not worry because most assuredly, I was hired.

So off I went to deposit the check and by the next day (Thursday, 14 December), it was cleared.

She asked me to withdraw the funds and send it via Western Union to a person she identified as the Head of Construction. I asked for the person's phone number and she countered with, "Why is there a problem?" I said no, but for quicker communication, might be better I have the number. She said I didn't need it.

So I went to a Western Union counter near my place and once I'd had the money sent, I texted her again, including the screencaps of the receipts etc. Two hours later, she texts me and asks me to go back to Western Union and ask back for the money because apparently, the recipient preferred to have the money deposited to a bank account.

I started to lose patience because I was thinking, why didn't she make sure how the money was really supposed to be sent before asking me to go to Western Union? But anyway, I managed to get back the money and while waiting for new instructions, she proceeded to tell me about bitcoins.

I told her I didn't think it mattered whether or not I knew about bitcoins but what exactly does the money recipient want? She replied with another name for me to send the money to via Western Union again. So I texted back and said, "I thought you said bank deposit?" She reasoned out that the bank was PNC (credit union) and that she wasn't sure there was a branch or even a counter near me.

I went back to Western Union, a different branch this time because I didn't want to give the impression at the branch near me that I was a fickle-minded nincompoop. I had the money sent and that was the end of that.

By evening, I was harboring suspicions here and there so I went back to the internet and searching for Union Gates Companies. Then I discovered: Other than their website, they're nonexistent. No news, no mentions, and I'm thinking if according to their website, they'd been in existence since 2000, why has there been no news of them?

I also checked the address they had on the website and searched for it on Google Maps and it was nonexistent. Plus, the website copyright is dated 2017. Not even 5 years old. Another thing I noticed was that the photos on their website were too curated. Like stock photos or those that were published by NatGeo or CNN.

By morning of the 15th, I was decided. I would write her and tell her I can't move forward with her and the company anymore. Before I could compose the letter, however, I'd found another FedEx envelope on my doorstep, another check in my name for the same amount, from the same issuer and same drawee bank. And then I got a text from her asking if I received anything. When I said yes, she said, "I need you to deposit that again."

I didn't reply to her text, and I had no intention of depositing the check until she answers my queries. I wrote an ultimatum of an email, consulting with my folks all throughout and sent the

letter to her.

Following is the content of my email:

Dear Mrs. Desa,

I have so many concerns and I would like to raise each of them with you at this point before we proceed any further.

1) The first time a check arrived here, I believed it was for the company. That being so, I also assumed that it would be named for Union Gates (Foundation?) and that my errand would be to have it deposited to a corporate bank account. Instead it was issued in my name. Then you asked me to deposit it to my account, wait for it to clear, and withdraw the cash as soon as it was available. I do not understand why you didn't ask for my permission to have my name and bank account used for company purposes before you had the check issued.

2) I chose to overlook this particular detail and conclude that if the money is needed ASAP, having it issued in my name would expedite its availability. The money could be disbursed quickly to the intended recipient - which you said was the Head of Construction overseeing the completion of the construction of the office. I also believed when you said the construction outfit does not accept checks although I do know that licensed companies operating here do accept checks as payment.

3) Having used my personal bank account (which, I already informed you in a previous email I wasn't comfortable with) to encash the check, I sent \$655 to the name and address you supplied (the first time to a Emmanuel Callisto of Charleston, Maryland; and then when we had to refund the money from Western Union, to have it sent again to a Emmanuel Adam of Wilkes Barre, PA), again, noting that this person was the Head of Construction. At this, I wondered why you did not ask me to contact them directly so I can ask for a receipt which we can, in turn, submit to the donor as proof of the expense. I simply concluded again you had this part covered.

4) With all due respect, Ma'am, I am not willing to accomplish errands you assign to me right now regarding this new check unless we can sign a contract of employment, stating my position, job description, salary and other company benefits. For my peace of mind, I need to hold on to a legal document for me to comfortably work with a company or individual.

5) Having said these, please give me an address where I can mail back this check, with the following details:

Check No. 1309

Date: 12/14/2017

Issued by: Aquatic Technologies, Inc., San Juan Capistrano, CA

Drawee bank: Partners Bank of California, Mission Viejo, CA

Amount: \$695.00

Please also ask your donors to cease issuing checks in my name.

I'd also like to give back the remaining \$12.50 which was left from the \$40 you instructed I use for incidental expenses in sending the cash (this is from the first check with which yesterday's transaction was done).

Details:

\$22.50 - Western Union transaction fee

\$5.00 - Service fee for using their ATM

=====

\$27.50 - total expenses

Thank you.

=====

She has not replied since.