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Background checks are crucial in stopping hiring 'mistakes'

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Contributing writer

His resumé is impeccable. He's very personable, and the hiring committee agrees that he will be a true asset to the firm. But here's what they don't know: He was convicted of embezzlement in 1992.

Unfortunately, scenarios just like this one are being played out daily in boardrooms around the world.

As natural as it sounds, taking people at face-value just doesn't work in the corporate arena. Drug use, violence, sexual harassment and theft are all making their way into the office and taking their toll on business and, equally important, employees.

Consider these facts from the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- Of the 16.7 million illicit drug users aged 18 or older in 2003, 12.4 million (74.3 percent) were employed either full- or part-time. Furthermore, research indicates that between 10 and 20 percent of the nation's workers who die on the job test positive for alcohol or drugs.
- Homicide is the third leading cause of fatal occupational injury in the United States.
- Between 40 and 70 percent of women and 10-20 percent of men report having experienced intimidation by sexual harassment in the workplace.

These facts have made a thorough background check an integral part of the hiring process. To keep your company from being the next appalling lead story on the nightly news, it is essential to understand the importance of investing in quality pre-employment screening.

Whether you are a small business or a Fortune 500 company, you need to know who is actually behind each resumé. Employers should also feel confident about the results obtained when outsourcing their background check initiatives. It is the thoroughness of a background check that counts, not just getting one.

As corporate security and safety in the workplace continue to be of significance to employers, it is essential to discuss the importance of investing in quality pre-employment screening. Although anyone can check Department of Motor Vehicles records, a thorough search extends well beyond such basics. Conducting a thorough check by hunting through court records at the county, state, and federal levels can be time consuming and may yield incomplete or erroneous results. This is why many companies turn to professional screeners

to meet their verification needs. A professional screening company will conduct a more timely and accurate investigation.

Besides avoiding occupational tragedy, what are the benefits of pre-employment screening? As a corporate executive, you are charged with keeping up the health of the financial ledger, including the creation of a productive work environment. By screening your potential hires, you increase the likelihood that you will build an environment free of harassment and intimidation. Additionally, drug abuse is taking a heavy toll on the workplace. Recent studies indicate that roughly 3 to 5 percent of employees in mid- to large-sized corporations are using illicit drugs on a daily basis. The resulting loss of productivity and quality add up to an estimated \$30 billion loss annually. A thorough background check can lead to a more productive and efficient office.

All of which leads to the question, "What should a 'thorough' screening include?"

- Accuracy. This is clearly one of the most critical elements in a pre-employment screening.

Newspapers are awash in stories of well-intentioned human resource directors who have denied employment to candidates based on their background checks, only to find themselves the targets of costly lawsuits because that information was flawed. When negative information on a subject arises, it is imperative that the background screening company dig deeper to verify report validity to ensure a legitimate and effective search on each applicant.

- Timeliness. This is another critical component of pre-employment screening. With so many companies vying for exceptional workforce talent, an employer cannot afford to be held up by processing time. At any time during the hiring process, a potential candidate could receive a more attractive offer. Companies be able to move swiftly to hire their ideal candidates before another company sweeps them off their feet.
- Customizability. This is perhaps one of the least recognized, but most important, elements of a pre-employment screening. Many companies do not realize that generic, pre-packaged screening services do not meet an employer's exact needs. The extent of screening required for a line employee versus that for a corporate executive may differ substantively.

Buying unneeded services can greatly impact not only the cost of the process but its timeliness as well. Having the option of selecting from a menu of services that can be customized to any given candidate can make the difference between a quick, well-informed hiring decision and a slow, laborious one that culminates just after the applicant has accepted another job offer.

With reputation, employee morale and higher profit margins at stake, employers simply cannot afford to forego the pre-employment screening process.

A professional pre-employment screener can alleviate the fears and frustrations that so many corporations face when it comes to hiring. Finding the right partner to provide the screening can ensure you the quality employee you seek, combined with the security and peace of mind you desire.

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