



Avoiding Employees who are Dishonest or Drug Users

By John Towler

No one in his or her right mind would hire a thief or a drug user. But many people do. They don't mean to, but it happens.

It's one thing to catch employees stealing and fire them, but the damage has already been done. Finding the thief, getting legal evidence and firing them takes time and if it isn't done correctly, you may end up in court defending your actions.

The same thing applies to employees on drugs. Mood swings and performance difficulties can be caused by a multitude of factors and not all of them are drug related. It's not easy to catch an employee using drugs and harder to prove your suspicions. So, how do you avoid these problems? One of the best solutions is not to hire these people in the first place. If you don't have problem employees, they can't cause you problems.

How can you avoid them? The answer lies in pre selection screening. When labor is in short supply, there is a tendency to hire anyone you can get and hope for the best. This simply doesn't make sense when you consider the cost of hiring improperly. Employees who steal can cost you a huge amount in lost merchandise and your time to find them and the effort to deal with them even if you don't land in court. Drug users can cost even more.

One retailer we know took 5 months to track rising shrinkage costs to an employee who allowed his friends to shoplift. Susan, head of a public service agency was sure that one of her people was on drugs, but couldn't prove it. Her employee is still there performing poorly and generating more than her share of customer complaints.

There are several ways to avoid these difficulties, they all involve careful hiring and:

- Reference check
- Background check
- Credit Check
- Pre-selection testing

One thing you can do is to check all references thoroughly. This can be time consuming and is somewhat unreliable when you are hiring people with little experience or ones who list their friends who will lie for them. Another approach is to hire a firm to do a complete background check. This often catches applicants who have falsified their applications or the ones with a poor employment record.

However, this takes time and can be even more costly. A simple technique that

often works is to run a credit check on the applicant. This is relatively inexpensive and fast. However, it isn't very effective for young inexperienced hires.

None of these approaches are completely reliable and none of them get at drug use. The best process to use is pre-selection testing. It's quick, inexpensive and has a proven track record. There are a variety of tests available that can accurately determine who is likely to steal and use drugs. The cost of buying these ranges but is a small cost compared to the cost of a wrong hiring decision. Look for ones that are valid, reliable and able to withstand a challenge in court. Make sure that it is legal to use them in your location. It is legal to test for honesty and drug use in most of the U S of A, but illegal to ask about drug use in Canada. Select tests that have been validated and have a good track record and get ones that you can administer and interpret without requiring specialized training.

Accurate pre selection testing is a tool that should be used by every hiring manager. It mustn't be the only basis of your hiring decision but it is far, far better than taking on the people who look promising and hoping for the best.

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