

SMART WORKPLACES BY HR TO GO - MAY 2004

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"Big Brother" or Big Trouble - Should You Do Background Checks?

HR Professionals constantly balance the time and expense of doing background checks with the bad publicity and expense of negligent hiring claims. If you're having problems with employees - problems that verge on criminal activity - you may need to investigate their backgrounds.

So what can your organization do during the hiring process to avoid claims that it was negligent without breaking the bank to run background checks on every applicant? (*Note: the costs of a criminal background check are about \$18.00 per county*)

First, make sure your job application asks whether applicants have ever been convicted of a felony. If the answer is yes, provide room for them to explain the circumstances. *Caution:* Just because the answer is yes, this shouldn't automatically disqualify them from the job.

Second, ask applicants for previous work references and check them thoroughly. Don't ask for - or accept - personal references. There are no applicants on the face of this earth who can't find a friend, family member or minister to say something nice about them. Only a former employer can tell you what type of worker you're considering hiring. *Caution:* Be sure your application has an authorization form attached permitting you to check references, background and employment history.

Third, look closely for gaps in the applicant's employment history. Gaps may mean that the applicant was incarcerated during that time. Also, look for applicants who have relocated from another part of the country without a really good reason for doing so.

Finally, keep in mind that not every job applicant has to be put through the same background investigation. The nature of the job should help you determine what type of investigation to conduct and what questions to ask.



Workers Dying to Trick You

The marvels of home publishing have made it easy to forge documents. For that reason, be wary of worker fraud - even something as simple as an employee looking for a few extra days off.

Shawn Martin had worked for his employer for a mere five months when he apparently decided that he needed a vacation. He told his employer, a South Dakota bank, that his grandfather had died and he needed to attend the funeral in New Mexico. He took 5 days of leave. When Martin returned, he brought back a funeral service folder that he had created. The bank learned that Grandpa hadn't actually died and fired his grandson.

Martin sought jobless benefits, which were initially granted. The bank appealed, and a hearing officer found that the employee had taken leave under false pretenses, which was work-related misconduct and disqualified him from getting the benefits.

With a few computer clicks, Martin almost got away with a nice vacation. But that didn't happen, thanks to the sharp eye of a suspicious bank official. **Remember this:** Carefully inspect any documents employees submit. Many documents can be verified independently. It's a little more work on your part, but it could save you in the long run.



How To Get That Second Wind

Feeling run down? You'll turn things around in five minutes if you...

... **Refuel.** Snack on fiber-rich munchies, such as dried apricots, bananas, baby carrots, or rye wafers. *Benefit:* The fiber slows the release of glucose into your bloodstream and helps fight energy dips.

... **Breathe Deeply.** Every 1-2 hours, spend five minutes inhaling and exhaling deeply, hands on ribs. You'll promote calmness and mental focus as well as renewed energy.

... **Go On An "Imagi-cation."** Close your eyes and take a mental vacation by imagining a peaceful scene...on an island...in a meadow...by the ocean. Imagine yourself relaxing there.

... **Call A Confidante.** Use your personal support system - family, friends or co-workers to quickly unload and unwind.

... **Snap Out Of It.** Splash cold water on your face, snap a rubber band worn on the wrist or pop a breath mint - mint flavors are stimulating.

... **Take A "Good News" Inventory.** At the end of the day, jot down all the good things that happened. You'll be surprised at how

much went right. Plus, you'll set yourself up for a good night's sleep... and energize yourself for tomorrow.



Want To Be Politically Correct? Listen to Gary Trudeau!

From the opening speech by Gary Trudeau, the "Doonesbury" cartoonist, at Yale University's Class Day:

" Dean Kagan, distinguished faculty, parents, friends, graduating seniors, Secret Service agents, class agents, people of class, people of color, colorful people, people of height, the vertically challenged, the temporarily sighted, the insightful, the out of sight, the out-of-towners, the Eurocentrics, the Afrocentrics, the Afrocentrics with Eurailpasses, the eccentrically inclined, animal companions, friends of the earth, friends of the boss, temporarily employed, the differently employed, the differently opinioned, people with options, people with stock options, the divestitursts, the deconstructionists, the home constructionists, the home boys, the homeless, the temporarily housed at home, and God save us, the permanently housed at home."

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