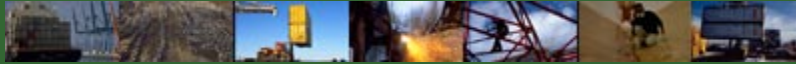




# Supervisors' Safety Update

Ideas and Strategies for Leaders



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## Productive Employee Screening & Orientation Techniques

*By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control*

**H**iring and training new employees is expensive and time consuming. Inadequate employee screening can mean reduced productivity, lost contracts, pilferage, more accidents and fraudulent worker compensation claims. As an employer, your goal should be to hire dependable, honest and qualified employees to maintain productivity and reduce turnover. More effort and time spent in careful employee screening and orientation can mean additional profit to your bottom line.

### Employee Screening

Evaluating and judging potential employees' future performance should be more than a gut feeling. Making good hiring decisions is not easy and only comes with proper training and experience. Studies indicate that up to 35% of all job applicants exaggerate about their education, experience and physical condition. It is very critical that the staff doing the screening use effective techniques to avoid making a bad hiring decision.

The following are some pointers in productive employee screening and hiring:

### ***Job Advertising***

Advertise your job openings where you will reach qualified candidates. Help wanted advertising in local newspapers may net several resumes, but cost a lot of time weeding the "bogus" and "pretender" applicants from the truly qualified. Some companies use "blind" ads, only listing a PO Box address to avoid time wasting phone calls from would be job seekers.

Going through state unemployment offices can be time consuming and frustrating as well. They may send out-of-work transitional employees who typically will leave the job when they get bored with it. Many overqualified candidates apply for jobs that are beneath them and when hired, will leave the position within a year when a better opportunity arises.

Employee referrals can be helpful, especially if they come from a trusted employee. However, some referrals come from an employee who is the applicant's friend and wants companionship on the job. These referrals can wind up being counterproductive.

Although established job placement services can provide qualified candidates, think twice before using them. First they are costly, with commissions ranging from 25% to 50% of the hired employee's first year of salary. Second, some "headhunters" are neophytes to their business and have little or no experience in the lines of business they are referring applicants. Thus, they can unknowingly send you unqualified candidates. Third, within the first year, after they have collected their entire commission from the job referral, some headhunters lure your employee to another job to collect more commission.

Your fellow industry employer counterparts can be a good source of qualified employees, especially if they have had layoffs due to a slowdown in business. Professional societies or trade associations often have job referral services as well. With these groups, you have a targeted audience and more qualified applicants. Often, you can advertise job openings in their newsletters free of charge.

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## ***Job Applications***

The job application form is a tool to help the interviewer qualify the candidate during the interview. It is essential to use a job application form to get the background and qualifications of your job applicants. Applications can also verify the honesty of the job candidate. A good application should include the following:

- Applicant name, address and telephone numbers.
- Job the candidate is applying for.
- Three or more previous employers including position, name of supervisor, job duties, salary and reason for leaving
- Special skills as they relate to the job i.e. - computers, software, equipment, etc.
- Education including high school, college and trade/technical schools. Ask for grades, major field of study and dates of graduation.
- At least three job or professional references including name, title, company affiliation and telephone number.

## ***Resumes and Application Letters***

Resumes should be brief and neat. They should include the following information:

- Name, address, phone numbers
- Professional objective
- Job achievements and qualifications
- Job history back no more than ten years
- Education, college degrees
- Professional certifications and associations
- Awards, publications, patents, etc.

Large or unconventional resumes are meant to impress and can be misleading. Typically, resumes should be no more than one or two pages. Resumes that are too vague or generic are of little value to the interviewer.

Often, candidates include an application letter with a resume. This letter is a brief introduction of the candidate and a synopsis of the candidate's qualifications.

## ***Background and Reference Checks***

Legally, you are limited as to what type of information you can obtain from previous employers. Questions you can ask:

- Did the applicant work there, what dates?
- What were his/her job duties?
- What was his/her pay?
- Would you re-hire this individual?

Sometimes, former employers will want to elaborate in more detail on a particular employee, but you should not encourage them or solicit additional information. Other employers will only respond by completing and mailing a form, to ensure they only give out information allowed by the law. Applicants will typically request that you not contact their current employer.

Avoid asking for and using personal references except for students who have no previous work history. Personal references give you no information about the candidate's work performance. They are typically based upon a friendship or family relationship and lack objectivity on "what a great person he/she is" and "what a hard worker he/she is."

Some employers contact credit bureaus to determine the credit stability of prospective candidates. Other employers use firms specializing in background checks that can include police records, military records, former landlords, etc. Generally, the more information you request on a candidate, the more expensive these services are.

## ***Interviewing***

Effective interviewing requires experience, training and planning. It is a good idea to involve several people in the interviewing process to avoid one-sided hiring decisions. After the candidate leaves, the interviewing team should meet to compare notes and discuss the candidate.

The interviewer should prepare by having a plan on how to conduct the interview. Become familiar with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Talk with your Human Resources/Personnel Director or maybe even an experienced attorney about the Do's and Don'ts associated with this Act. For instance, you may ask whether the applicant has the ability to perform job related functions,

with or without reasonable accommodation. However, do not ask what disabilities a person may have, comment on the disabilities, ask how often the individual will need to leave for treatment, or inquire as to the nature or severity of the disability.

Questions should be well designed and productive to the interview. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with a yes or no. Also, be cautious about asking general questions. These types of questions allow the candidate to make exaggerated claims that may sway uninitiated hiring personnel. It is more productive to ask questions that focus upon the candidate's experience and skills as they relate to the job. Use questions such as: "Have you ever done this type of work before, where, and for whom?" "Do you know how to operate this equipment?", "Can you demonstrate for me?" or "How will your experience or skills help us to do this job better?"

First impressions mean a lot. They often reveal the candidate's attitude and self-discipline. When a job applicant shows up late for an interview he/she is showing you poor time management skills. If the candidate comes to the interview in sloppy dress and has indications of poor personal hygiene, it indicates lack of self-respect.

When asking questions, look for non-verbal language and gestures from the applicant. Signs of nervousness, inattention or boredom may indicate dishonesty and insincerity. On the other hand, if you come across as stern or critical, you might expect the candidate to be nervous.

## ***Job Testing***

Some jobs require skills testing, physical capacity tests and honesty/aptitude testing. Hands-on testing is important where craftsmanship or specialized technical skills are required. Several companies can provide the employer with custom testing specific to the requirements of the job. Some of these indicate employee aptitude, attitude, honesty, intelligence, etc.

Drug testing is often required for construction, chemical manufacturing and transportation occupations, but may be appropriate for other industries as well.

There are different types of drug testing including:

- PRE-EMPLOYMENT
- POST ACCIDENT
- FOR CAUSE (because of suspicious behavior or observed actions)
- RANDOM

Ensure that the applicant understands and gives consent to be tested for drug use. Use a release form requiring their signature before you give them the test.

## **New Employee Orientation**

Effective new employee orientation is very important to maintaining a safe workplace and keeping workplace injuries to a minimum. Statistics indicate that up to 60% of all job injuries occur to new employees with less than six months experience on the job. OSHA and most state labor codes require all new employees to be oriented to their employer's company and safety rules.

Be sure to start orientation early. Before the employee actually starts work. If an employee is injured before receiving proper orientation, the employer may be facing serious and willful misconduct litigation.

Employee orientations are typically done by the human resources department, safety director and their immediate supervisor. If there is a language barrier, try to use a bi-lingual supervisor to assist in the orientation. You must document all employee orientation and training. A good way to do this is to use a checklist.

Some of the things to include in the orientation checklist:

- Company benefits, health plans, etc.
- Company rules of conduct and disciplinary procedures
- Prompt reporting of all work related accidents to their supervisor
- General employee safety rules and regulations
- Job specific safety rules
- Safe lifting and material handling techniques (include demonstration)
- Equipment training and certification (forklift, cranes, vehicles, etc.)
- Enforcement of safety rules
- Hazard communication/chemical safety training, if applicable
- Special hazard training
- Use and care of personal protective equipment

- Location of fire alarm and fire extinguishers
- Location of first aid kits
- Emergency evacuation procedures
- Emergency telephone numbers and other safety information on bulletin boards

When the initial orientation is complete, both the supervisor and the new employee should sign the checklist indicating that he/she understands the information and rules and will abide by them. This form should be kept in the employee's personnel file. Some companies use a quiz after the orientation to ensure the employee's retention of the information.

After the orientation, it is good practice for the immediate supervisor to stay in close contact with the new employee for at least a week and up to a month. He/she should observe and correct any unsafe actions or behaviors in a constructive way. The supervisor should also confirm the new employees understanding of company rules and safety procedures by questions and general discussion.

If the employee is transferred to a new department, a new orientation must be done outlining the duties of the new job. If an employee leaves the company and comes back 6 or more months later, you should do a complete new employee orientation.

It is acknowledged that employee screening procedures may vary considerably in a union situation based on collective bargaining agreements. Thus, additional challenges may exist in the hiring process. However, employee orientation remains an effective part of the overall process and should not be overlooked, no matter how much "experience" the "new" person claims to have.