

Application “Red Flags”

“How to spot Potential Problems before you hire them”

The Key element in any plan to protect your business from the threat of workplace violence or from any number of other potential problems is to establish a system for consistently hiring only good, qualified employees. One of the best is by consistently watching for the **“Red Flags”** that can be found on almost every application that you see.

Except for customers, good employees are the next most important element for the success of your business. They are as important if not more so than having the right tools or equipment and perhaps even more important than whatever product or service you sell.

Because it is your employee who in most cases will deal directly with your customers & clients, it is imperative that you have the best trained most qualified people you can find. These are the people who, in your customers mind, will be thought of as the company. It cannot be stressed strongly enough that you absolutely must exercise the greatest care when selecting your employees.

One single bad employee who fails to treat one customer with the care they deserve and what you will have can best be described as a wild fire that is going to start burning out of control. It will start small at first, just smoldering as that one customer goes away from your business with a “bad taste” in his/her mouth. That one customer, just like a small smoldering fire, will flare up as he or she relates their unpleasant experience to someone else who will pass the information along to the people they know who will pass it along to others and well you get the idea. It’s called the “rule of 250”. Most small businesses have heard of it; every customer who has a story to tell will relate it to at least 250 other people who will then NOT do business with you, and all because of a small lack of care on your part in hiring that one employee.

Hiring and training good employees is as much an asset to your business as offering quality merchandise. It all begins with an understanding of what a good employee is and how to find them. You know your business better than anyone, you are more aware of what it takes to be successful in your particular line than anyone else except perhaps someone who is also in that same business. I have no doubt that you understand what you are looking for when you start the hiring process.

The technical skills that are required for any potential employee in your business are set or can be taught, but what about the other intangible things that you may not be aware of. There is the potential to steal or the probability of someone becoming violent or bringing their domestic problems from home into the workplace. How does a businessperson spot the potentially bad employee? The answer to this question is to take the steps necessary to spot the **“Red Flags”** as you go through the hiring process.

Let's take as an example the Airline Pilot, each and every time he or she gets into the cockpit of an airplane and gets ready to fly, he or she will go through a very detailed checklist. This is done to make sure that they have completed the complicated process of "Pre-Flight" correctly. They have checked each thing that needs to be checked and made sure that everything that is required is done correctly so that there won't be any nasty surprises later that could ruin their day.

This same concept of making sure that you have followed each step in the process can be adapted in business. As you proceed through the hiring process you want to check each thing so that there are no nasty surprises later to ruin your day.

I would like to relate a true story that happened to me. Some years ago I was operating a very successful small business; I interviewed a very pleasant young woman who was applying at my business for the position of cashier. She seemed nice enough and had all the right answers to the questions I asked. I even followed the procedures then in place to prevent me from hiring someone for a cash handling position, which might cause me problems later on; I did a criminal history check on her. A few days after that initial interview, the criminal history check came back with a **GREAT BIG RED FLAG**, she had a criminal record the exact details of which were unavailable.

Now I like to think of myself as a nice guy who does not jump to conclusions about people. I most certainly did not want to jump to any preconceived conclusions about this very personable young woman, so I brought her in for a second interview. During that second interview I asked her about the information I had uncovered. She gave me a very plausible explanation for it, she said she was a single mom trying to get off welfare and had gotten herself into some trouble by writing a bad check but that it was all cleared up and she was not in any trouble at the moment.

Now I am the kind of person who likes to try and give people a second chance, so against my better judgement and because I really needed to hire someone, I ignored this major warning sign and hired her. She was thoroughly trained in all of the company's policies and procedures as well as all the rules for cash handling. Now I'm sure you can guess what happened next. On her first day alone she cleaned out the cash register and failed to make the required cash drops during her afternoon shift. Early the next day on Saturday morning, as I blissfully slept in, I received a frantic call from one of my managers who informed me that when she was counting the receipts there was no money.

This very pleasant and personable girl had stolen over **\$2200** in cash, over half of the total day's receipts. That was a very hard and a very expensive lesson for me to learn and I had to learn it because I didn't follow my own set steps in the hiring process and I ignored an enormous **RED FLAG**.

This story illustrates the folly of going with your gut feeling when hiring an employee. By hiring this person for a position that was, for me at least, a very sensitive position in my business. I had actually created the problem that followed. Had I stuck to the procedure I had in place and paid attention to this

red flag I would have politely thanked this young woman for her interest in the job and moved on to another candidate.

Now I cannot absolutely guarantee that the outcome would have been different by passing up this woman and hiring someone else, but at least I would not have had to second-guess my decision and I may not have lost that large amount of money.

I relate this story about my own mistakes in hiring because I want to illustrate how very easy it is to overlook a basic step in what should have been a pretty good hiring process. I urge you to remember one thing here; I have had substantial experience in this, I have hired literally hundreds of employees in my time and I have had the advantage of having spent 20+ years in Law Enforcement to boot. It just goes to show you that even someone who really should have known better can make a **HUGE** mistake.

Don't be too hard on yourself if you have made a similar mistake at some point because you didn't have a lot of experience or background. The answer is to have a structure in place, a plan if you will, that you follow in hiring your staff so that you never have to wonder if you did the right thing.

Many employers gain experience each time they hire someone and over a period of time any businessperson will develop the "Sixth Sense" that allows them to make good hiring decisions. I am of the opinion that a good "Sixth Sense" is okay to have but just don't base your hiring decisions on it entirely. You must have that step-by-step plan that you follow religiously to insure that you don't miss something that is going to come back to haunt you.

So with that said, let's get down to how you can develop you own plans for spotting the potential problem employee before you hire them. The "**red flags**" that you can look for and find on the vast majority of the applications that you will see represent things that will make your hiring decisions better, easier and less expensive.

The very first thing I would like to point out to you is probably the most basic something you may even know already. You can never have too much information when you are hiring employees, so don't just go to your local stationary store and pick up a package of standard run of the mill applications that so many businesses use these days.

It will absolutely pay you to do some research and maybe even talk to an attorney about getting your business set up with an application form, geared for your particular company, that will provide you with the information you need to make sound hiring decisions. It is also important to remember that there are any number of legal requirements that are being placed on businesses on an almost daily basis by various levels of government that require you to ask certain questions and forbid you to ask others.

Do not get caught short by using a generic application form that may get you into trouble later on because it is insufficient in quality and content for your particular business. This is not the place to cut costs. Spending a few extra dollars here will pay a huge dividend in the future.

The 15 *Red Flags* you need to be looking for

#1

When you first look at the application, see if any information has been omitted and ask why? Not having all the information requested could have a simple explanation or it could mean that the applicant has something to hide. I cannot think of a single circumstance where it would be okay to accept a partially completed application from anyone you are considering as a potential employee. Take my word for it; this red flag will save you countless sleepless nights.

#2

Does the applicant have a valid driver's license issued in the state in which your business is located? One of first big red flags is if they have a driver's license from a state other than the one where they have been working and living. Why haven't they been able to get a driver's license? It could be that they have a criminal record and can't obtain a local license. Or they may be using the name of a relative from the other state. This is something you need to explore.

#3

Is the applicant a US Citizen (If your business is located in the United States)? You would never want to discriminate against anyone, but not being a citizen will cause you no end of problems with Immigration officials if it is later determined that the person is an illegal alien without the right to work. Believe me when I say that this one issue can get very expensive if you end up in court. In California and in many other states you are now required to fill out the I-9 immigration forms when you hire someone. Make sure that the required documentation is present and valid.

#4

Make sure that the Social Security Number that is provided is Valid! This is very easy to check.

INVALID SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

1. All single digits are the same
2. The number is 987654321
3. The number is 123456789
4. Three or more leading zeroes
5. Leading number of 8
6. Leading number of 9
7. First two positions are 73 through 79
8. Ending in 4 zeros

Remember! Phony Social Security cards as well as driver's licenses and other forms of ID are not that hard to obtain illegally.

#5

Is the person applying for a specific position? Now this may seem like a small thing but consider this. A person who is hiding something in their past or who may be running from the law or who doesn't want you to look too hard at them may apply for "Any Open Position"; ask about this, the answer may be very enlightening.

#6

Does the applicant indicate that they have sufficient experience for the job for which they are applying? People will embellish the truth to make themselves more employable. Remember you want to hire good, qualified employees not someone you are going to have to fire after they have turned your business upside down with mistakes or driven away customers.

#7

Does the application indicate why the person has applied to your business for employment and how they found out about your business? This might indicate that the person is a serious applicant who has applied for a specific job opening or if they are simply going from place to place putting in applications. People who do not stay in one place very long will often take a shotgun approach to their job search by going to every business and applying. Why waste your valuable time hiring and training someone who is going to leave or who may not show up at all.

#8

Does the application indicate that the person is unable to work overtime or weekends or that they can only work certain hours? This may indicate that they have problems with childcare or perhaps they have a domestic problem where a spouse is being very controlling and demands that they be home at a certain hour. They may also be concealing such problems as being on probation or work release from jail or being in a house arrest situation because of drunk driving conviction or other similar situation.

#9

Does the application indicate that the person has been convicted of a felony or has a criminal record but does not provide any particulars? This is a big one, you will need to really ask some hard questions if this red flag pops up. Why is the applicant being evasive? What don't they want to admit? What could they be trying to hide from you? If you will think about this, you will quickly see that this one red flag could cause you no end of problems later on.

#10

Does the application indicate that the applicant did not finish high school? While this may or may not be something that you need to worry about, it is an indicator that you need to consider in making your hiring decision. Not having a high school diploma is indicative of other problems that can be much more serious and the reason why needs to be explored.

#11

When you review the employment history section of the application look for the following:

- ☞ Gaps in employment – is there any blank time period (unaccounted time) in the past 10 year's?
- ☞ A lot of jobs in a relatively short period of time – job-hopping tends to indicate that the person may have something to hide. Why are they moving around so much?
- ☞ Have they changed professions a number of times over a short period? One item you might want to look for here is if they misspell the title of a job that they claim to have held.
- ☞ Look at the reasons they give for leaving previous jobs.
 1. Fired
 2. Didn't like the boss
 3. The work was too hard
 4. Felt like it
 5. Didn't want to work

6. Didn't get along with co-workers or supervisors

The reason a person leaves a job can sometimes provide you with a great deal of insight into the applicants thinking which should then lead you to additional questions that you can ask in order to make a better decision about whether you want to hire this person.

- ☞ Does not want you to contact the former employer – This is a major red flag. Why don't they want you to contact the former boss? Did they leave under less than desirable circumstances? Were they fired because of major problems?
- ☞ Have they left the former supervisor's name off the application?
- ☞ Does the salary seem high for the position that they indicate they held?

#12

What level of education does the application indicate? Is this consistent with what you see on the application; for instance are there a lot of misspelled words? This may indicate they are overstating their level of expertise or claiming education that they do not possess. You will also need to make sure that the information that is provided is accurate. Does the school actually exist; is it legitimate? Are you able to contact the school to verify that a record exists for this person? Remember that there are any number of diploma mills out there that will issue you a very authentic looking diploma with any title you desire as long as you are willing to open your wallet. These fake diplomas may have the names of legitimate schools that you know exist. They may even include an authentic transcript printed on security paper. If the applicant provides you with a number to call to verify the educational record, be very suspicious. If you can not get a number independently from the phone book or a directory service it may mean that the applicant is directing you to a verification service that will of course verify that the diploma is valid and that the transcripts accurately reflect the student record. If someone would misrepresent their true level of education what else may they be misrepresenting?

#13

References are a very important part of the application, so it is important to look at this area very closely.

- ☞ Does the application list references or is this area left blank? This should immediately raise your suspicions. Why did the person fail to complete this area?
- ☞ Are there any former managers or supervisors listed as references? Anyone with a good work history will list at least one or perhaps more work references as these types of references can speak directly about the person's ability, level of expertise, quality of work, work habits,

promptness, diligence and perhaps even the level of education. Always be suspicious if no former bosses are listed.

- ✍ Have relatives been listed as references? It is appropriate to speak to family members about a potential employee, to get a feel for the level of family support the person has. However, relatives will not be accurate references with regard to how good a worker the applicant will be or if they have personal issues that may be a problem during their employment with your business.

#14

Does the application indicate that the person tends to relocate often, that is change address or living arrangements frequently? This may tend to indicate that there are domestic issues or criminal problems that have not already been detected. Why did they move from their last place of residence? Was there a problem with the landlord? Did they fail to pay rent or other obligation on time?

#15

Is the application signed? This is a huge red flag if you see it. At the end of almost all applications there is a statement that the applicant had filled out the application with accurate and true information. If a person fails to sign they are in effect refusing to verify to authenticity of the information they have provided to you. This also goes for any fair credit reporting disclosure authorization that you may include in the application. Having a signature on this disclosure allows you to check the credit history of the applicant. This disclosure also allows you to run a criminal history check on the person. This is something that is highly recommended as it can not only reveal criminal and credit problems but can provide you with additional evidence of “due diligence” on your part in attempting to identify and remove a known hazard from your business.

It is important to remember that your efforts in making sure that you only hire good qualified employees will pay off in a smoother running business and fewer problems. Don't look at it as more work that you have to perform, look at it as saving you time and money later on.

Statistics show that 40% of businesses will not fully recover from a violent incident and 28% will NEVER recover...

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