



Avoiding Disastrous Hiring Decisions

Richard Pomerance, PhD

Every so often we hear about violent employees who vent their rage in the workplace, injuring—or even taking the lives of—coworkers who cross their path.

These are extreme—and thankfully rare—instances of disturbed employees jeopardizing workplace safety and productivity.

But there are many more cases of nonviolent, yet equally disruptive, employee behavior for which business owners should be prepared.

Individuals who have difficulty focusing on their work...are habitually rude...or seem overly distrustful are among those you may want to avoid putting on your payroll.

To prevent work disruptions, you must improve your understanding of people and learn to spot early signs of trouble.

By spotting these signs, you can avoid hiring “problem” employees...identify and guide troubled workers...and remove those who may create problems *before* they have a chance to hurt anyone.

HOW TO DO IT

• **Interview job candidates strategically.** Don't do all the talking. Let the candidate freely tell you about him/herself, following a natural train of thought. *As you listen, ask yourself the following questions...*

□ Where does the candidate tend to go in his thoughts? Does he begin to talk about his work but end up talking about the great beaches he's visited...or his magnificent home?

□ When he talks about previous jobs, does he refer to his bosses as controlling, unfair or crazy? This usually is a sign of general negativity

and unwillingness to take responsibility for oneself.

• **Make note of your initial impression.** During the interview, jot down your initial thoughts and feelings about the candidate.

Often, this first impression foreshadows the entire working relationship. That's why it's so important to keep in mind when you're evaluating information and making your final hiring decision.

Questions to consider: Do you feel intimidated as the candidate enters the room? Does he seem overly passive, dull or distracted?

Example: The owner of a pet store interviewed an applicant who seemed insincere, distracted and manipulative. This first impression was offset, however, by the candidate's pleasant smile and offer to work long, odd hours, covering a shift the owner desperately needed covered.

Two months after the candidate was hired, the owner found stock missing and noticed bizarre deaths among some animals.

Because his other employees had been with him for several years, the owner naturally—and correctly—suspected the new recruit. The owner wished he had given more weight to his first impression when interviewing this individual.

When interviewing and checking references, keep an eye out for—and be especially careful about hiring...

□ **Controllers and naysayers.** These people tend to take the creative spontaneity out of employees' lives and sap everyone's energy by ensuring

Bottom Line/Business interviewed Richard Pomerance, PhD, a psychologist and organizational consultant who helps companies avoid business problems with competitors, collaborators and employees.