



Pre employment screening, don't get caught out

By Brad Stewart, director of Talent Capital

It is estimated the cost of a bad hire can total 75% of an employee's annual salary.

Can you really afford to get it wrong?

Back in 2004 I recruited a business development manager for a very well known Australian provider of commercial security systems who we will call Client 'A'. Good on me, for my client I found a trustworthy, reliable, hard working, team-playing Aussie ocker with all of the skills required to do the job. He even had a great sense of humour and seemed well liked by his peers. I knew he was all of these things because I phone interviewed him, I met him face-to-face and then confirmed his credibility by speaking to two referees who he nominated.

Job well done. I was happy, the candidate was happy and hooray the client was happy.

Six months into his employment with client 'A' this amazing person disappeared. One day he was there and the next no one could track him down, not at home, not socially and when we took the initiative to call one of his referrals a few weeks later we couldn't track them down either. What was going on?

Eventually the mystery just died down until several weeks later the police contacted the employer after the mystery employee had been identified as a person of interest and wanted for being involved in a smuggling ring responsible for bringing weapons into the country. The ex-employee had used client 'A's' security clearance pass to clear customs for bringing in dangerous and explosive goods.

So where did it all go so terribly wrong? Sticking to the book, all reasonable checks and measures were undertaken but unfortunately we hired a lemon. Ok - this case is extreme but how do you know it will not happen to you? In 2008 a well known Auckland HR Director was identified as having purchased a fake degree from the U.S and more recently Mary Anne Thompson, the former head of the New Zealand Immigration Service pleaded guilty in the Wellington District Court to CV fraud.

When you are hiring a new employee or promoting on qualifications you have many methods and options at your fingertips to help you make an educated and informed hiring decision. An absolute must do is the reference checking. I have found in nearly every case a former employee will give honest feedback as they tend to look out for their fellow business owners and employers. Ask questions about their performance, abilities and achievements and if there were any red flags in their past employment and do not settle for 'yes' 'no' answers.

Typically you would do two reference checks with past employers but don't be afraid to ask for a colleague or an ex-client or customer. If you are using the services of a recruiter, ask for a typed transcript and the referees' contact details for your records.

Police checks are also common practice these days (especially for security companies). Companies such as **Personal Verification Ltd** will aid in background, criminal and CV checks. For positions such as management and finance or any role of authority you should always ask to sight their qualifications, if you do not recognise them contact the listed institute who should carry electronic records.

By asking a potential employee for their consent to undertake a criminal and CV background verification check you will find most people, if they have anything to hide, at that point will unexpectedly withdraw their application.

We call this 'self screening'.

On top of formal checks, trust your intuition and if something doesn't feel right then explore further and ask more questions, it may just save you time and money in the end. And if you were wondering - they never found the employee in question and yes I learnt a huge lesson from that experience.