

Screening job applicants

Norman Mortell, BA(Hons), RanTech, MIAT

Following a few simple steps can improve recruitment success and reduce turnover

Recruiting new staff members represents a significant investment for any organization. Proper screening of candidates will minimize the risk inherent in the selection process. But where does that screening begin and end?

In the employment context a robust screening process should be designed to facilitate the recruitment of qualified employees; anecdotal evidence from one pharmaceutical company's laboratory animal facility suggests that the implementation of a thorough screening process not only improved the quality of the labor pool, but was also associated with a 40% reduction in petty theft, vandalism, and other minor crimes.

Job advertisement

The candidate screening process begins with the advertisement itself. By the use of appropriate wording such as "successful candidates will be required to undertake a full security screening" we can actually screen out some individuals who will not bother applying at all. This can serve as a filter for unreliable or untrustworthy individuals; on the other hand, candidates who are honest about past issues will generally be given a fair hearing by an employer.

CV review

The next stage is to thoroughly review the application form and CV looking for inconsistencies or other suspicious signs. Do the dates match up? Are there any gaps? Are there genuine reasons for the candidate to want the job? Would taking the job mean a lower salary or job level?

In the biomedical research industry we are seeing increasing incidences of facility infiltration by animal rights activists; by thoroughly reviewing the documentation we can reduce these risks.

Interview

The interview is an excellent place to continue the screening process, ensuring that any suspicions issues raised on review of the CV are satisfactorily answered. Some matters are easy to check into (e.g., a paper published in a scientific journal, a qualification). Nevertheless, although we tend to accept official-looking documents as genuine, it is vital to recognize that forged identification and qualifications are easily obtained. Dealing with some issues of potential deception may be judgment calls (e.g., 'overstated' college qualifications by a candidate who subsequently went on to obtain a PhD), while others will be more cut-and-dried.

Formal screening

If a candidate seems strong after the early stages of assessment, it would be prudent to then subject them to a formal screening process. A job offer would then be contingent upon a successful security screening. This (with the required personal authority or data subject consent form) enables the organization to carry out more stringent checks. Many organizations outsource this responsibility to suitably qualified third parties who can check, cross check, and investigate any issues. Is the person actually who he or she claims to be? Many people change their names for a variety of reasons, some genuine and others suspicious. Are their qualifications genuine? Where was the person during that six-month gap?

It is also critical that references be contacted. Performing formal telephone inter-

views with the candidate and references will allow managers to glean a lot of information and enables the cross referencing of information to verify the details. By using experienced interviewers it is possible to easily obtain key information. In addition, screening companies may have a host of database search options that enable long forgotten information to be found and reviewed.

Post-hire screening

Screening should not end when an individual has been hired and inducted into the organization. If the person is a thief, fraudster, or infiltrator there will still be telltale signs.

Animal facility staff members should be trained to be able to spot the actions and behaviors of individuals that do not have the best interests of the organization at heart. Infiltrator behavior has been profiled and activities logged; there are simple steps that organizations can take to reduce the risks by having their front line workers effectively screen new people. While we are not advocating a 'Big Brother' approach, it is often the case after an infiltration that 20 different people have witnessed 20 clues but nobody put the information together until it is too late. Taking this last proactive screening opportunity not only reassures current staff members but it also makes your organization a harder target.

CONCLUSIONS

At the start of the recruitment process it is important to recognize, the screening begins with the recognition that the organization will actively benefit from a robust screening mechanisms, reducing turnover and, therefore, overall recruitment costs. Following the steps outlined above should ensure that the working environment is safe and that the organization only hires qualified individuals.

Norman Mortell is Director at Agenda Resource Management (Hull, UK), a company that specializes in recruitment and pre-employment screening. He is also Editor of Lab Animal Europe. Email: screening@agenda-security.co.uk. URL: <http://www.agenda-security.co.uk>.