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Positive Steps for Screening Out Workplace Violence

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There are no perfect solutions for ending workplace violence — called an epidemic by the Centers for Disease Control — but one California company has designed and implemented a screening program that comes close.

Jurg (Bill) Mattman of The Mattman Company is a leading expert in employee and executive security, and a principal founder of the Workplace Violence Research Institute. Last spring, The Mattman Company was asked by a computer software company in Santa Ana, Calif., to develop an effective screening program that would not only address the violence issue but legal concerns as well.

Application Process

Mattman developed an extensive screening process for the software company, designed to root out potential “problem employees.”

Step one is to tell applicants that everybody is subject to random drug testing and a background investigation.

Once the application is received, the software company verifies education, job positions and titles, and especially employment dates. “The reason is that people who have weak job histories — lots of job changes — know that employers don’t like that and they will drop off half the jobs and just expand the time period,” Mattman says.

“If you have somebody hiding a specific job, it could be that something happened at one location that they don’t want you to know about. In any case, if you have a new employee who lies to you at the start, you should be worried. It’s likely that they will become a problem in some form or another.”

Concurrently with the verifications, The Mattman Company performs a credit check, criminal background check, DMV check and public filing check on the software company’s applicants.

The last item, Mattman says, is to “check carefully with references.” He recommends asking for another name of someone who knows the applicant. Then, “disregard all the information from the first two levels. Start paying attention at the third level.”



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20 Questions

Another vital part of the hiring process is the applicant interview. Mattman gave the software company a list of about 20 "open-ended" questions, though not all of them need to be asked in every interview.

For example, Mattman says, "you might ask, 'tell me about the best boss you've ever had?' That leaves a lot of room for comment. The next question, 'tell me about the worst boss?' One indicator of potential problems is the person who has never had a good boss." The software company also has two people interview the applicant, one of whom is a security officer.

Rules and Consequences

The process does not end with the hiring, Mattman says. The new employee must be familiarized with company rules and regulations — and the consequences of not following them.

These rules and procedures have had an additional benefit for the software company, Mattman says. "They have told me that they feel very comfortable with this, and have a better handle on personnel. But the primary thing is that their labor law firm was extremely pleased to see they are doing it. It goes a long way to reducing liability."

Though the program was designed for one company, Mattman feels it is applicable generally. "It's kind of like bringing the level of safety up to 100 percent. That may not be possible, but I feel that by asking them to implement this program we have narrowed the gap to maybe 98 percent."

"I do not think this is a perfect program. But it is a realistic program that can be applied to most companies without incurring outrageous costs."