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The cost of workplace violence to corporate America is staggering and shows no signs of slowing down. In addition to negligent hiring claims from injured employees, employers are increasingly feeling the pinch of administrative action from OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration).

For example, employers who fail to stop workplace violence could be in violation of OSHA's general duty requirement that employers are required to provide employees with a reasonably safe working environment. The threat of an OSHA administrative enforcement action exposes employers to penalties and abatement requirements. Therefore, employers must hire smart.

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Q: What are the best steps to follow through on concerning the hiring process?

A: The initial interview will reveal a great deal about a prospective employee if conducted by an experienced professional. While some employers used to hire on gut instinct, it is best to hire on knowledge-not impulse.

Also, in-depth background checks are one way of verifying and uncovering information on a prospective employee.

Q: Can extensive screening be good for the company?

A: The answer is "yes." The scope of the investigation is often the subject of debate within companies. In years past, pre-employment investigations were an insurance policy against exposure for negligent hiring. While continuing to remain effective, pre-employment investigations have now become one of the single most important aspects of the hiring process. Companies are now willing to wait for results and devote financial resources toward ensuring that the right candidates are selected in the first place.

Q: Is it necessary to research past public records and how may that be achieved?

A: Public record checks will reveal legal troubles that were filed in court, but will not reveal problems that were never made public.

For example, many employees who cause problems on the job are never prosecuted. Claims of embezzlement, harassment, substance abuse, and even assault, are often handled quietly and the employee is allowed to resign. In problem situations, a public record is never initiated and the only source of vital information is the prior employer.

A trained investigator performing a pre-employment background check can often draw this information out of even the most reluctant manager, or can at least sense unspoken cues signaling a problem.

Q: Should executive level employees be screened from top to bottom?

A: Statistics from the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners demonstrate the need that all applicants, especially those interviewing for high level positions, be screened in accordance with their position.

The ACFE report concluded that those in the highest positions have the greatest access to, and opportunity, to abuse company funds and intellectual capital.

Q: How is pre-employment screening viewed today?

A: Pre-employment screening was once viewed as an investigative tool to find out if individuals had criminal records. While this remains an important role of the screening process, many companies now view background investigations as an essential part of the pre-employment evaluation process.

Given the staggering workplace violence statistics, the continued use of drugs on the job and employee criminal activity, it is now more important than ever to know whom you hire. The stakes are simply too high to expose your clients, employees and corporate assets to individuals whom you know little or nothing about.