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UMAN RESOURCES

PERSONNEL ISSUES IN LODGING

Pre-Hiring Preparation

Taking the time to check applicants can save time and money.

BY ELIZABETH JOHNSON

The Walt Disney World Company began conducting criminal background checks on all new employees this past summer, after a cook at one of its Florida hotels was charged with raping a 16-year-old tourist. Mirage Resorts tested 12,000 potential employees for drug use as part of the application process for its Las Vegas resorts. Properties of Ramada Franchise Systems use a personality index to match applicants with the jobs for which they are best suited.

In today's tight labor market, it may be tempting to fill positions with the first applicant who meets your basic requirements. But taking the time to find the best person for the job can help you reduce turnover, increase productivity, and possibly avoid a lawsuit for negligent hiring in the event of a crime committed by an employee.

Pre-employment screenings are a way to discover important information that can influence the hiring decisions you make. Types of screenings include reference checks, criminal background checks, drug screening, skills testing, and personality testing.

According to the *U.S. Full-Service, Deluxe and Luxury Hotel Benchmarking Study*, conducted by the Educational Institute of AH&MA and KPMG Peat Marwick, checking employment references is the most pervasive type of pre-employment screening conducted by those surveyed (99.6 percent). In contrast, jobs skills testing and personality testing of applicants were the least common hiring practices used by the surveyed properties (17.6 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively). Nearly one-third of the properties did not conduct criminal background checks and 59 percent did not perform drug testing on applicants.

The study noted that more thorough screening could help decrease involuntary turnover. For instance, one of the top reasons given for employee dismissal was drug and alcohol use—an employee



behavior that might be detected prior to employment by performing drug screening and criminal background checks. In addition, absenteeism and tardiness, which ranked first and third among the top reasons for employee dismissal, are tendencies that could be identified through quality pre-employment personality testing.

Loews Hotels used a series of pre-employment screenings to hire the best employees for its new Loews Miami Beach Hotel. Approximately 3,600 applicants began the process, which included a basic eligibility screening, a 45-minute in-depth session with 50 questions designed to assess personality traits and technical skills, drug testing, and background checks. At the end of the five-day process, Loews had hired the top 12.5 percent of applicants for line-level, supervisory, and management positions.

Some properties use personality tests, such as the Reid Report, produced by

Chicago-based Reid Psychological Systems, to assess integrity, safety, substance abuse, and personal achievement. Others, such as Ramada, use the Predictive Index, distributed by PI Management Resources, to learn more about applicants' personality traits and motivational drives.

The SecurResort 2000 Pre-Employment Biographical Questionnaire is one tool specifically designed for the hospitality industry. It was created by security expert Steven Millwee, president/CEO of Tampa-based SecurTest. Millwee partners with Dr. Marc Clark, president of the hospitality consulting firm M. Douglas Clark & Associates of Franklin, Kentucky in offering the SecurResort 2000 to hospitality/service organizations.

Applicants self-disclose information in biographical categories that include harassment history, violence history, guest relations, criminal background, illegal drug use, work performance history, workplace theft, and workplace safety. Employers receive a biographical report of the applicant's disclosures instantly with their computer version or within 15 minutes by fax, enabling them to make informed employment decisions.

"Many hotel companies will take the time to run checks on management-level applicants, but not on hourly employees," Clark says. "By conducting pre-employment screenings that focus on past behavior, you make the workplace safer for our most important assets, our employees and guests." ■

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