

How to do background checks (and what to do with the intel)

By Nick Patch | September 19, 2017 | Hiring & Recruiting, See all



There's no such thing as having too much information about a potential new employee.

After all, **making the right hire** is crucial for any organization – especially small businesses. And the more intel you can gather about a candidate, the better situated you are to make an informed decision.

Enter background checks.

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“The question becomes: do you know who you’re hiring?” says Curt Schwall, vice president of compliance and regulatory affairs at Employment Background Investigations, Inc., a pre-employment screening company in the U.S. “Past history is the best predictor of future behaviour that we have.”

Many employers use some form of background checks when exploring a new hire, even if it’s something as basic as calling references. But there’s actually a wide range of screening options available to small business owners looking to gather as much info as possible about their potential hires.

Here are five background checks to consider adding to your hiring process – and a what to do with the info once you gather it.

Reference checks

Whether you’re hiring someone you hope will be a crucial cog in management, or a temp for the mail room, there’s simply no excuse for not checking references.

“We never recommend hiring without doing a reference check,” says Cissy Pau, principle consultant at Clear HR Consulting.

During the reference check, you’ll want to verify that the applicant:

- Provided the correct start and end dates for previous employment
- Reported his or her title(s) accurately
- Didn’t get overly creative in describing job responsibilities

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job performance, and communication skills – it’s all valuable information. However, getting an honest assessment could take some persistence.

“What you see a lot now is references being very vague with their responses, because employers are sometimes concerned about giving information that’s not positive and having that employee coming back and accusing them of slander,” says Pau.

Criminal background checks

Criminal screening is becoming more popular in Canada, according to Schwall. If you’re hiring someone to work around children or other vulnerable people, for example, a criminal check is likely necessary.

These checks can be carried out either by private investigators or the RCMP, and may or may not involve the Canadian Police Information Centre.

However, it’s important to note that in many provinces, employers can’t refuse to hire someone based on a past conviction unless they can prove it has a direct impact on the person’s ability to do the job.

“I have a client who does criminal background checks, and the president of the company has a strong opinion about any type of criminal convictions in their entire life, even if the person is in their 60s and it happened in their 20s. It could be a small criminal conviction and he doesn’t want to hire them,” says Lisa Kay, president and lead consultant at Peak Performance Human Resources.

“You can’t discriminate. You have to be really fair. And employers need to know what they can and can’t do with the

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information they receive.”

To respect human rights laws, review your **requirements as an employer**, and be sure to clearly establish in writing in advance that a criminal background check is a requirement for the position.

Driver abstract

If you’re hiring someone to go behind the wheel of a company car, you’ll want to make sure they’re not concealing a road-warrior past. A motor vehicle check can reveal impaired charges, licence status, convictions, and suspensions.

Short of climbing into the passenger seat during the interview process, a driver’s record is the best way to ensure a candidate is a safe driver.

Education verifications

Fake degrees have become a multi-million dollar industry. Even if an applicant isn’t going so far as to invent a completely false education history, they could be stretching his or her educational background to fit the requirements of the job, or simply being dishonest about their spot on the honour roll.

If you have specific and non-negotiable educational requirements, conducting an education check – by verifying educational details with university and college records offices – is a must.

Credit reports

Before putting someone in contact with your company’s finances, it might be wise to take a look at theirs.

Credit inquiries can bring to light erratic payment histories, personal bankruptcies, and legal issues. It stands to reason that a candidate mired in money woes might either be desperate enough to do something foolish, or simply be insufficiently competent to handle company money.

“If you’re a financial adviser and you’re in significant debt, you might not be giving the best advice,” explains Kay.

That’s probably why credit checks are rising in popularity; the federal government, for instance, has done credit checks on public servants since 2015.

One word of warning: credit checks can’t be carried out secretly. Employers do need written consent to gather this information.

What to do with the information?

No matter which of the above background checks you carry out, the experts all warn not to rush to judgment.

In some cases, ruling a candidate out because of their past is not only unfair, but unwise. You could lose a good employee. If you’re concerned about information that arises, consider talking about it with the candidate.

But if a background check does turn up a red flag that forces you to hit the brakes, tread carefully. Sometimes it’s better to tell the unsuccessful candidate that you simply went another way, rather than revealing that a reference left an unflattering review.

“You need to be very careful if you don’t hire somebody because of the information that’s brought up,” says Pau. “I don’t know how much I’d go into detail because you’re just

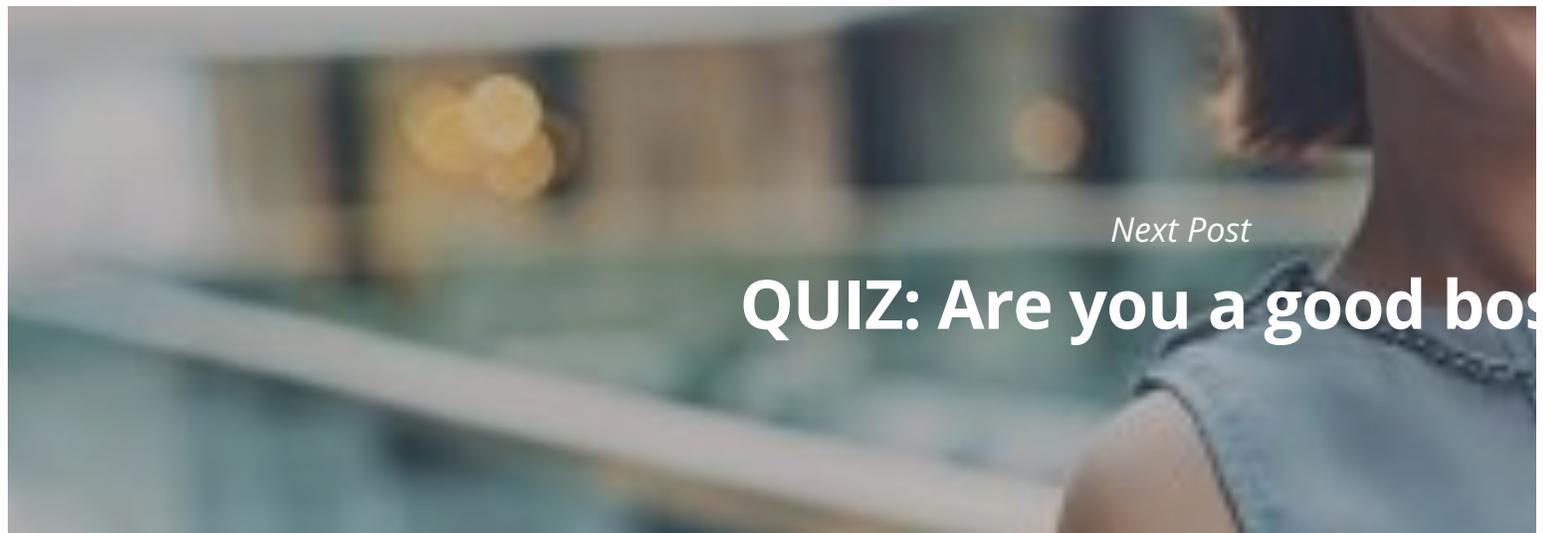
going to get a big argument back.”

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