

At Work

Conducting proper interviews can head off trouble

By Lindsey Novak
Tribune Media

Q: We have had a string of employees who didn't work out for various reasons. We are careful in our screening, but some people who are great at interviewing don't seem to come through on the job. Any suggestions for better screening processes?

A: Interviewing job applicants is a skill as well as a talent. Some interviewers have a natural ability to converse, while obtaining important insights and information on the interviewees, but according to the mail I received, that's not the norm.

Anyone who conducts interviews should take a look at John Kador's

book, "The Manager's Book of Questions: 761 Great Interview Questions for Hiring the Best Person" (McGraw-Hill), which presents open-ended questions designed to get to the heart of the matter. Asking interviewees the right questions, listening carefully to what they say and how they say it, and making a mental note of what they don't talk about are important factors in hiring the right person. Also take note of your initial gut reaction to the person - does he seem warm, open and forthright or cold, rigid and authoritarian? Or is he so open that you might worry about his ability to act professionally?

Most people are on their best behavior during interviews, but they do give clues to what they are really like if you fine-tune your listening skills and know what to ask.

I am ready to change jobs, but now people say I should answer yes to such questions because potential

employer can find out, and it would give cause for termination.

When I once told the truth about it, I then had to provide more information about what I was doing since. What's the point of having it sealed if you have to divulge the details, at a later date?

A: Your court records were sealed, so you made a serious mistake not listening to your attorney's advice. Lying about an adult criminal record would be grounds for dismissal, but juvenile court records are sealed to protect the child's future. According to Fred Mark Dry, a Chicago attorney concentrating in criminal law, the courts are strict about maintaining

confidentiality of juvenile records. A mistake made when a person is young and foolish should not be allowed to haunt that person forever. "If a crime is heinous in nature," says Dry, "the child would probably be tried as an adult."

Once you divulge your juvenile record to an employer, you've opened a can of worms. It's understandable that an interviewer would ask for more details. Before you start a job search, discuss the situation with an employment lawyer to see if the information you revealed to your present employer can be passed on or must be kept confidential.

RIGHTS TO EMPLOYEES

PERSONAL FILE

Q: Do I need my supervisor's permission to see or obtain a copy of his or her personnel file, and can they deny my request?

A: No and no. An employee has the right to receive a copy of his or her personnel file, but your company will require a written request from you before releasing the records.

Having problems on the job? Write to Lindsey Novak in care of Tribune Media Services, Inc., 435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1500, Chicago, Ill. 60611. She can also be contacted at AtWorkbyLN@aol.com.

By Alice Bredin
Tribune Media

combat my malaise, I have been binging on some ways to keep my energy levels up.

Two of the healthiest and easiest ways to stay alert are to drink lots of water and to get some exercise.

You may have heard the advice that you should drink at least eight to 10 glasses of water a day, but you may not realize how important water can be to your performance in the home office.

The reason water is so crucial is that every chemical reaction that occurs in your brain requires water and, therefore, even a 2 percent reduction in your amount of body water will make you less productive. Thanks such as problem solving, making judgments and responding quickly are all affecting at this

level. A 5 percent reduction can seriously impair mental functioning. Sometimes when you feel fatigued, you may be experiencing dehydration. If you are not drinking enough water, try these steps to make sure your body is hydrated:

- 1) Fill a 64-ounce (equivalent to eight 8-ounce glasses) jug or pitcher of water and keep it in your kitchen or office. Drink from that pitcher during the day to ensure that you consume the necessary amount of water.
- 2) Consume water gradually. Don't try to get it over with and drink most of your day's quota quickly. Aside from being uncomfortable, you will not have met your body's need for fluid - you must take the water in over the course of the day.
- 3) Avoid dehydrating your body. If you drink coffee or tea you need to consume two cups of water to counteract the dehydrating effects of each cup. Other substances that dehydrate your body include:

- Carbonated, caffeinated sodas.
 - Decongestants, antihistamines and many prescription drugs.
 - Pollution and pollen - they cause your body to "flush" at a faster rate.
 - Alcohol.
- Exercise can also help you stay alert. The job of your cardiopulmonary system (heart and lungs) is to pump oxygen into

your blood and then pump the blood around to all the vital places in your body that need it to operate efficiently. As you can imagine, your brain is one of the major destinations for this blood. Your gray matter makes up only 2 percent of body weight, yet it uses 25 percent of all the oxygen and glucose (blood sugar) you take in.

But when you're sitting at your desk, your lungs breathing quietly, your heart at rest, you are sending less oxygen to your brain than when you're exercising and giving the heart and lungs enough of a workout to encourage blood flow to the brain.

After a few hours of sitting at your desk without a break, your brain activity naturally slows because those vital ingredients,

blood and oxygen, are in lower supply. The practical effect of this situation is that part sluggish brain has a harder time remembering things, coming up with new ideas and solutions, and just plain staying alert.

Sending oxygen-rich blood to your brain will not only increase your energy level, it will help you remember things, solve problems and may even make you feel more optimistic.

Alice Bredin is author of the "Virtual Office Survival Handbook" (John Wiley & Sons) and host of The American Express Small Business Exchange Web site <http://www.americanexpress.com/smallbusiness>. You can write to her at Tribune Media Services, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611, or e-mail her at BredinA@aol.com.

Beating summer work doldrums

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ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Unions production facility has an immediate opening for an Administrative Assistant. This position is responsible for clerical duties, including but not limited to: answering phones, filing, and general office support. Must be a high school graduate with 2 years of experience. Salary: \$12.00 per hour. Fax: 312-953-2232.

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We are seeking a dynamic, energetic individual to join our team as a Sports Entertainment Specialist. Responsibilities include: promoting events, managing guest lists, and providing excellent customer service. Must have 2+ years of experience in the industry. Salary: \$15.00 per hour. Fax: 312-953-2232.

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Government Underwriter
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