## Consider Comfort, Boundaries of Employees in Home Office

2H(0)

Tribune Media recently added a full-time administrative assistant to my staff. Along with my part-time employees and the independent contractors who stop by from time to time, my home office is getting quite busy.

Because of the number of people I have working in my apartment, I have learned a let about how to set employees up to work in a home office.

office, There are basic legal considera-tipas such as liability insurance, in case they fall and hurt themselves, as well as myriad subtle issues that are important both to making admeone feel comfortable in your home and to maintaining your per-

sonal privacy.
Before you hire someone to work
in your home, you should make
super they are comfortable with the

concept of working in a home office. Explain to them that it can be quiet and they may miss the interaction that is part of a tradi-

interaction that is part of a tradi-tional office.

If you have pets or children, ask thom about their comfort level with both and inquire whether they will mind visits from both during the workday. A husband-and-wife architect team I know invited potential employees to the home office and made a point of bringing their children in to see how the candidate reacted to kids. I strongly recommend checking

I strongly recommend checking references for anyone who you plan to invite into your home to work. The minimum number of references I recommend is three, and more is advisable.

Also, consider running a credit report on a potential home office employee. To check someone's credit, call a credit report company

you.

Before you check a candidate's credit report you must obtain written authorization from the applicant along with his or her Social Security number and current

Other issues to consider include:

 Glasses and dishes. Because everyone has a different idea of what clean dishes mean, I have found that the most sanitary mode for handling dishes is to sak work.
 ors to place all used items in the dishwasher. This avoids the prob lem of you finding poorly washed items in your dish drainer.

· Hours. When you are setting

such as Experian, Equifac or TransUnion or get the name of a resoller from these companies who name on a condition credit check for you.

Before you check a candidate's credit report you must obtain written authorization from the applicant along with his or her Social

bours, make sure that the time room to use, where the water glasses are, if they are allowed in timpings on your personal life of their perts of your home, and anyotimize the polymer should step it established to your home office setup.

If you have only one bathroom, you should keep it free of private items such a bathrobes on the

• Food. Just because you don't drink coffee or milk doesn't mean your employees don't. Make sure you have a coffee maker, tea, water, and milk and sugar for employees. Show them these items, along with the refrigerator when they start their job. Let them know if they are allowed to store their food in the refrigerator.

Basics. Make employees com-fortable right away by letting them know where to hand their cost, whether they need to wipe their feet at the doorway, which bath-

Privacy. If you have been working at home alone for a while, may have become accustomed to total privacy. When you hire employees, plan for where you will conduct confidential meetings and phone calls while they are in the office.

Their personal life. All workers will need to make or receive per-sonal phone calls from time to time. Be sure you have a phone

they can access, other than the one sitting on your desk. A portable phone or phone in another room is an appropriate option.

• Comfort. Skimping on a good chair for yourself may lead to shoulder, wrist or neck paid Cutting corners on an employee's work setup can lead to a lawaut or increased medical paymonts. Make sure your employee's deak, chair and work are are comfortable and ergonomically sound.

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/ mallbusiness You can write to her at Tribune Media Struices, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60811, or e-mail her at Bredin Abool.com

## Interviewing Employees? Don't Ask These Qusetions

By Alice Bredin Tribune Media

Tribune Media
This time of year is a popular
hiring season for home-based
business entrepreneurs. A fresh
crop of college students is on the
job market. Also, mid-year is a
busy time for entrepreneurs,
many of whom need to hire to
handle expansion.
The peril in this phenomenon
is that many home-based hari

The peril in this phenomenon is that many home-based business owners have sole hiring responsibility for the first time. Some entrepreneurs are used to having corporate human resources departments to guide them through the process, others have just not been involved in any kind of hiring before. In the best case, unfamiliarity

with the hiring process can lead the year they graduated from to the wrong hire, in the worst high school. You may, however, case, a lawsuit. Certain questions are legally forbidden in the hiring process. Asking them can lead to a lawsuit based on job differminations.

discrimination.

As a general rule, steer clear of legal trouble by sticking to professional topics during an inter-

Specific questions to avoid include:

• How old are you?

People over 40 are protected by state and federal law to pre-vent age discrimination; therefore, you may not inquire about a candidate's age. Because most people graduate from high school at age 17 or 18, you may not ask

Are you married?
 Leave this kind of question for getting acquainted after an offer has been extended.

has been extended.

• Are you a citizen?
Although you will need to verify that someone is a citizen in order to hire them legally, you cannot find out by asking this question. You may ask it another way: 'Could you, after employment, submit verification of your legal right to work in the United States?' Are you planning to have

children soon?
You may describe job requirements, including travel, overtime and hours, and ask candidates if and hours, and ask candidates if they have any reason they can-not meet the requirements, but you may not ask about child-bearing plans.

May I have your maiden name?

name?

Because knowing a maiden name may provide information about someone's national origin, it opens you up to charges of discrimination. Likewise, you cannot ask for the name of a relative to contact in case of emergency. You may ask for someone to contact as long as you do not stipulate that the person be a relative.

• Are you disable? Do you have any medical problems? Have you ever filed for worker's compensa-tion?

The 1992 Americans With The 1992 Americans With Disabilities Act prohibits job discrimination based on disabilities of any kind. The questions listed above are just a few examples. It is safest to assume that you can not ask questions about a person's health or physical capabilities. You may describe job responsibilities and ask the candidate if he or she is capable of performing the job functions "with or without accommedation."

tion."
Even if someone volunteers information during the interview that could lead to discrimina-

tion, you can still be held liable. To protect yourself, never write down any volunteered informa-tion that falls into the categories tion that falls into the categories above, or into any others you think could get you into legal trouble. In these circumstances, state that the volunteered infor-mation is not relevant to the interview and move on.

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.amercianexpress.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

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