# Opinion: Finding honest help harder than finding good help

**By Denis Collins**

It's not just hard finding good help these days — it's hard finding honest help, too.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, approximately 75 percent of all employees steal from work in some way. What's worse is that about 30 percent of all corporate bankruptcies are a direct result of employee theft. The National Retail Security Survey in 2009 said you can also subtract a whopping $15.9 billion each year just from retailers who suffer from employee theft.

With the problem so widespread, many companies simply factor those losses into their yearly projections, and then hope it's not worse by year's end.

Although it may seem complex, one hedge against employee theft and fraud is to redesign the hiring process to help screen for employees who suffer from 'selective integrity'. After an employer fires someone for theft, the natural question they ask is, "How'd we even hire that guy?" Well, by changing your hiring practices, you can screen out people who are more likely to steal, and reduce the number of times you ever have to ask yourself that question again.

Tips for managers who screen job candidates include:

* Obey Legal Ground Rules

— While there are many questions the law forbids you to ask job candidates to eliminate discrimination, there are still many questions you can ask.

* Use Ethics-Based Interview Questions

— Too many interviewers gloss over questions that test an individual's character. Ask the candidate how he or she responded at a previous job to someone stealing, engaging in sexual harassment, or cutting corners at the cost of high ethical standards. Ask them if a superior ever requested that they do something unethical and, if so, how did they react. Even those who are dishonest with their answers can reveal how they feel about ethics in general.

* Review Behavioral Information

— Behavioral information can be gathered about job candidates through resumes, reference checks, background checks and some basic integrity tests that quiz candidates through "what would you do" style situations. Three standard integrity tests come from the Reid Report, the Stanton Survey and the Personnel Selection Inventory (PSI), which are easily found with a Google search if you don't already have access to them.

* Test Personality Traits

— The traits that govern whether an employee is more or less inclined to be dishonest include conscientiousness, organizational citizenship behavior, and social dominance. For the first two, you want to see high scores — not so much on the last one. Again, personality tests are widely available to test these traits.

* Other Tests

— Some of the most revealing tests are the obvious ones — alcohol tests, drug tests and even polygraph tests, when permitted by law. Many candidates may object to these as employment requirements, but in a world in which 7 percent of our entire economy goes up in smoke from employee theft and fraud, companies should not feel shy about drawing a line in the sand. While those who refuse to take those tests may not have anything to hide, it's clear that those who agree to those tests have nothing to hide.

Fraud and malfeasance at the highest levels of some of the country's largest companies contributed to the 2008 to 2010 recession, and have been a willing assistant in keeping our economy down. It would be interesting if we could have turned the clocks back and run those executives through an ethics-oriented hiring process, and perhaps eliminated some of the fraud and theft that helped level our economy. Short of that, all we can do is pave the way for a better future by taking some very basic steps to help weed out the unethical and dishonest from our nation's talent pool.

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