

REFERENCE & BACKGROUND CHECKS, SCREENING, ASSESSMENT, INTERVIEWING

Workplace Violence and Hiring

Paula Santonocito Wednesday – June 28, 2017

A recent incident in Orange County, Florida, where a former employee entered the workplace and fatally shot five people before turning the gun on himself, has HR professionals again discussing how acts like these can be prevented. One issue that frequently comes up is the possible link between hiring and workplace violence.

But does such a link exist?



Predicting Violence

HR is well aware of the potential for violence in connection with employee termination. At large companies especially, there are generally procedures that detail how to sever an employment relationship, with attention to workplace safety.

Yet, procedures are typically created with attention to termination and its immediate aftermath. The employee in Florida had been terminated in April and returned to the workplace in June.

Foreseeing future acts of violence may be next to impossible, even as HR and other management professionals in retrospect sometimes think there were signs.

What Statistics Show

Still, the number of workplace homicides makes HR and other management professionals search for a way to predict and prevent these acts.

In 2015, the most recent year for which data is available, there were 417 workplace, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); 354 of these incidents were intentional shootings. Others involved stabbing, cutting, slashing, and piercing.

Were any of these preventable?

Maybe. But maybe not.

BLS data shows assailants in workplace homicides differ greatly depending on the gender of the decedent. In 2015, approximately 43 percent of female decedents were fatally assaulted by a relative or domestic partner. The corresponding figure for male decedents was 2 percent.

In other words, the conflict isn't always between an employer and employee.

About the Hiring Process

This makes things really complicated for employers looking for a link between hiring and workplace violence.

Yes, you can and should conduct pre-employment screening. Comprehensive background checks are a must.

Similarly, pay attention to work history, as past behavior is typically a predictor of future behavior.

You should also interview with attention to social skills. This includes being alert to body language, along with any negative vibe you may get from a job candidate.

Answers to behavioral interview questions likewise provide insight into how the person reacts to criticism and show how he or she manages feelings.

Needless to say, you are looking for red flags.

Following these guidelines will not prevent every workplace incident. But if they stop you from hiring one violent person, you may have saved a life.

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