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Know Your Employee

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Gaining as much knowledge as possible about an employee is important for morale, profit, and security considerations. Paying attention to employee financial, emotional, or personal motivations—and sharing feedback with employees—can dramatically improve morale, communication, and profitability.

An employee's perception of whether you have a genuine interest about their job performance and welfare can have a much larger impact on morale and productivity than factors such as training and technology. Even more so, we are now entering into an era of liability and security concerns that requires many of us to gain additional and more in-depth information about employees before, during, and after they have been hired.

Before hiring a potential employee, ask about education, work history, and personal interests. Conduct a background check. That's more than checking their references; it's also seeking out whether they have a criminal history, traffic violations, or something else that may prove to be a red flag. If you are concerned about an individual's criminal history because of the requirements of the job, local law enforcement authorities may be able to help with this task.

Criminal background checks can be done by a local law enforcement agency but only for arrests made by that agency within their jurisdiction and by their own personnel. Consequently, other law enforcement agencies may need to be contacted in order to account for other geographical areas and/or jurisdictions where the potential employee may have lived or worked.

Background checks require complete information. This includes full name, social security number, date of birth, and any known aliases. Generally, local law enforcement agencies also require a signed waiver by the potential employee in order to allow the requested information to be released to a potential employer. The processing fee is nominal and can be as low as \$5. Remember if you have a bad feeling about someone, move on to the next candidate.

Once employed, get to know your employee; ask relevant but no intrusive questions on a somewhat regular basis. Encourage dialogue in order to determine a person's behavior. Behavioral changes may be an indicator of drug use, personal problems, psychological issues, etc. Also keep track of an individual's progress on confidential matters, loss prevention concerns, and traffic violations.

Confidential agreements are becoming commonplace and may be used to ensure confidential information remains undisclosed. Periodic checks on drivers' license records are also becoming more commonplace and may prevent you from having an employee driving your vehicles with a suspended drivers' license. Many automobile insurers provide this service upon request.

When an employee leaves, make sure to find out why and where they are going. Keep the lines of communication open. Do this as part of an exit interview so you can find out how to contact past employees about financial matters, such as W2s, and on other issues such as criminal mischief and inventory shrinkage that may impact your business after they have left.

Sources: Offices of the Sheriff – Monroe, Livingston and Wyoming Counties; New York State Police – Troop E

Original Printing: Cornell Cooperative Extension of Monroe County, Rochester, NY