



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

ARE YOUR BAD APPLES SPOILING YOUR BARREL

Most of us are employers in one form or another. Even if it's just the maid or the occasional baby sitter, we go through the same process as any major employer – we interview, assess and hire on credentials and gut feeling. And we place huge trust in these people. We leave the maid in charge of our entire house and contents every day. We expect the babysitter to do the same, as well as keeping our kids safe from harm – there's an assumption of trust between employer and employee and we assume they will not take advantage. And when they occasionally do we rightly feel bloody peeved off and kick ourselves for not seeing through them in the first place.

HR professionals face the same challenge but on a much bigger scale. It's our job to identify the most capable and dependable employees from an often very large pool of candidates. Neglecting to conduct effective pre-employment assessments can result in poor workforce productivity, potential law suits, damaged company reputation, and financial loss- all of which threaten the success of your business or organization. But we all know that, right?

We also know that various pre-employment screening techniques are available to help meet this challenge. Aptitude tests, background checks and personality profiling aid in the assessment of technical skills, prior experience, and overall credentials of a candidate. Those who are running businesses responsibly recognise and make some effort to ensure we have most of the bases covered. It makes perfect sense. Unfortunately you can't get it all right. You always run the risk of letting dishonest and corrupt people slip through the net into your business. To minimise this risk you are therefore also obliged to put in place systems and procedures and even barbed wire fences in some situations to ensure that your property, assets, stock, whatever are protected – it's a whole new aspect of commerce and it's called security or loss or shrinkage prevention. The new buzz phrase is risk management but how do you assess how much security is enough or when it is too much?

Instead of laying out a fortune on security cameras, sophisticated surveillance systems and high-tech safety systems, or contracting in expensive pseudo detectives, the corporate equivalent of Inspector Clueso, Miss Marples, Sherlock Holmes or Mma Ramotswa, there is now another route you can adopt to reduce the threat of liability that a potential employee may pose in the

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Unbeknown to most these days you can you accurately identify a candidate's level of risk regarding unlawful acts such as theft, drug use, bribery, or general lack of integrity. We trawled the market and found a product with high reliability and so are able to test along the parameters of honesty, truthfulness, proneness to corruption, drug use and stealing etc. And it makes perfect sense – chances are if you employ someone with a propensity to make a fast buck at the expense of others – he/she will sooner or later make a plan to help themselves from your organisation and forewarned is forearmed.

The more I use it the more I am surprised that it hasn't yet caught on in Botswana. Sure, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, the country is ranked 26th (just below Belgium and Portugal) and it is the highest-ranked African country. But that doesn't mean there is no corruption. The other day I asked a senior businessman about whether he felt corruption was present here. His response was that he doesn't understand when people say Botswana is rated so highly because when dealing with government and schools etc. the word on the street is that it is very difficult to try and do business with integrity as it is common practise to give 'backhanders' to secure tenders.

But does the propensity for corruption feed off itself and become contagious? Recent research at Stanford University attempts to shatter the common myth about 'rotten apples' within organisations. The overall assumption of the research is that organisational culture plays a significant role in influencing corruption - that an employee may not be "rotten" when entering the organisation but can evolve into one. We see this the whole time - it's the old 'everyone else does it so why shouldn't I?' attitude. And we see it in corporate Botswana everyday when the whole management team jets off to Switzerland or wherever with their inflated US\$ per diem firmly tucked in their wallets, off to another conference which nobody really needs to attend in the first place, intent on a company-sponsored party and shopping spree.

So in one form or another it's widespread and the trouble is that as individuals we are not always the best judges of character, nor do we all deal from the same assessment pack. According to Liat Basis a Social-Industrial Psychologist and R & D Consultant for Midot, "pessimistic managers, who believe humans are essentially corrupt expend company resources in order to hire security officers, establish strict codes of conduct, implement rigorous recruiting processes and institute stringent penalties. On the other hand, optimistic managers prefer to employ strategies of reward among honest and diligent employees and ensure that junior employees are aware of these strategies." And whichever category you as a manager fit into, there are still pitfalls and you need to recognise them and turn to the professionals for help.

Sceptical? Who, you may well ask is Midot when it's at home and what does it do to earn its keep? Well it's a company that has developed a web-based tool for testing morals, honesty and other personality traits. Test parameters are honesty, truthfulness, proneness to corruption, drug use and stealing etc and it's considered extremely reliable. And my business is too small to accommodate corruption and theft so I'm not prepared to take any chances. Anybody who gets employed by me is going to be tested in future, as I am not prepared to ascertain any 'rotten apples'. I want to know just how far they might go to bend the rules and buck the system, at my expense and I have the technology to do it. This is the ultimate in soul-searching with a silicone-chipped microscope. And I know it works - I did the test on myself and passed with flying colours. In fact I was so impressed I offered myself a contract right there and then!

