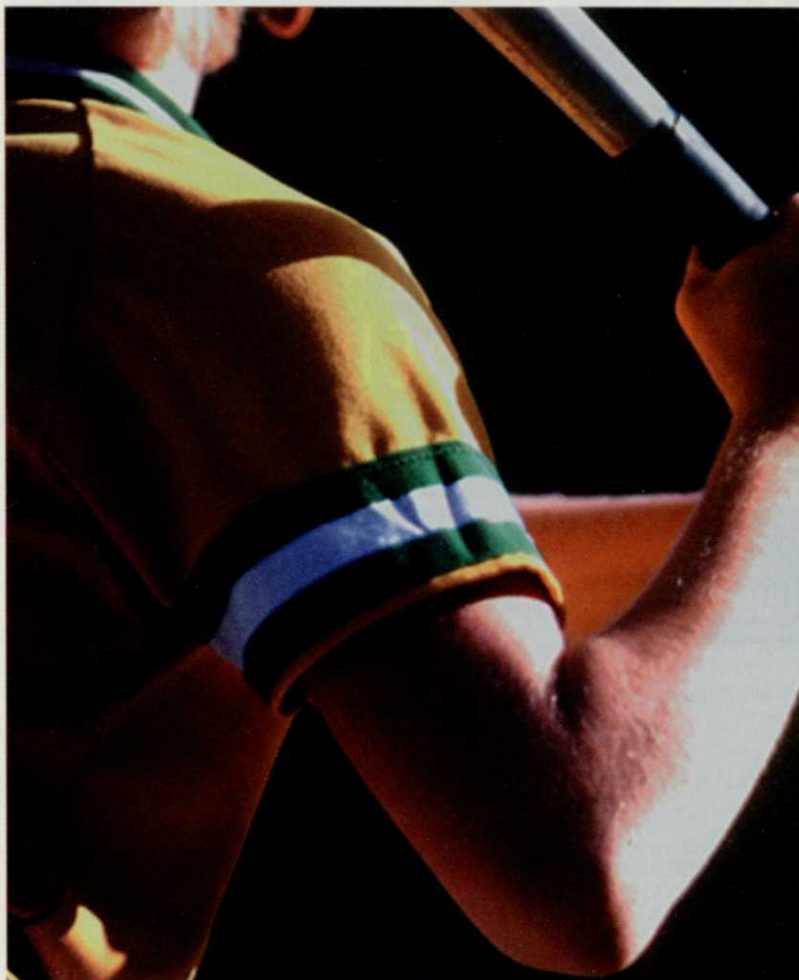




*'Would I want this person
driving a vehicle in which
my wife and kids are
passengers?'*



f hiring new technicians is one of toughest tasks you face, it could be because you don't have a plan in place to help predict whether a job candidate will be reliable and honest.

Not having a hiring process—it doesn't have to be elaborate—is a mistake.

Even though no system is infallible, a structured interviewing and hiring process produces more "homers" than "strikeouts" in acquiring reliable and honest employees. At least more success than the, "yup, he-looks-like-he-can-handle-it" hiring approach.

Atlanta-based Orkin Pest Control and Lawn Care, for instance, screens applicants systematically. This is done along with face-to-face interviews.

The process includes:

- ▶ a drug screening program;
- ▶ a felony record check;
- ▶ a motor vehicle report;
- ▶ a pencil-and-paper "integrity" test;
- ▶ and a company physical.

It starts as soon as an applicant walks into an office and is informed that the company is drug-free. The drug test itself isn't given until after a prospect is offered conditional employment and signs a consent form.

Orkin uses a nationwide laboratory for drug testing, says Tom Diederich, vice president of government relations. But some companies use local laboratories.

Applicants should be advised to list any prescription drugs they're taking so the laboratory can screen them out, he says.

Curiously, the law treats drug and alcohol testing differently, says Richard Lehr, an attorney who works closely with lawn application companies. A company

Hiring long-ball

by RON HALL / Senior Editor

can conduct random employee drug testing, says Lehr, but it must have "reasonable cause" to test an employee suspected of being alcohol impaired.

While outside vendors can conduct felony record checks of job prospects (about \$35 per individual, says Diederich), employers can do this themselves. It will require several calls to the county where the applicant lives, or previously lived.

Likewise, Orkin uses a vendor to run motor vehicle checks of prospects. "A current license doesn't necessarily mean a clean driving record," says Diederich.

Again, employers can get this information themselves, although it may take a while. Motor vehicle departments may or may not be as cooperative as you'd like, depending on the state.

What about a telephone reference check of a job candidate?

Do it, advises Diederich. Some former employers will only reveal that the individual worked for them, and perhaps the job title and length of employment, but their tone of voice can be significant, he says.

You may also be able to contact a former supervisor or co-worker who might provide a more complete picture of the job prospect.

As for the physical examination, most companies would probably benefit from using a local doctor who's, at least, familiar with the types of jobs the prospect will be doing. Will it require heavy lifting? Sitting for prolonged periods?

Crucial to the entire process is confidentiality. Whatever the company learns about the prospect must remain confidential, cautions Diederich.

Beyond the tests and the interviews, says Diederich, green industry employers should ask themselves the ultimate question:

"Would I want this person servicing my home? Or driving a vehicle in which my wife and children are passengers?"

"If the answer is 'no,' no matter how desperately you need a person, I would say, pass on that person," says Diederich. **LM**

—For more on hiring, consult the business section of your local library (Dewey Decimal 658.311).

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Hiring tips

- 1) Establish a positive company image to attract the best talent.
- 2) Know what you need, especially in the areas of technical expertise and personality traits.
- 3) Don't pre-judge candidates you're interviewing, and don't hire on instinct.
- 4) Look for industriousness, intelligence, temperament, creativity, resourcefulness, confidence, motivation and drive.
- 5) Ask for references, and check them. □

—Sources: "A Small Business Guide to Employee Selection by Lin Gensing; "On Hiring" and "Finding, Hiring and Keeping the Best Employees" by Robert Half.

Why you must prepare for job interviews, too

To successfully interview a job candidate, you should prepare first, believes Ewald Altstadt, director of national operations for Lawn Doctor of Holmdel, N.J. Unfortunately, many don't.

"We should organize the necessary data. We should make a list of the key questions. Even the most skilled interviewer should prepare questions beforehand—job-type qualification questions," says Altstadt.

The interviewer can draft these questions by following these five points:

- 1) Determine exactly what is required of the job.
- 2) List the characteristics, the skills and the abilities a person will need to do the job.
- 3) Find out as much as possible about candidates' background.
- 4) Determine to what extent each person you interview does or doesn't have the necessary skills or ability.
- 5) Weigh all information on all available applicants and make a decision.

Altstadt suggests "a semi-structured" interview process. Its goal is to learn as much as possible about the job prospect which means "getting the person talking and keeping him or her talking."

Even then, hiring a prospect is, at best, an educated guess. "The more data we have on each candidate, the better our guess is going to be," says Altstadt. After each interview, thank the applicant and let him or her know when you will make a decision, says Altstadt. That's the time to write down your impressions of the job candidate.

All managers can greatly improve their ability to conduct successful job interviews. But it takes persistence and preparation, says Altstadt. □

—R.H.

