Case Incident 1
Peering Into Your Past

In this age of seemingly social and humanitarian values, it's ironic that employers are peering deeper than ever into our backgrounds, often without our knowledge.

In large part, this change is a reflection of our economic times. Though there are skill shortages in some industries, most employers have plenty of applicants from which to choose, meaning they can afford to carefully check into applicants' backgrounds. And check they have—employment screening is booming.

Background checks are done with the applicant's authorization in most, but not all, cases. One staffing expert said, "I'm shocked how many employers are not getting applicant authorizations." Moreover, when a background check does reveal a problem, most employers don't inform the applicant that this is the reason for their rejection. When Theodore Pendergrass was rejected for a store supervisor job at Walgreens, the company, unlike most, told him the background screening firm ChoicePoint found a past employer had accused him of stealing $7,313 in merchandise. Pendergrass was shocked. "I wanted to cry," he said. Despite proving the charges false, Pendergrass was similarly rejected by other employers that used ChoicePoint, including CVS and Target. Eventually Starbucks, which doesn't use screening firms for entry-level positions, hired him.

This is not to suggest background checks have no merit. Past behavior often forecasts the future, and malfeasance is a huge problem for most companies. Across industries, roughly 10 percent of applicants have criminal records, and more have driving violations (48 percent), employment verification problems on their application or résumé (48 percent), or credit problems (43 percent).

Background checks don't stop with screening firms. A *lot* of companies also mine the Internet—including Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, message boards, and blogs—for information about prospective job candidates. Flight attendant Ellen Simonetti lost her job at Delta after she posted some suggestive pictures of herself in uniform (even though she didn't identify Delta as her employer). She sued Delta and lost. Heather Armstrong wrote about her job in a blog and was fired. She started a Web site (Dooce.com), which spawned a neologism—"Dooced"—to describe workers fired for what they post on the Web.

Questions

1. Do you think employers have a right to investigate applicants by Googling them or exploring sites such as MySpace or Twitter? What about checking out their current employers?
   Answer: The answer to this is simple. Each of the sources suggested are open records. What a person places on them is open to the world, including potential employers. For some reason, some students will not see this openness as an acceptable tool for employers' employment investigations. Why they perceive this can be from any number of facility beliefs.

2. When applicants apply for a job, typically they give employers permission to look into their background. Do you agree this absolves employers of moral blame for such "digging"?

Answer: This question seems to imply that employers commit "moral blame" if they use these sources for background checks. This is not an issue. Even if an applicant didn't sign a form giving permission for a background check, using these sources as tools is open for the process, if they are applied to all applicants equally (EEOC requirement).

3. If you worked for a consumer products company that asked you to develop a background check policy, what would be some central tenets of your recommended program?
   Answer: Background reports can range from a verification of an applicant's Social Security number to a detailed account of the potential employee's history and acquaintances. There is even some evidence that employers are now searching popular social networking Web sites such as MySpace and Facebook for the profiles of applicants. An October 2007 survey from Vault.com found that 44% of employers use social networking sites to obtain information about job applicants while 39% have searched such sites for information about current employees. Read about "digital dirt" and the jobseeking process at www.abilitiesenhanced.com/digital-dirt.pdf.

   Here are some of the pieces of information that might be included in a background check. Note that many of these sources are public records created by government agencies.

   - Driving records
   - Vehicle registration
   - Credit records
   - Criminal records
   - Social Security no.
   - Education records
   - Court records
   - Workers' compensation
   - Bankruptcy
   - Character references
   - Neighbor interviews
   - Medical records
   - Property ownership
   - Military records
   - State licensing records
   - Drug test records
   - Past employers
   - Personal references
   - Incarceration records
   - Sex offender lists

   Source: http://www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs16-bck.htm

4. As we noted in this chapter, if an employer doesn't check the background of an applicant with a criminal history who then harms others at work, the employer can be liable for "negligent hiring." What do you think of such a policy? Does it influence your attitudes toward background checking?
   Answer: Answers to this question will vary based on s student's ethic or value system. No matter what a student answers, he or she should be aware that this subject is LAW, therefore it is not subject to variation based on personal beliefs. See http://www.verires.com/nhiring.htm for an excellent introduction into the legal considerations.

5. Some individuals are turning the tables and checking out prospective employers by posing as customers or clients. Couldn't an applicant argue "What's good for the goose is good for the gander"?
   Answer: A student could argue the point, but he or she must consider a MAJOR difference. The employer is NOT assuming a false identity to acquire the information. An applicant posing in a false representation using false premises to acquire information treads on fraud. The false representation, then, is at the least unethical and approaches illegal if carried to extreme.

Sources: Based on F. Hansen, "Caution Amid the Credit Crunch," *Workforce Management* (February 16, 2009), pp. 35–39; C. Terhune, "The Trouble with Background Checks," *Business Week* (June 9, 2008), pp. 54–58; J. S. Lublin, "Job Seekers Go Undercover to Check Out Employers," *Wall Street Journal* (November 24, 2008), p. B4; and S. Foss, M. Collin, "You Are What You Post," *Business Week* (March 27, 2006), pp. 52–53.

Case Incident 2
Job Candidates Without Strong SAT Scores Need Not Apply

Many high school students probably believe that once they get into college, their SAT scores are a thing of the past. However, many job seekers are discovering their would-be employers are asking for their SAT scores as part of the selection process. Donna Chan, a 23-year-old graduate of New York's Wagner College, learned that one of the minimum requirements for many of the entry-level financial services jobs she was seeking was a combined SAT score of 1300. According to the College Board, the organization that administers the exam, the average combined math and verbal score of the freshman class of 2005 (the last class to take the old version of the SAT) was 1028. Donna Chan's score was "in the 1200s"—a good score to be sure but not good enough to obtain any of the positions she was seeking, even though she obtained a 3.9 grade-point average in college. "I think it's asking a bit much," says Chan. "That's something high school kids have to worry about. After four years of working hard, I think you've paid your dues, and unless you're applying to Princeton Review or some mathrelated, analytical job, I don't see the relevance."

Apparently, however, some recruiters do. Alan Sage, a vice president at systems-management software company Configuresoft Inc., says SAT scores are a good predictor of success in his company, and he regularly has applicants submit their scores when applying for sales positions. He set the mark at a combined score of 1200—lower than Donna Chan faced but nonetheless well above average. Says Sage, "In my experience, people with high SAT scores tend to do better." Sage himself scored between 1200 and 1300. He adds, however, that "we wouldn't exclude someone from an interview if he or she didn't score high."

Seppy Basilli, vice president of Kaplan Inc., one of several companies that provides instruction on taking the SAT, believes companies are misusing SAT scores. "It's such a maligned instrument," he says. "It's not designed to measure job performance, and the kind of person who performs well on the SATs is not necessarily the kind of person who will perform well sitting at her desk." Morgan Denny, who works as a headhunter in New York, shares a similar opinion. Though his clients typically want to consider only applicants with high SAT scores, Denny often shows his clients applicants he believes are strong candidates for the position despite a lower score. "The SAT is an annoyance for us and an annoyance for our candidates," says Denny.

Some individuals, such as Kristin Carnahan, a spokesperson for the College Board, feel companies should use other measures of cognitive ability, such as college grades, which are also more recent indicators than SAT scores. However, grades aren't standardized across institutions, so they can't be compared like SAT scores can. Grade inflation (Exhibit 17-3) also may make it more difficult for recruiters to assess an applicant's GPA. Because OB research has shown cognitive ability is a strong predictor of job performance—and the SAT is supposedly a measure of cognitive ability—many companies may continue to use the SAT as a benchmark for job applicants.

Questions

1. Is it fair for organizations to require minimum scores on standardized tests such as the SAT? Why or why not?
   Answer: Students will have very strong opinions on this issue. Try to get your students to focus on the issue as an employer, not as one who is currently self-interested.

2. As a recruiter choosing between two individuals with different SAT scores, would you have difficulty giving the job to the applicant with the lower score? On what additional factors might your choice depend?
   Answer: Again, here is an opportunity for spirited discussion with your students. There are some problems with standardized tests, yet they are relied on by many organizations. Students will have little trouble debating this topic among themselves and with the instructor.

3. What other indicators of job performance, besides SAT scores, could you use to screen job applicants? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
   Answer: Lists could include GPA, co-curricular activities, community activities, previous awards, etc.

4. Suppose you worked at a company that used SAT scores for hiring purposes. How would you handle diverse applicants, such as those from a foreign country who may not have taken the SAT?
   Answer: Students may want to work with "diverse" students in the class to tackle this question. Assuming that you have broad diversity among your students, you can probe for differences and similarities among those in the class.

Sources: Based on S. Foss, "Background Check—Background Search," American Chronicle, July 12, 2007; and K. J. Dunham, "Career Journal: More Employers Ask Job Seekers for SAT Scores," Wall Street Journal (October 28, 2003), p. B1

Instructor's Choice
Recruiting for the Registry

Students are asked to assume the position of Director of Human Resources for a gift registry Web site based in St. Paul, Minnesota. The company is expanding rapidly and must hire 30 new employees. However, the company wants to increase its workforce diversity, so the HR office is attempting to develop a recruitment strategy to increase diversity.

Form groups of five to six students each. Each group will be assigned a particular minority group for which to develop a recruitment strategy. (Minority groups that have been used in the past include: African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, Hispanics, men, physically challenged, over 40). In developing your recruitment strategy, be as specific as possible; i.e., list specific organizations, journals/magazines, newspapers, college campuses, radio and/or TV stations, etc. you would use to target your minority group.

EXPLORING OB TOPICS ON THE

WORLD WIDE WEB

Search Engines are our navigational tool to explore the WWW. Some commonly used search engines are:

www.goto.com   www.google.com   www.excite.com

www.lycos.com   www.hotbot.com   www.bing.com

1.   Do you have a job in mind once you graduate from college, or maybe a dream job that you hope to land someday? Write a job description for the job. Include as much detail as possible, including qualifications, nature and scope, etc. If you are not sure what to include, do a Web search on job descriptions; there are many free sites that will give you the needed categories.

2.   Rank and Yank. This is not an "official term" you will see in the textbooks, but it is how employees often refer to Forced Rankings as a method of evaluation. Below are two Web sites (a Web search will yield more) that discuss this topic. Write a short two-page paper on your reaction to the term "rank and yank" after reading one or more of the articles found on these Web pages.
        http://www.laweekly.com/ink/02/08/on-powers.php
        http://www.darwinmag.com/connect/opinion/column.html?ArticleID=105

3.   Termination. Not a friendly term, but employees are fired everyday. What would you do if you were the person who is to deliver the bad news to the employee? There are better ways than others to let an employee go, and they involve "due process." Learn more about how to conduct yourself in this situation at: http://www.hrzone.com/topics/firing.html. Write a short reaction paper on what you learned. Include not only what you learned if you were the person delivering the bad news, but what you think you would do if you were the one being terminated.

4.   Writing a job analysis is one of those duties that managers typically only do rarely in their careers, but it is important when a new job is created or when making decisions about what training should take place for new employees. Go to: http://www.hrzone.com/topics/joba.html and read about how to conduct a job analysis. Select a job and then write a job analysis for it based on the recommendations of the article. Try to select a "public" job or one that everyone in the class would be familiar with. For example: bank teller, flight attendant, customer service representative, travel agent, even—college professor! Bring your analysis to class for feedback.