

“Dental office receptionist required immediately -- Embezzlers please apply”

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Author: William Hiltz BSc MBA CET

william@prosperident.com

It continues to amaze me how dental staff members, fired by a dentist for stealing, invariably manage to get hired by another dental office.

There was a notorious woman in Toronto who stole from (and of course was hired by) nine different dental offices within two years.

It is tempting to attribute her success in hiding her previous track record to the anonymity provided by a big city; however we regularly see adverse information successfully concealed in Nova Scotia also. The only conclusion I can reach is that dentists don't know how to do proper background investigation before making hiring decisions.

We were recently involved in an investigation of a spectacular fraud (theft of several hundred thousand dollars) in HRM. We have since received reports offices about the involved employee applying for work at several other dental offices.

She was successful in getting hired by one dental office. However, several months after being hired, after seeing suspicious activity on the part of the employee, the office finally became aware of her history and terminated her. As recently as the week this article was written (September 20, 2008) this woman continues to apply for employment at dental offices in HRM.

This article outlines the steps you need to take to avoid hiring an embezzler.

Eight Steps to Prevent Hiring the Wrong People:

1. **Inform all job applicants that you will check their references before you make any hiring decisions.** *Dentists will often hire applicants because they need someone immediately. Because of the damage an embezzler can cause to your practice, always perform the required reference checks no matter how quickly you need to fill a position.*
2. **Ask each applicant to sign a release form permitting you to ask questions of their former employers and other references** (See Annex A for a sample). *Without this consent, you may be limited to confirming dates of employment, pay rate, and position only. While this information is useful, it will tell you nothing about the prospective employee's character.*
3. **For each employer listed on the applicant's resume:**
 - a. **Do not make use of phone numbers helpfully provided by the applicant - instead look up previous employers' phone numbers yourself.** *The applicant may supply a false phone number that is answered by someone poised to give a glowing reference.*
 - b. **Ask former employers for a confidential fax number.** *Use it to send the employer a copy of the consent form along with your own personal credentials. Some dentists fear being sued for defamation if they say anything negative about a former employee and your fax will address their concerns.*

4. Verify the following information:

- a. **Confirm the beginning and ending employment dates** -- make a timeline. *Ask each employer when the applicant began their employment and when it was terminated.*
- b. **Ask each employer who the previous and subsequent employers were and compare the answers with the applicant's résumé.** *An applicant may omit or distort the information on their résumé. Previous employment may be omitted and replaced with phrases such as: "stayed at home with the children" or "attended school", or dates of employment may be altered to cover a job the applicant doesn't want you to know about.*

5. Confirm job title, salary and jobs responsibilities.

- a. If one of these basic checks doesn't match the applicant's résumé (or what you heard during the interview); something may be amiss.
- b. **Ask the former employer if they would hire the person back.** If their response is less than enthusiastic, move on to the next applicant.

6. Do not rely heavily on Reference Letters

- a. Forged reference letters are easy to create using word processing software. *To confirm authenticity, look it up the author's number in the phone directory and call them.*
- b. Do not place weight on reference letters that are stale dated (one or more years old) or generic (*i.e. "Dear Sirs" or "To Whom it May Concern"*) A good reference letter will be addressed to you, the prospective employer. Again, do not call the employer's phone number as supplied by the applicant or in the reference letter, look it up yourself.
- c. Do not place significant weight on reference letters from non-employers.

7. Be somewhat skeptical about requests on the part of the applicant not to contact current or former employers. It is understandable that an applicant doesn't want a current employer contacted, as the current employer may not know that their employee is about to leave. However, not having access to what is normally the richest source of information on the applicant can be dangerous.

One common method of dealing with this issue is to perform all other checks and, if these prove satisfactory, making a job offer to the applicant conditional on a satisfactory reference from the applicant's current employer. At that point, assuming that the applicant has a decent relationship with the current employer, the applicant should feel comfortable allowing you to contact the employer.

8. **Inform each applicant that a precondition of employment is a “Police Clearance Certificate”**; which is a nice way of saying a “Criminal Records Check”.
 - a. In many cases just the mention of a Police Clearance Certificate is sufficient to drive would be embezzlers out the door. However, a clearance check is not a substitute for employment reference checks. There are many dishonest people without criminal convictions. Police clearance checks should be delegated to a prescreening service that will perform them in a legal and confidential manner.
 - b. For more information about conducting background checks, please contact the author or you visit www.backcheck.ca for help. *(Back Check is just one of many firms offering employment screening services. Their fees for employment screening vary; starting at around \$40.00 for basic check and upwards of \$150 for a full work up including employment verification, social networking, judgments, educational verification, personal and professional references.)*

William Hiltz is the Chief Fraud Examiner at **prosperident**; Canadian pioneers in the forensic investigation of frauds against dental offices. His organization has investigated countless frauds against Canadian dentists and, working closely with law enforcement agencies, has secured numerous criminal convictions in fraud cases.

Annex A - Sample Applicant Consent

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT REFERENCE CHECK

I, (print applicant full name) _____, hereby give authority to "YOUR DENTAL OFFICE NAME" to solicit a reference from previous employers in connection with my application. I also hereby authorize previous employers to respond to your enquiries in a forthright manner in connection with my application for employment with "YOUR DENTAL OFFICE NAME" and release them from any liability in regard to same.

Applicant Signature _____ Date _____