

Robbers, Rapists and Killers need not apply?

By Sonya Skipp, General Manager of iFacts

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Have you ever been convicted of a crime? No? Well then let me ask you this. Have you ever done anything unlawful? No? Have you ever done any of the following: littered, dodged a bill, ignored a fine, exceeded the speed limit or driven a vehicle after three alcoholic drinks?

All of these, no matter how “harmless” you perceive them to be, are in fact criminal offences, ones that are in fact punishable by law. And while it’s unlikely that many people will pay any sort of penalty for these crimes, including the ultimate price, it’s worth bearing in mind that very few of us are squeaky clean.

Now imagine that you’re applying for a job at a company and that any “crime” you ever committed left a glaring red flag on your job application. Only, the company you’re hoping to work for cannot see what you actually did, all they know is that you have some sort of criminal record. Now that red flag becomes a big worry in the mind of your future employer, because they now don’t know who they’re dealing with – could you be a litter bug or a serial blue-collar fraudster? They just don’t know unless they ask. And what if they don’t ask?

This is unfortunately an all too common scenario, which is playing itself out in our country on a daily basis. According to Stats SA, South Africa’s economy has taken a beating in recent months, and with the dramatic downfall has come the news that our country’s unemployment rate rose by a further 2.2% in the first quarter of 2016 to a staggering 26.7%. With more than 14 million South Africans

now finding themselves with no means of employment, companies and hiring managers have to be more aware than ever of the potential risks that desperate job seekers will go to in order to find work.

While we fully support a stringent pre-employment screening process to keep out people who may cause harm to your organisation in some way shape or form, I shudder to think of the thousands of highly talented individuals who might be overlooked because of past mistake that has no bearing whatsoever on their ability to carry out the job that they're applying for.

From the employer's perspective, there are a number of things you need to be on the lookout for, including falsified qualifications and professional experience. South African government provides a perfect example of the issues that arise from ignoring these problems, with numerous high-profile cases of government bigwigs having lied about their qualifications on their résumé.

The most effective way for a business to safeguard its hiring process against this form of fraud is to introduce a pre-employment screening policy that assesses and verifies a candidate's credentials before the hiring process even begins. By doing so you will be able to ensure that the candidate you ultimately choose to fill a particular position is the right fit for the job at hand.

However, when you come across a candidate that ticks all the boxes, but their reference check comes up with a criminal history, you need to start looking at things on a case by case basis. It's perfectly understandable that no one wants to hire a convicted fraudster for a bookkeeping position, or that a sexual offender is a completely unsuitable candidate for the school's drama department.

But should the brightest marketing mind you've ever met be denied the opportunity at your organisation because he was caught driving over the limit more than 10 years ago?

There are legal implications that need to be taken into consideration as well, and companies need to guard against candidate discrimination. Also, do not underestimate the impact of rehabilitation. Someone who sold "dope" at high school to make ends meet, and who has since been sufficiently rehabilitated, may even be a positive influence rather than a negative one in your organisation. The best way forward is to have an open and honest conversation with your hopeful candidate. While we are all for protecting the greater good of the organisation, there are still many that deserve a second chance.

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About iFacts:

iFacts are the experts in helping you to identify and manage your people risk. When it comes to Background Checks, Screening and Vetting, your organisation needs a proactive, stringent and comprehensive approach.

iFacts removes the people risk so that organisations can go about their business with employees they can trust.

iFacts offers a range of services that extend into every aspect of proactive and reactive screening, which a company requires for optimum employee performance, loyalty and integrity.

From people risk, ethics and integrity to safety and security and employee wellness, iFacts offers a full range of services to both individuals and employees that will ensure your organisation is achieving optimum performance and an excellent return on its human resources investment.

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