

Did You Do It?

Did you do it? Well, did you? Did you remember to ask? Did you forget or just didn't think he would say anything? Or maybe, why bother because we can't interview on implications anyway. Or, maybe you didn't ask correctly.

How many times have you gotten an implication from a dishonest associate?

Sometimes getting an implication is as simple as asking who else is taking money or merchandise from the company. But, did you remember to at least ask for that admission? It is a heady experience to get a confession, and it is easy to forget to ask for implications.

If you forget to ask, what are you leaving on the table?

When you look at an employee population that is predominantly between the ages of 18 and 35, about 30 percent of your cases will potentially reveal implications of other associates' dishonesty...almost one in three.

Service Merchandise Corporation reported a 20 percent implication rate in the 1980s, and Wicklander-Zulawski statistics put the number at about 30 percent with the vast majority falling between the ages of 18 to 35.

The 16 to 25 age range has consistently held first place rank for arrests since records were kept beginning in the mid-1800s. By their mid-30s most people begin to settle down and change their focus from thinking only about today to planning for the future. They begin looking forward to a career, family, and a home, making risk-taking behavior, such as stealing, less desirable.

Implications

Many companies choose not to interview on implications. But even if you can't interview, you have identified a thief and their preferred methods of theft. Might that give a direction to an investigation? But, did you remember to ask? And, if you did ask, did you really try to get an admission?

There is generally strong resistance to providing information about another's wrongdoings. Giving up oneself is one thing, but to implicate another, well that goes in the face of everything we have been trained not to do.

Our parents told us not to be tattletales. "Quit telling on your sister and get along!" We have all had others expose us for confiding another's misdeeds. Rarely, was there applause for telling on another.

The police face this difficulty all the time. In Illinois, high school students withheld the information that their classmates helped kill another boy's parents. A murder in a motorcycle club was unsolved for thirty years until several members decided to come forward to testify against the killer. Gang

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members and neighbors refuse to help police resolve street shootings. It's the code of the street—snitches get stitches.

It doesn't take a psychologist to understand how negative reinforcement, social pressure, and the fear of retribution can shape one's behavior. Our language even reinforces this resistance with unflattering names, such as informant, snitch, or nark, for those cooperating in an investigation. Is it any wonder why we face a workforce who has an ingrained resistance to reporting or implicating a dishonest employee?

Overcoming Resistance

So how does an interviewer overcome the individual's inbred resistance to telling on another?

One of the biggest reasons people confess is they believe their guilt is known. Thus, there is little to be gained by continued resistance to conceal information already known. The interviewer who delivers a carefully constructed introductory statement has already gone a long way toward convincing the subject his dishonesty has been discovered.

Encouraging the development of implications will increase the organization's productivity in developing new cases in a proactive fashion.

The subject's belief he has been caught is a tenuous one that is constantly being tested. Every statement made by the interviewer is evaluated by the subject for consistency and truthfulness. Just asking, "Do you know of anyone taking merchandise or money from the company?" can shake the feeling of being caught. Why would he ask that if he already knows?

It is much better to ask the employee, "How many employees do you know who are taking money or merchandise from the company? Is it more than five?"

If the employee hesitates the follow up question is used, "Is it more than five?" The follow up question achieves a denial that is the equivalent of an admission—"I know of others, just not five."

It is interesting that asking an assumptive question to obtain an admission does not seem to cause a subject to question the interviewer's statements in the same way as a closed question of "Do you know of any others taking money or merchandise from the company?" does. It may be the way the question is phrased. The

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question appears to ask about something known, rather than something unknown. Something unknown to the investigator should be protected and instinctively the subject denies.

Using Rationalization

Even when an assumptive question is used to ask for an implication, there may be a reluctance to give the information, so the interviewer uses rationalization to support the subject's self-image.

The cornerstone of reducing resistance during any interrogation is the use of rationalizations. Whenever resistance to making an admission arises, the interviewer turns to rationalizations as a means to minimize the seriousness of the issue or focus the attention of the subject on the resolution of the situation, rather than its seriousness.

Using stories as illustrations, the interviewer talks about other peoples' actions and how they impact innocent bystanders. The interviewer then focuses on the unfairness of having someone's deeds reflecting poorly on another. It is often effective for the interviewer to incorporate peer pressure and its power to influence as a persuasive technique.

However, there is still a lingering doubt in the person's mind—"Is someone going to tell the person I informed on him?"

Limited Confidentiality

Offering a limited confidentiality can overcome this resistance. The interviewer should offer limited

confidentiality to the subject to overcome this final point of resistance. Offering this assurance has a calming effect on the subject:

"Mike, no one is going to go back to this person and say you said this or that. This is going to be kept confidential, and we are not going to tell anyone else unless they have a need to know."

This limited confidentiality should be honored. There is no reason to identify where information came from, and in most cases, there will be independent corroboration from the investigation indicating the associate's dishonesty.

Lack of Emphasis

Besides forgetting to ask, the biggest reason implications are not obtained is the lack of emphasis placed on them during the interviews. It is not unusual in interviews we have reviewed for companies that implications were not sought by the interviewer or they were an afterthought given only marginal effort.

Most interviewers are focused on substantiating the investigations by obtaining admissions confirming what they already know and forget about asking for the implication.

Management must set an expectation that the organization's interviewers are to ask and attempt to obtain admissions relating to the knowledge of other employees stealing. Without this emphasis and encouragement, it is unlikely that there will be a change in the interviewer's habits and work product.

Encouraging the development of implications will increase the organization's productivity in developing new cases in a proactive fashion. There is already a tremendous expenditure by most companies to identify dishonest employees and failing to take advantage of this fertile ground during interviews would seem to be a terrible waste. ■



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