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# How Not to Hire the Wrong People in Your Practice

by **David Harris**

**M**uch has been written about hiring the right people for orthodontists. Finding a good personality fit and ensuring that employees properly project your office's personality are things others know far more than I do, so there is little that I can contribute to that discussion.

However, my background and experience provide some insight into how serial embezzlers, who are the very LAST people you want to hire, successfully conceal unsavory pasts. I'd like to share what I have learned about their tactics.

I'll mention that, in my experience, most orthodontists intensely despise the hiring process. This means that when an applicant appears who presents as the ideal candidate, most are so happy to be able to end the unpleasant process of hiring that the healthy skepticism that should exist seems to vanish.

Embezzlers superficially look like perfect applicants. They are smart, organized, and have strong computer skills. They present well in interviews, and convey an understanding of the preciousness of your time. They present an attractive resume without typos (seemingly a rarity today). And, of course, they have dental experience, although you don't yet fully comprehend the nature of that experience.

I'll also observe that many of you strive for what I sometimes call "clinical utopia". This is the situation where your office runs itself, without you being dragged into the minutiae of practice management. Serial embezzlers offer the promise of bringing you much closer to this utopia. While you may not fully comprehend their motivation, they do share your interest in keeping you uninvolved in the operation of the front desk.

Fortunately, there are areas where embezzlers differ from truly ideal employees, and this article will help you differentiate.

The most obvious area is that many, but certainly not all, serial embezzlers have criminal records. A properly conducted criminal records check will uncover this, and allow some rotten apples to be foregone. Two things should be kept in mind here. Many embezzlers don't have criminal records either because charges were never brought, or because of the agonizing slowness of the justice system. Also, since a criminal record could reside in many different places, criminal background checking is complicated and best contracted out to professionals. Also, keep in mind that the existence of a criminal record in many cases is a good basis for not hiring someone, but the reverse isn't necessarily true – a clean criminal records check does not mean that someone is safe to hire.

My next advice is that, when checking with former employers, verifying education etc., eschew any phone number provided by an applicant. We have seen many cases where doctors thought they were speaking to former employers, finding out much later that it was actually a friend of the applicant pretending to be that former employer. When verifying past experience or a credential, always locate the phone number independently so that you know with whom you are speaking.

Now that you are speaking with the right person, let's consider what you should check. What you are seeking is the undisclosed job that the applicant wants to conceal. This job can be hidden either by showing it as a period of non-employment (home with children, travelling through Europe etc.), or by stretching the dates of other employment to make that job disappear without leaving a visible gap in the resume.

The best way to address absences from the work force is to ask for documentary evidence. A passport with country

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stamps is good validation of the European trip, and you can ask the applicant to bring in a copy of their tax return (and assessment from the IRS) when home with children shows on a resume. Like any document, a tax return could be forged, but the nature of this form makes the forgery a lot of work, so most applicants trying to hide something will simply move on to another victim.

My other suggestion is to ask each former employer (and you should normally contact all employers from at least the last five years) a few strategic questions.

- Get them to provide exact dates of employment. Don't prompt them with the dates in the resume and ask for verification; human nature may result in them agreeing without verifying.
- Verify job title and responsibilities.
- When speaking with former employers, verify continuity by asking who the previous and subsequent employers were (most former employers know this).
- If the applicant claims to be currently working for an employer, confirm this fact with the employer. People who have been fired tend to conceal this fact from you.
- Finally, ask each former employer a very specific question, "If this person were available and if you had a suitable opening, would you rehire them?"

The attractiveness of this question is that, while former employers are often cautioned by attorneys to avoid making derogatory statements about former employees, most will find this question, which simply asks about future intent and not about specific actions or characteristics, to be a safe question to

answer. And a single word answer, like "no" (or anything short of an enthusiastic "yes"), shouts volumes about the applicant.

Compare all answers to the resume, and reject any applicant where dates or job history do not line up exactly with the information you determined independently.

While there is no foolproof means of identifying resume cover-ups, the simple techniques outlined here give you an excellent chance of spotting situations when resumes have been doctored. Also, while the focus of this article is on finding criminal activity, techniques shown here will also help uncover resume embellishment, which is a definite concern – published studies suggest that more than 60% of resumes contain some form of lying. Also, 65 million Americans (1 in 4 adults) have criminal records.

Better hiring practices won't stop ALL embezzlement because the majority of embezzlers are first-timers with no adverse work history or criminal record. However, improving the process of scrutinizing applicants is something that is easy to implement, and can dramatically improve the chances of not hiring a highly undesirable employee. ☺

## About the Author



David Harris is a licensed private investigator and CEO of Prosperident, the world's largest firm investigating economic crime against dentists. Prosperident consults on hundreds of embezzlement matters annually. He is speaking at the 2017 Users Group Meeting in Orange County, California.