

Playing Games: Defending your Turf and Hiring the Best

Could your own employees be biting the hand that feeds them? Are you suspicious of theft, fraudulent behaviors, and/or other counter-productive behaviors within your fleet? Truth is, it's happening everywhere. From hourly workers to your own leaders, some of your own employees can be your biggest risk. Luckily, there is something you can do about it.

One of my favorite games as a child was RISK, a game of world domination. If you have never played, it is not nearly as boring as it looks. Yes, it is true that you have little plastic soldiers and spend most of your time building your armies and protecting your land. However, the "risk" comes into play when you decide to "attack" your friend's army with a swift roll of the dice. Yes, the luck of the dice can easily knock out 2 to 3 hours of hard, plastic army-building work in a quick minute. With luck, victories can also come to the tiniest of armies, when up against a fleet 10 times the size.

What is great about the game is that there is a certain element of strategy involved. As a player, you have to align your game plan, make moves that either help you gain land or hold on fiercely to what you already have. The game has strong similarities to the world of business strategy, market share, and gaining competitive advantage. Within human resources, the game is analogous to building bench strength, ensuring your people are in the right places, and strategically selecting those fit for the position.

For both the game and the real business world, hard work pays off. Using new, innovative strategies, knowing when to strike and when to hold back, and staying in the leading edge of best practices all work in your favor to bring home the victory. However, in both situations, game players and professionals alike often lose sight of potential weaknesses down the road. I, myself, have spent so much time and effort lining up my little plastic army, selecting them based on their fit for the position, their strength and/or stability under pressure, only to realize a little too late that I have left an area of my land uncovered. With humans, it is not so much the area of land we leave unprotected, but perhaps there are certain characteristics in our people, such as integrity, that we have left to chance. Unfortunately, we have learned that it does not matter how good a soldier is in battle, if he is stealing from the captain.

In the recent troubling times, many companies reported an increase in theft, misuse of power, and/or fraud. Employees were being pushed to their limits and quite possibly exhibiting behavior they wouldn't normally do. It goes without saying that this type of misconduct is bad in any market, but especially hurtful when companies are already struggling to survive.

Unlike other traits and characteristics often used in selection, integrity and honesty are not necessarily attributes that can be developed after a problem is discovered. Further, while personality assessments can be used with present employees, particularly for re-orgs, professional development, and career-succession planning, it is not recommended that integrity tests be used for anything other than pre-employment. The U.S. DOL

suggests that using integrity tests to make decisions with incumbents could have serious implications for employee morale and draw potential legal repercussions when not substantiated by actual counterproductive behavior at the current job. In other words, if a company does not use an integrity assessment at pre-hire, it is not a good idea to do so when problems arise down the road.

Not only can validated integrity assessments serve as a sort of insurance that your hiring decisions are not being compromised by devious, unethical behavior from your employees, but they also serve their intended purpose of reducing theft, misconduct, and overall counter-productive behaviors. In our own research, we found that candidates with lower integrity were more than 12 times more likely to manipulate numbers and 4 times more likely to steal from the company. Those that have implemented validated integrity assessments have seen large reductions in shrinkage, time theft, and other similar misconduct. Validated integrity assessments have been noted as part of a battery of best practices in employee selection by the Society of Industrial Organizational Psychologists, Association of Test Publishers, U.S. DOL, and the E.E.O.C.

Various integrity assessments can be used at all levels of the organization from hourly employees to the top leaders of the company. In little plastic army terms, you can assess the honesty of those you are considering as recruits, all the way up to your fighter pilots. Additionally, when an integrity assessment is used in combination with reasoning and personality measures, it adds quite a lot of bang for your buck. They are a quick, legally defensible, cost-effective way to “load the dice” in your favor.