

# Oregon Law Practice Management

Practice Management Tips for Oregon Lawyers



## Know Who You Hire

*The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.*

Love him or hate him, this quote from [Dr. Phil](#) says it all when it comes to hiring legal support staff.

Before joining the [Professional Liability Fund](#) in 1996, I operated the [Multnomah Bar Association's](#) Legal Placement Service. During my tenure, I interviewed and screened thousands of potential applicants. We did not place lawyers, but we filled every other available position in a law office or legal setting.

My experience at the [MBA](#) taught me many things, not the least of which was the importance of checking references.

Applicants can be very charming, professional, and appear to have spot-on experience. In fact, they may truly possess all these qualities. But none of this really predicts how well they will do on-the-job. The only way to find out is to check references.

By contacting former employers you may learn that your charming applicant is an embezzler, exaggerated his experience, or threw a plant at her former boss. (I did.)

This is not to say that there is an abundance of poor candidates - far from it. The point is: you need to know who you are hiring.

With the caveat that I am not an employment or labor law specialist, here are some questions you might ask of a reference:

- What position did this employee hold at your firm?
- When did the employee work for you?
- Can you describe the employee's responsibilities?
- Why did the employee leave your firm?

- Was the employee dependable and reliable? Did he/she have any issues with absenteeism or tardiness?
- Did any personal problems affect this employee's work performance?
- Did the employee communicate well orally and in writing?
- How would you describe the employee's clerical/secretarial skills? Did he/she turnaround work quickly? Was the employee's work product accurate?
- Did the employee take instruction well? Did he/she seem to grasp new responsibilities quickly?
- Did he/she get along well with others in the firm?
- Did the employee have contact with clients? If so, did he/she ever encounter angry or upset clients? How did he/she respond?
- How did the employee handle pressure? Stress?
- Did the employee make sound and timely decisions?
- Was this employee a self-starter?
- What do you think is this employee's strongest quality?
- Is there an area this employee could improve upon?
- Do you think this employee will perform well as a [job title]?
- How would you describe the employee's overall performance?
- Would you re-hire the employee?
- Is there anything of significance you'd like to add?

Don't underestimate the importance of being systematic in your approach to hiring. Develop a set of questions to ask references [and applicants](#), then create and use forms or checklists to ensure that your hiring process is thorough and consistent. You won't be sorry!

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