



Article Title

Pre-Employment Drug Testing for Hospitality Sales Positions: Who's Buying In?

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Abstract

Pre-employment drug testing in the workplace has often been adopted by hospitality organizations both nationally and internationally due to the acceptance of conventional wisdom that drug-using workers have substantially lower productivity rates. While research consistently finds hospitality employees display higher rates of substance use, limited hospitality research has been conducted on the topic of pre-employment drug testing in this industry, and applicant and employee responses to this practice have yet to be investigated. Emerging themes based on employee comments are explored, including perceptions of fairness, necessity, and value. Suggestions for future theoretical-based research are offered, and implications for hospitality industry decision makers are discussed.

Methods

This exploratory study adopted a mixed-methods approach that included a survey of hospitality sales employees followed by in-depth, semi-structured interviews with willing participants. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. Using this technique, which does not claim representativeness, a sample is collected based upon participant expertise about or awareness of the population being studied.

Results

Favorable Attitudes Toward Pre-Employment Drug Testing

Themes that emerged from the qualitative questionnaire responses indicating favorable attitudes towards the use of pre-employment drug testing were (1) Reduced Absenteeism and (2) Company Rights. These respondents felt that the use of a pre-employment drug test would help to reduce employee absenteeism within a company: "Drug testing would eliminate illegal drug users, and in my experience 'loadies' miss work more often. So employee absenteeism would decrease." It should be noted that all responses that supported the use of drug testing to reduce employee absenteeism were based on the assumption that drug testing would eliminate drug users from employment in the organization. These respondents also felt that pre-employment drug testing is an organization's right: "Asking someone to take a drug test in

order to work is the same as asking someone to wear a suit and tie if they want to work. It's the company's right to set requirements for hire."

Unfavorable Attitudes Toward Pre-Employment Drug Testing

Conversely, comments from respondents who consistently selected answers disagreeing with drug screening had different viewpoints, primarily those identified by previous practitioners and scholars. Respondent #20 stated that "Drug users can beat most standard drug tests," "[Sales] employee turnover is based primarily on sales performance or lack thereof," and "Most agents do not operate equipment that could lead to increased accidents." Respondent #22 commented that "injury and accident rates are similar regardless of whether drug screening is conducted or not."

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate hospitality sales employees' perceptions of and feelings toward the use of pre-employment drug testing in their workplace, as well as their beliefs about its effectiveness in the workplace and any perception bias related to drug-use history. Vacation ownership sales employees were targeted, as vacation ownership is an important subset of the hospitality industry, and these sales employees may represent an even larger population of all hospitality sales employees, as well as an even larger sample of sales employees across all industries. Specifically, this exploratory study attempted to answer two broad research questions: (1) What general perceptions of and feelings toward the use of pre-employment drug testing in their workplace exist among hospitality sales employees? And (2) Are hospitality sales employee perceptions of pre-employment drug testing influenced by their own drug-use behavior?