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“HIGH” ACHIEVERS

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You can't believe your luck when you receive the resume. And now before you sits your dream candidate; just out of school, a graduate from the most prestigious of universities, with a 4.5 GPA, an engaged community participant with stellar references, and a high achiever. So “high” in fact that she “fires-up” at least 3-5 times a week.

Marijuana use among college students is up, according to every study I could find on the internet. What would you do if your star candidate, bright, determined and fresh on the job market was perfect in every way; except she smoked weed every few days? What's your position? Don't know? Well, you need one. You need one now as a new wave of college grads hit the market; and you need one always, because the well-being of your organization is your responsibility. Let me say right now, not all college kids, top of the class or bottom, smoke. This column is only about those who do. Also, some states allow for the use of marijuana for “medical purposes”. This column is not referring to that issue.

For those of you who grew up in the 60's or 70's like me, thinking of pot-smokers brings visions of carefree hippies and “dead-heads” and kids experimenting in order to have fun or to be cool. “Legalize marijuana” rallies in my hometown of Northeast Philadelphia were constant, and, by comparison, marijuana seemed so harmless compared to heroine and cocaine. By the time that life started to get pretty serious, the pot phase was pushed aside and the hippies, dead-heads and “cool kids” moved on, leaving the pot-smoking a distant memory. Back then the “best and the brightest” weren't the ones toking – or were they, and we just didn't know it?

Whether pot-smoking is becoming the new “drug of choice” among the elite college crowd or if it always has been is hard to say. Ultimately, marijuana is considered an illegal drug. Yet compared to, let's say, crack or heroin, most would agree that they don't belong in the same category. (But that's a different debate.)

The real question is what is your company's policy?

Students (and adults alike) say they use marijuana to relieve stress and help them manage pressure of achieving what many experience as “unachievable” expectations. These 4.0+ GPA students put a lot of pressure on themselves. They need an outlet. Pass the doobie.

Acceptance of the drug among elite students is startling to some. It certainly startled a client of mine. This business owner manages money for high-wealth individuals and was committed to bringing only the best of the best to his organization. His awareness came as he began to interview college grads of elite schools from all over the country for internship positions. The few he chose as the most qualified all declined a drug test and admitted to smoking pot on their own time. This owner, shocked by what he was finding, did a little investigating on his own by interviewing top colleges, talking with top executives in his field and reading everything he could get his hands on about this topic. He concluded that even on Wall Street, entry-level positions often do not require drug testing, as this practice could, in fact, deter the hiring of these “highly-qualified” students. In the end, this particular businessman did not make a hire from this group.

A few years ago, another client of hireVision implemented random drug testing. The industry was one that experienced a higher than normal “acceptance” of pot smoking...on the job! (Hard to imagine, but true). Once the client implemented drug testing he lost half of his staff. However, he stuck by his decision and eventually he attracted those employees that were seeking a drug-free environment. This was certainly a very brave move that, in the end, paid off.

In other situations where I have conducted random drug testing I experienced employees “ratting” on others who they felt certain were smoking pot on the job and found that these employees passed the drug tests due to the availability of pills on the internet that block the drug tests from discovering the marijuana in their system. Some of these pills actually work.

Certainly, marijuana use reaches far beyond college students.

While most of us would unanimously agree that smoking pot has no place on the job, we all need to be clear and consistent about how our company will respond if we discover that one of best performers smokes at home, or that a stellar applicant admits to using.

So, intern or full-time employee, baby-boomer or Gen Y worker, assure that you have a legally sound drug policy, and follow your policy consistently across the board. Being consistent with adherence to your policy will help to keep you in compliance. Having a standard and belief that is shared with all hiring managers will seal the deal.

I would love to hear your feedback, experiences or any opinions that you are willing to share...openly or anonymously on the subject. Based on the response, I will print a follow up story in the coming months. You can reach me at: Tina Hamilton 610-443-0119 or email at Tina@hirevisiongroup.com.

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