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Is Honesty Test an Infringement?

A MANUAL written by two security officers states that nearly one-third of the 1,500 businesses that go bankrupt each year do so because of dishonest workers.

The National Retail Merchants Association says that employees of member companies steal as much as \$40 billion in goods from their employers each year.

The obvious course of action is to try to weed out dishonest employees and hire honest workers. This is becoming harder to do because federal laws are working against it.

Regulations now severely restrict employers on questions they may ask applicants. It is regarded as an invasion of a prospective employee's "rights" to inquire whether he or she ever has been convicted of theft, burglary, robbery or other crimes.

Now, as an alternative, employers are turning to use of the polygraph

or lie detector to assist them in screening applicants. At present, no federal law prohibits use of these machines, but Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind., has proposed a bill to limit their use.

Business Week magazine says the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission could curtail use of lie detectors. Several states have laws regulating or specifying usage.

Nobody seems to question whether certain employees will lie in order to get jobs and access to money or property.

The question is whether the employer has a right to try to find out if the applicant or the employee is telling the truth and whether he or she will be an honest worker.

Businessmen are not looking for thieves when their experts set up voice analyzers or other devices to look for telltale evidence of falsehoods.

Employers also try to spot junkies, liars, alcoholics, psychotics and people who have a history of filing an excessive number of workmen's compensation claims.

An Atlanta nursing home uses polygraphs to screen out potentially sadistic or disturbed nurses or orderlies. An insurance firm uses a polygraph to test tape recordings made on insurance claims, looking for fraudulent statements.

Is this old adage, "Honesty is the best policy," about to be declared an infringement upon the rights of the dishonest?

Human beings, frail as we are morally, must be taught to tell the truth. Until we learn to follow that course of action, it seems only fair that those with whom we deal should have as much right to catch us in a lie as we might have to tell one!