

# The Ten Biggest Mistakes People Make When Hiring a Caregiver

By Shirley Cohen

1. **They don't check references.** It is very common for people to believe that they are a good judge of character and fail to perform reference checks. Failure to perform these vital checks can result in the hiring of someone who is unreliable and undesirable.
2. **Failure to expect a caregiver to dress professionally for an interview and a care giving job.** Tight-fitting clothes, jeans, tank tops, high heels, long, painted fingernails, facial jewelry are all forms of inappropriate attire for a caregiver. Failure to set a standard will result in a caregiver who will be led to think that anything she wears or does will be acceptable.
3. **They don't run a background check.** Running a background check is very important these days. There are tons of sweet-looking, sweet-talking people out there with felony records. You don't want to make a mistake by not taking this step and installing such a person into your home with your frail or confused parent.
4. **They are not strict about punctuality.** Reliability is one of the most important factors in evaluating a caregiver. You don't want someone who will be chronically late. It creates tension and insecurity to the elder and their family members. A person who comes to an interview late and doesn't call should probably not be hired unless there are some reasonable extenuating circumstances.
5. **They don't insist on getting someone with plenty of experience.** Sometimes concern with costs may trump common sense but it shouldn't. A care provider who has no experience with your relative's condition can cause more harm than good, especially, for instance, if they are taking care of a diabetic and they don't really know what the optimum diet should be. People who have worked as a care giver with their own parents or who have just volunteered to help some seniors somewhere are not necessarily qualified to work with your relative.
6. **They don't plan for caregiver absences.** Eventually everyone needs to be late or absent for good reason. But, when a caregiver doesn't show up, and you're at work, and your parent is waiting in a wheelchair for them to come and help them with their personal care, it could be a huge problem. You need to develop a backup person or plan so that you can call upon an experienced and kindly person to fill in when the need arises.
7. **They don't pay payroll taxes.** It is very tempting to try to work with caregivers who will accept straight pay without any deductions, but that often comes back to haunt the employer. Not only is it illegal, it is also not a very smart thing to do because payroll taxes include unemployment insurance, social security and Medicare benefits for the worker and act as proof that you had legitimate health care expenses for your taxes.
8. **They work with undocumented aliens because of the cost savings.** While there may be cost savings at first, it may be costlier in the end because you will not be able to get the deductions on your taxes for which you may be qualified and you could get enormous fines if audited.
9. **They don't bother to get Worker's Comp in place.** Since one can never predict who will slip and fall when, it behooves consumers to make sure their home owner policy has a worker's comp rider

in it which covers household help. Failure to take care to have proper Worker's Comp insurance in place can be very costly when it comes time to respond to a claim.

10. **They don't carry Liability or Dishonesty Insurance.** When you have a parade of caregivers coming through your house, it's sometimes extremely difficult to identify who took what when. The loss of jewelry and other valuables can not only be extremely aggravating, it can be very costly.

If managing any or all of these responsibilities seems too much to handle for you or your family, consider working with a reputable home care aide agency in your area.

*The writer is the Founder and Executive Director of Home Sweet Home Care, a home care aide agency with offices in San Francisco, Redwood City and Walnut Creek that has been serving seniors in the S.F. Bay area for more than 18 years. Home Sweet Home Care is an honor roll member of the Better Business Bureau and the National Private Duty Association. Interested readers can visit their website at <http://home-sweet-home-care.com> or call them directly at (800) 286-2774.*