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Your Line ONLINE

This week's unscientific poll: Would you recommend friends for a job at your company?

When it comes to mixing friends and work, the possible outcomes are filled with uncertainty. Perhaps that's why this week's poll respondents were so evenly divided in their answers.

By a narrow margin, the leading response was: "Maybe. But only in rare cases." But there was also as much support for each of the three other choices: "No, the company might blame me if my friends don't do good work"; "no, my friends might blame me if they hate their jobs"; and "yes, my friends would fit in well at my company."

None of those responses are wrong (or always right), says Ann Kelleher, president and owner of Integrity Staffing in Omaha.

"It is true that the best employees often come through personal referrals," Kelleher says. "For this reason, many employers encourage employees to refer their friends. These companies are generally pleased with the quality and performance of their employees and want to hire others just like them."

"Some companies go so far as to pay employees bonuses when a friend is hired."

A rule of thumb to follow before referring a friend, she says, is to ask yourself several important questions: Does your friend have the skills your employer is looking for? Do your friend's values match your employer's values? Does your friend have a good work ethic? Is your friend ready to make a commitment to a company, or simply seeking a quick fix in a difficult job market?

"Once these questions are answered," Kelleher says, "you will know if referring your friend is a good idea."

There is one situation that requires extra caution: The "friend" who also is a romantic partner.

"Be sure to divulge to your employer at the time of the referral if you refer someone with whom you are in a dating relationship," Kelleher says. "Your employer can be the judge of whether to proceed further based on this information."

-Jan DeKnock