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Contact: Eric Hutchison

Phone: 708-391-0287

Email: eric.hutchison@fifththeory.com

FifthTheory Introduces Biosafety Assessment to Bolster COVID-19 Workplace Safety Strategies

The use of a Biosafety Personnel Assessment to Assist in the Reopening of the United States Economy

Chicago, Illinois, April 21, 2020 —The world is clearly facing an unprecedented challenge with the coronavirus pandemic crisis, including when it will be feasible to reopen economies across the globe. FifthTheory, LLC, a global provider of job-relevant personnel assessments, recognizes the need for organizations to be active partners in keeping local communities safe, healthy, and prosperous. To this end, FifthTheory is now focusing on helping organizations with their "reopening the economy" strategies via an assessment solution for identifying high *Biosafety Mindset* job candidates and current employees.

"We want businesses to get back on track, but only in the safest and most secure manner," said Andre Allen, FifthTheory's Managing Member and EVP of Technology & Operations. "Many of our clients are currently open for business where they offer in-store shopping and curbside pickup and delivery services for their customers. In essence, their employees are essential workers who are heroically helping all citizens cope with this pandemic."

Eric Hutchison, EVP of Strategic Marketing at FifthTheory also noted, "Many of our customers are starting to contemplate how they can best follow any forthcoming state and federal mandates related to safely reopening their businesses. An important aspect of this challenge is how to best staff customer facing positions with safe, responsible, and service-oriented employees. That is why FifthTheory is pleased to introduce our new Biosafety Express Measure, a pre-offer behavioral risk assessment that can ensure better protection of employees and customers."

New Biosafety Assessment

John Jones, EVP of Research & Development at FifthTheory, noted that this groundbreaking measure is a new type of biosafety risk management tool. "This instrument was developed for those organizations that need to reduce any risk of virus spread and contamination when placing their workers in close contact with customers, co-workers, and management. FifthTheory's team of Industrial Psychologists have historically led the way in this area with the invention of the original Safety Consciousness assessment, and they have now bolstered that line of pre-employment screening measures with the Biosafety Express Measure."

The new Biosafety Express Measure can be added to organizations' current personnel selection assessment batteries. If organizations are already screening their new hires and temporary workers for customer experience mindsets, for example, they can now add a supplemental pre-employment screening measure to ensure that these same workers will behave in a safe manner when around customers. The new Biosafety Express Measure can also be used with employees returning to work to ensure that they will support all efforts to make in-store, curbside, and home delivery shopping experiences as safe as possible. Organizations will benefit from the use of this new measure in the following ways:

1. **Behavioral Safety Screening:** Organizations will be able to use a valid and reliable online behavioral screening tool with their job candidates and/or current employees returning to work to better ensure that these workers engage in safe, responsible, and preventive behaviors while working. The goal is to reduce the probability of workers spreading and/or contracting the COVID-19 virus in stores and other workplace

settings. This proactive screening can then be followed up by comprehensive biosafety training specific to an organization's culture and context.

2. **Professional & Legal Compliance:** Organizations will be able to use a pre-offer screening assessment that is not a medical test. This new job-relevant measure focuses on screening job candidates and/or employees on their propensity to exhibit safe workplace behaviors in terms of sanitation, social distancing, and customer protection. All organizations are encouraged to follow the guidance on reopening workplaces offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the U.S. Department of Labor, among other governmental bodies.

3. **Comprehensive Biosafety Strategy:** Many organizations are adopting additional policies and procedures in their workplaces to ensure that all biohazards are effectively controlled, including the coronavirus. This includes more intense cleaning and disinfecting strategies, the use of in-store signs and markings that encourage social distancing, the installation of plexiglass at registers that blocks inadvertent airborne virus spread, and the use of face masks and other protective gear at work. It is important, however, that job candidates and employees returning to work also have a "Biosafety Mindset" that ensures that they will properly use all available and mandated safeguards so as to protect themselves, their co-workers, and all customers.

4. **Social Responsibility:** Organizations will be able to keep their word to customers who want assurances that the physical places where they interact with employees (e.g., grocery stores, drug stores, health care settings, curbside and home deliveries, and safety and security situations) are safe from behaviors that can facilitate the spread of this highly infectious disease. The use of a valid and reliable biosafety screening procedures is not a panacea. However, it is designed to increase the odds that organizations will provide the safest possible workplaces for their employees and virus-free shopping experiences for their customers.

5. **Liability Management:** Companies will be able to have another tool to control liability exposures and costs in the workplace. It will take a full arsenal of interventions to control this virus as the economy in general and businesses in particular reopen.

FifthTheory, LLC is a minority owned business that is located in Chicago, IL (www.FifthTheory.com). FifthTheory provides online assessments and surveys to ensure that organizations and their employees engage in safe and responsible behaviors that always advance a strong customer experience. FifthTheory's leading brands include The Reid Report®, the Employee Safety Inventory, and the Campbell™ Leadership Index, among others.

FifthTheory has remained open and fully functioning during the coronavirus crisis, and has continued to help organizations (a) strengthen their culture of safety and security via preemployment screening, (b) utilize online assessments with job candidates and employees to support social distancing mandates, (c) adjust cut-scores and decision-making rules to ensure that organizations can be properly staffed during the crisis, and (d) have access to job-relevant assessments that allow them to best cope with this pandemic as the economy prepares to reopen. Direct questions to Info@FifthTheory.com.

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Additional Resources for Opening U.S. Economy

Center for Disease Control (CDC). "Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Diseases" (Updated 2020)

CDC encourages businesses to consider establishing policies and practices for social distancing. CDC defines social distancing in the workplace as avoiding large gatherings and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible (e.g., breakrooms and cafeterias). CDC recommended other strategies that business could use including: (1) Implementing flexible worksites (e.g., telework); (2) Implementing flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts); (3) Increasing physical space between employees at the worksite; (4) Increasing physical space between employees and customers (e.g., drive through, partitions); (5) Implementing flexible meeting and travel options (e.g., postpone non-essential meetings or events); (6) Downsizing operations; (7) Delivering services remotely (e.g. phone, video, or web); and (8) Delivering products through curbside pick-up or delivery. (www.CDC.gov)

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). "What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and other EEO Laws" (2020)

The EEOC notes that EEO laws, including the ADA and Rehabilitation Act, continue to apply during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they do not interfere with or prevent employers from following the guidelines and suggestions made by the CDC or state/local public health authorities about steps employers should take regarding COVID-19. When asked specifically about hiring and onboarding, this is how the EEOC experts responded:

- *If an employer is hiring, may it screen applicants for symptoms of COVID-19?*
  - Yes. An employer may screen job applicants for symptoms of COVID-19 after making a conditional job offer, as long as it does so for all entering employees in the same type of job. This ADA rule applies whether or not the applicant has a disability.
- *May an employer take an applicant's temperature as part of a post-offer, pre-employment medical exam?*
  - Yes. Any medical exams are permitted after an employer has made a conditional offer of employment. However, employers should be aware that some people with COVID-19 do not have a fever.
- *May an employer delay the start date of an applicant who has COVID-19 or symptoms associated with it?*
  - Yes. According to current CDC guidance, an individual who has COVID-19 or symptoms associated with it should not be in the workplace. (www.EEOC.gov)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). "Work for America: Reopening the Country Safely and in Phases" (Plan In Progress, 2020)

This FEMA plan is still in progress and is being prepared in conjunction with the CDC. This plan in progress focuses on helping state and local governments to assess community readiness to reopen closed spaces. The plan encourages the evaluation of a variety of indicators, including community transmission, public health capacity, health system capacity, and local community characteristics so that officials can make an informed decision about when it is appropriate to begin to ease community mitigation measures while continuing to protect the most at-risk individuals. The plan currently aims to differentiate communities based on the indicators present and the type of mitigation needed. Currently, the three categories include: (1) Low Mitigation – communities where significant spread was never observed, can possibly "re-open" first; (2) Moderate Mitigation – former hot spots entering controlled recovery, and limited mitigation communities observing increased, but contained transmission; and (3) Significant

Mitigation – current or emerging hot spots, moderate mitigation communities showing signs of strained capacity. (www.FEMA.gov)

U.S. Department of Labor (US-DOL). **"Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19"** **(2020)**

The US-DOL utilized the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to prepare a comprehensive roadmap on how to best address COVID-19 in the workplace. This document is not considered a regulation, but it definitely covers best practices. For example, these US-DOL/OSHA guidelines address mission critical administrative controls that require action by the worker or employer. Typically, such administrative controls will be accompanied by changes in work policies or procedures to reduce or minimize exposure to a hazard. Examples of administrative controls derived from previous infectious disease exposures (e.g., SARS-CoV-2) included: (1) Encouraging sick workers to stay at home; (2) Minimizing contact among workers, clients, and customers by replacing face-to-face meetings with virtual communications and implementing telework if feasible; (3) Establishing alternating days or extra shifts that reduce the total number of employees in a facility at a given time, allowing them to maintain distance from one another while maintaining a full onsite work week; (4) Discontinuing nonessential travel to locations with ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks; (5) Developing emergency communications plans, including a forum for answering workers' concerns and internet-based communications, if feasible; (6) Providing workers with up-to-date education and training on COVID-19 risk factors and protective behaviors (e.g., cough etiquette and care of PPE); and (7) Training workers who need to use protective clothing and equipment how to put it on, use/wear it, and take it off correctly, including in the context of their current and potential duties. This US-DOL/OSHA guidance clearly indicates that COVID-19 training material should be easy to understand and available in the appropriate language and literacy level for all workers. (www.DOL.gov)