

## TIPS FOR THE EX-OFFENDER

Dealing with potential employers is never an easy task for clients with criminal records. Ex-offenders who lie on the application may get hired, and then get fired if their record becomes known. Those who are honest may feel like they never even get a chance. Although there are no magic formulas for dealing with this sensitive situation, the following hints may be helpful. See your social worker, work-release coordinator, or contact the Transition Program for more information.

### THE APPLICATION PROCESS

QUESTION/ TOPIC	DON'T	DO
Have you ever been convicted of a felony?	DON'T simply say yes.  DON'T lie and say that you haven't ever been convicted of a felony.  DON'T leave blank.  DON'T write a lengthy explanation of past convictions on the application.	DO write "Yes, will discuss in interview" or something similar.    DO remember that honesty is important.
What was your wage/salary at your job?	DON'T say the actual amount paid (\$.20/hr).	DO write "minimum wage." After all, a dollar a day was the minimum wage!
What was your reason for leaving?	DON'T use negative words like "went to jail" or "paroled."	DO use terms like "relocated" or "contract ended." Both of these are true.
What experience do you have?	DON'T lie about your experience or qualifications. Even if it helps you get the job initially, you can be fired if and when the truth becomes known (and it usually does).	DO be honest.   DO "sell yourself." If you have the experience, let the employer know why you should be hired!
Grooming	DON'T take this for granted!	DO look your best, even when going to fill out an application - this will be the employer's first impression of you. You might also be interviewed on the spot.
Follow-up	DON'T forget that you filled out an application.	DO call back within 5 - 7 days to check on the status of your application. This shows you are

	DON'T simply wait for an employer to call you back.	really interested in the job.  DO keep a list of the places where you filled out an application. This will make it easier to do callbacks.
Volunteering Information	DON'T volunteer information that might be considered "negative" by employers (for example your criminal record, substance abuse history, job terminations).	If you have to explain, DO write "will discuss in interview."  DO know your rights and which questions are considered illegal. (See "Examples of Illegal Interview Questions" in this packet).
Overall .....	DON'T give up!	DO remember that you will probably hear many "no's" before you get a job, but if you are willing to work at getting a job you will be successful!

### THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

<b>DON'T</b>	<b>DO</b>
<p>DON'T be unprepared for questions about your criminal history.</p> <p>DON'T see yourself as an ex-convict unworthy of employment.</p>	<p>DO be prepared.</p> <p>DO decide whether you will tell an employer directly and explain what you have learned from the situation or if you will avoid giving any information unless you are specifically asked. Our suggestion is that "honesty is the best policy." How you communicate the information makes a difference.</p> <p>DO see yourself as worthwhile and a valuable asset who has the skills and abilities an employer needs.</p> <p>DO have a positive self-image and confidence in your skills and abilities to "sell yourself" to an employer.</p>
DON'T be lengthy in explaining things.	DO keep it short and discuss only necessary items.
When asked about your criminal conviction, DON'T say things like "The cops set me up" or "I didn't do anything wrong; it was my brother, Bob, who should have went to prison."	<p>DO be honest.</p> <p>DO explain what you learned from your prison experience or how you want to better yourself after being in prison.</p> <p>DO take responsibility for the actions that led you to prison.</p>

<p>DON'T lie about your criminal background. Employers now have a way to review your criminal background on the Internet! If you are fired, it's not because you are a felon, but because you lied on your application!</p>	<p>DO stress that although you were incarcerated, you haven't been lazy; explain things you did to stay busy or improve yourself (worked, read, etc.)</p>
<p>DON'T stress out!</p>	<p>DO relax and be comfortable in explaining you're criminal conviction.</p> <p>DO practice ahead of time.</p> <p>DO maintain eye contact; this shows you have nothing to hide.</p> <p>DO believe in yourself - it will show.</p> <p>DO add something positive about your skills and abilities or positive information about the company.</p>
<p>DON'T be blind to programs that can help you get a job.</p>	<p>DO remember the Federal Bonding Program. This program allows employers to hire ex-felons and bond them if their own insurance won't. In other words, this program acts like an insurance coverage on you to protect the employer (Contact the Transition Program for more information on this program). Mention this program to the potential employer.</p> <p>DO remember the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). This is available as an incentive for employers to hire ex-offenders and others who may have difficulty in getting work. Inform the potential employer about this.</p>

**How would you answer the question, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime?"  
Below are some examples of how to answer that difficult question!**

***EXAMPLE 1***

*Interviewer: "I see from your application that you have been convicted of a crime. Will you explain this to me? Tell me about it."*

*Applicant: "I'm glad you asked because I want you to feel comfortable hiring me. It is embarrassing for me to talk about. I want to assure you that it had nothing to do with my previous employers. I took some things that didn't belong to me and as a result, I've taken the time to decide what field I*

*would like to get into. I have enrolled in several clerical courses and can type 50 wpm. I am familiar with several software programs for word processing, and have excellent phone skills. I am very interested in learning all I can about this industry, and I know I would be an asset to your organization."*

*-OR-*

*"When I was younger I got mixed up with the wrong crowds and got in trouble for breaking into cars. We all do things when we are young that we regret. I used the time to my advantage by completing an air conditioning and heating training program and received my certificate. I've researched several air conditioning companies in the area and yours is well respected. I would really like to be a part of your team."*

*-OR-*

"In my past, I was involved with drugs, but that is all behind me, and I've taken control of my life. I have two years of experience in food service and want to stay in this industry and learn as much as possible. As a result of my past, when you hire me, your company is eligible for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which can save you up to \$2,400. Are you familiar with this program?"

## **CALLING THE EMPLOYER**

**Below are examples of phone scripts you can use when calling an employer to get more information about a job or to apply for a job.**

**For a Classified Ad:**

Hello, my name is       (name)      . I'm calling about the                   (Job title)                   position advertised in                   (name of newspaper)                  . I've had                   (number of years of experience or "a lot")                   years of experience in this field and would like to set up a time for us to get together and discuss this job in more detail.

**For a Random Call When No Position Has Been Advertised:**

Hello, my name is       (name)      . I'm calling to see if you have any openings for                   (job you're interested in)                  . I've had                   (number of years or "a lot")                   years of experience in this field and would like to set up a time for us to get together and discuss this job in more detail.

**If They Don't Have Openings:**

Would it be possible for me to come down and fill out an application in case any positions become available? Do you know of any                   (job title)                   openings in the area?

**Remember that communication is not just about the words you use.**

**Your Total Message:**

7% Actual Words

38% Tone, Pitch,

Volume, Rate

55% Body Posture,

Clothing, Facial

Expressions,

Gestures

**Remember:**

- Be polite. Whether you get the results you want or not, thank the person for taking the time to speak with you.
  - Be prepared to answer questions about your background and/or experience.
  - Have a pen and paper handy to take down information or directions.
  - Be prepared to set up an interview.
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**EXAMPLES OF ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**These are questions that should NOT be asked in an interview by an employer:**

- Are you married?
- How old are you?
- Do you have children?
- What is your sexual preference?
- Do you go to church?
- Do you have a disability? If so, what is it?
- How much do you weigh?
- How tall are you?
- Is your childcare taken care of and who is your provider?
- Do you own your home or rent?
- Do you plan on having children/more children?
- Would you like to go out with me?
- Tell us something about any personal, family, or health issues that will prevent you from doing your job.
- What does your spouse do?
- What political party do you belong to?
- How much money did you make last year?
- Have you been arrested and if so, what was the charge?
- What is your opinion on (politics, social groups, religion)?
- Do you drink, take drugs, both?

**If you are asked any illegal question, your options include the following:**

- ◆ Answer the question
- ◆ Gently refuse to answer the question
- ◆ Change the subject
- ◆ Make a "joke" about the question (Be Careful - this can be difficult)
- ◆ Return the question to the interviewer with another question:
  - "Why do you ask?"
  - "How does this apply to the job?"
  - "If I don't answer, will I automatically not get the job?"
  - "Are you aware that you have just asked me an illegal question?"

## **Preparing for an Interview:**

### **Difficult Questions Employers**

#### **Might Ask you about your Criminal Background**

During an interview, an employer is trying to get as much information about you as possible in a very short amount of time. Below is a worksheet of difficult questions that an employer might ask you. Fill in your answers to see how you would answer them.

- 1) I've noticed gaps in your work history; can you explain those gaps?
- 2) Have you ever been convicted of a crime?
- 3) What were your convictions?
- 4) What have you learned from this?
- 5) How can you assure our company that you won't re-offend or commit the same crime?

#### **Advice on answering the "Felony Interview Question"**

❖ Sandwich your response. Tell of your felony conviction between several strengths and accomplishments. People often remember the first and last parts of sentences.

❖ Own up. Be honest.

❖ Think about these questions:

What strengths and accomplishments do I have?

How do I feel about what I did?

How have I changed because of going to prison?

Where am I going? What are my life and career plans?

### **Examples of Other Difficult Interview Questions**

- 1) Tell us about yourself.
- 2) Why do you want to work here?
- 3) Why did you leave your last job?
- 4) Name three strengths and three weaknesses.
- 5) How do you respond to having to work under pressure?
- 6) How many days of work did you miss in the last year?
- 7) I see on your application that you have had many jobs in the past year; is there a reason for this?
- 8) Would you have any objections if we contacted any of your former employers?
- 9) Where do you see yourself five years from now? What are your long-range career plans?
- 10) Why should I hire you?
- 11) What would you do if there were a conflict between you and a supervisor? What would you do if there were a conflict between you and another worker?
- 12) Why do you want to work for our company?