

“Nobody would hire me if they knew”

A worksheet for people who want to find good jobs in spite of a criminal history.

It can be difficult to look a prospective employer in the eye and talk about a criminal history. However, many employers are willing to hire people with felonies and misdemeanors if they are honest and upfront about their past. People who have found jobs in spite of felonies, agree with this perspective:

“I found out that telling the truth about my criminal history made it easier for me to interview for a job because then I didn't have to make up other lies to avoid the truth.”

The way that you talk about your legal record can make the difference.

In order to hire, employers say that they need to believe that the person has changed his or her life for the better. There are four things that you should

remember when talking to employers about your record:

1. **Be honest and upfront.** Look the employer in the eye and tell them about your conviction(s). For example, a person might say: “In 2007, I was convicted of theft and drug possession.”
2. **Let the employer know that you are willing to take responsibility** for what you did, but keep it brief. For example, “I regret the things I did.”
3. **Explain how your life is different now.** For example, “I’m in counseling now so I have support”, “I’ve been sober for six months”, “I’m going to GED classes because I want to focus on getting ahead”, “I’ve been going to church because religion helps me stay focused on the right choices”, “I’ve been volunteering at the food pantry because I want to give back to my community.”

4. **Talk to the employer about the reasons that you would be a good employee.** “I have experience as an assembler and I am very reliable. At my last job, I only missed one day of work in 11 months.”

“In my experience, it’s important to come clean, admit to your mistakes and then tell the employer what you have learned from the experience and why you will behave differently in the future.”

Begin by thinking about the work experience and job skills that you have to offer an employer. For example, experience in food service, a welding certificate, or experience working with customers.

List your job skills and work experiences below. (If you had any training or work experience in prison, include that as well.)

Now think about your good qualities as a person—characteristics that an employer would like. For example, has anyone ever told you that you get along well with others? That you are reliable? That you stay calm in stressful situations? List your strengths below:

Read the following examples to see how you might explain your history:

Example One:

“I have a charge of possession of drugs on my record. I have made some bad choices in my life. I’ve successfully completed a drug rehabilitation program and I am currently working with an employment specialist to help me to find part-time employment. I would never use drugs that would affect my ability to do my job. I have experience working with the public and previous employers told me that I have great customer service skills.”

Example Two:

“I have a sexual assault charge on my record. I know that what I did was wrong. I used poor judgment and made a life-changing mistake. I understand now how to make better choices and not repeat the same mistakes. I am eager to start a new job and continue down a more positive path. My family is supportive, I am an active member of my church and I am engaged in mental health treatment. I would be a good employee because I am extremely reliable and I have experience driving a forklift.”

Example Three:

“When I was younger I was arrested for burglary. I am extremely remorseful and I understand that I made a poor choice. I am a changed person. I have grown and I have not committed any crimes since then. I am currently a volunteer at the local soup kitchen and I am very involved in my community. I am a hard worker. I’ve always been a person who wanted to work and I never complain on the job.”

Finally, write the statement that you will use to talk to employers about your past.

It will help if you practice saying your statement out loud until you can say it with confidence. You can also review your statement before going to meet with employers.

State your conviction(s): _____

Express regret/take responsibility for past choices. _____

Explain how your life is different now. _____

Tell the employer why you will be a good employee. _____

Think about people who know you and can vouch for you.

For example, your employment specialist, VR counselor, probation or parole officer, AA sponsor, clergy, GED instructor, volunteer supervisor or past employer. Consider asking those people to write a

letter explaining that they know you and believe that you are a person of good character—that you have changed your life for the better. Bring copies of these letters when you meet with employers.

Finally, stay positive.

It may not happen overnight, but people with all sorts of convictions and multiple convictions have been able to get back to work. You can, too.

stay positive