

EXPLAINING A FELONY CONVICTION TO AN EMPLOYER

For an ex-offender, the most dreaded part of the job search can be explaining a felony conviction to a potential employer. Many ex-offenders have never honestly answered the question, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime?" As a result, they drift in and out of employment, staying with a job until the employer finds out through a background check, a call from a parole agent, or some other way.

Ex-offenders may be fired for falsifying information on their job application, not because they are ex-offenders. A company may hire ex-offenders, but have a policy of terminating anyone for lying on the application.

It is up to you whether you tell an employer about felony convictions. But we believe that "*honesty is the best policy.*" Our experience shows that *HOW* you communicate this information makes a difference. You must see yourself as a worthwhile and valuable asset who has skills and abilities an employer needs, not as an ex-convict unworthy of employment. You need a positive self-image and confidence in your skills and abilities to "sell yourself" to an employer.

The federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is available as an incentive to hire ex-offenders and others who may have difficulty finding work. The Federal Bonding Program, in states where it is available, allows employers to hire ex-felons and surety bond them if their own insurance won't. These incentives, along with your positive attitude, can make you an attractive job candidate.

Some points to remember:

RELAX – If you do not look and feel comfortable talking about your conviction, how can you expect the interviewer to be comfortable with your explanation?

MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT – Although a fundamental rule of interviewing, it is especially crucial to assure the interviewer you have nothing to hide.

BRIEFLY EXPLAIN YOUR CONVICTION IN WORDS THE INTERVIEWER CAN UNDERSTAND – Never state penal code or health and safety code violations (they will only ask what they mean) and don't dwell on your conviction.

ALWAYS ADD SOMETHING POSITIVE ABOUT YOUR SKILLS AND ABILITIES OR POSITIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPANY – This is a good place for your "personal commercial."

The following examples illustrate these rules: