

Tips for the ex-offender

Dealing with potential employers is never an easy task for clients with criminal records. Ex-offenders to lie on the application may get hired, and then 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 release preparation coordinator for more information.

- To tell or not to tell. It's up to you but we recommend honesty. On the application put "will discuss in interview" rather than a lengthy explanation of past convictions. In an interview, keep explanations short and stress what you learned in prison and what your skills and assets are. Be positive!
- Gaps in employment due to time served. If you had a job in prison, list this. Under salary, write "minimum wage." After all, a dollar a day was the minimum wage! Again, be positive and stress that though incarcerated, you haven't been lazy.
- Reason for leaving. Avoid negative words like "went to jail" or "paroled." Instead put "relocated" or "contract ended."
- The interview. Relax—be comfortable discussing the conviction. Practice ahead of time. Maintain eye contact – this shows you have nothing to hide. Again, keep explanations short and focus on what you have to offer the employer. Believe in yourself and it will show.

Applications

- 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).
- Never volunteer information that might be considered "negative" by employers (i.e., criminal record, substance abuse history, job terminations). If you are asked on the application about these things, put "will discuss." Since the purpose of an application is to get an interview for the job by putting "will discuss" instead of the possibly damaging information, you are forcing the employer to either give you the interview to get more information (which is the goal anyway) or eliminate you without really knowing why. If you are a qualified applicant, most employers won't do this. Remember: when you go to fill out an application, you should be groomed and dressed as if you were going on an interview. Sometimes you will be interviewed on the spot. When you file an application