

# Ex-Offenders:

## How to Prepare for the Job Interview

Behavioral interviewing is the selection method of choice for most large companies. During a behavioral interview, an employer evaluates you based on competencies that you'll need on the job.

### What is a behavioral interview?

Basically, it's an interview designed to gather information that will tell the interviewer how you will perform on the job. The principle behind the behavioral interview is the belief that the best indicator of future behavior is past behavior. This involves asking a series of questions designed to get you to talk about how you handled certain situations in the past.

For example, let's say a company has a high-stress environment, the interviewer might ask you to talk about whether you have been in a stressful situation in the past. If you say yes, the interviewer would proceed with a line of questions about what you have done in the situation, how it made you feel, how others responded to your actions, how you relieved the stress of the situation, and so on.

Typically, the interviewer has to determine three or four behavioral characteristics that would be most important for on-the-job success. They will have written out a definition of each such characteristic. For example, let's say you are applying for a customer service position:

- ✓ **Good listening:** The ability to listen empathically to another person's problems, asking appropriate questions and paraphrasing responses.
- ✓ **Written communication:** The ability to capture, in a concise manner, the most important issues to be resolved, the recommended action plan, and the desired outcomes.
- ✓ **Project management:** taking responsibility for organizing tasks, reaching agreement on individual responsibilities and goals, monitoring progress, resolving problems, and reporting progress.

During the interview, you will be provided with definitions of the desired characteristics and you'll be asked for examples of situations in which you demonstrated those characteristics. Sometimes, after you provided one example, you will be asked for another, just to test the depth of your experience.

One of the supposed benefits of this technique for employers is that candidates cannot prepare for these questions in advance. However, you can help yourself by anticipating the types of questions you might receive and searching your memory for examples of past behavior. You may be able to guess at some of the questions by studying and thinking about the job requirements beforehand.

### Breaking the ice

When you meet the interviewer, start with a firm handshake and a smile that conveys your enthusiasm and energy. Then, either wait to see what the interviewer says and follow his or her lead, or start by something that connects you quickly. This can be something as simple as "How are you?" or "Nice to meet you." Talking about the weather is good neutral ground to begin. You could also be more inventive. Maybe you observe something in the interviewer's office that you can relate to.

Know your resume inside and out. Anything on it, including any additional information or hobbies and interests is fair game in an interview. Also, make no mistake: *You need to have a thorough knowledge of how your career goals and aspirations relate to your background in advance of your interview.* This means clarifying for yourself what your values, purpose in life, and job/career goals and objectives are.

Ask yourself: What are the key themes about yourself you want to get across to the interviewer? What motivates you? Why are you applying for this job? Knowing who and what you are about will provide a strong foundation. It will help you speak from a position of strength and confidence.

Just because this is the time when the interviewer is asking the questions, doesn't mean you should let him or her take over, thus allowing the interaction to be lopsided. Instead, make every effort to actively engage the interviewer by using facial expressions and nodding your head in understanding or agreement. This is a surefire way to communicate your positive energy to the interviewer. By all means, ask for clarification concerning a question when you really need it. In this way, you can buy some time to frame your thoughts and compose yourself before you respond with an answer. No matter what, you'll want to listen actively. Don't think about what you're going to say in answer to a question while the interviewer is talking because you may miss an important nuance or qualifier to the question. After listening to each question, take a few seconds to organize your thoughts, think before you speak, and answer concisely and directly.

### **How to answer interview questions**

**Q:** *What is the most difficult workplace situation you have encountered, and how did you handle it?*

**A:** Think back to a difficult time at work and the results that developed from your solution. Show how you fixed or improved it.

**Q:** *What are your greatest accomplishments?*

**A:** Use awards, recognition, and factual information to make your point.

**Q:** *Why do you want to work here?*

**A:** Do not focus on how getting the job will advance your career. Rather, focus on how your skills can improve the bottom line of the company.

**Q:** *Tell me about yourself.*

**A:** Do not get into your personal life — kids, family, recovery, things like that. Keep it strictly professional. Could be a trick question to get to know how your life outside of work could affect your performance.

**Q:** *Where do you want to be five years from now?*

**A:** Talk about how you see great opportunity for professional growth within the company. In addition, how you feel if you work hard and prove yourself you can advance in the company.

**Q:** *Do you prefer to work in teams or alone?*

**A:** Double-edged sword. If the job requires you to be independent without someone hovering over you, then let him or her know you can work alone. Also let them know you excel in a team environment — provide some examples.

**Q:** *Why did you leave your last job?*

**A:** Could be checking to see if you are a job hopper, or had a conflict with your old boss. Be careful!

**Q:** *What type of wage or salary are you looking for?*

**A:** Know what others in this position make in your location and with your experience before the interview.

**Q:** *What do you know about this company?*

**A:** Study the company Web site or find and read information about the company before the interview.

**Q:** Any other questions?

**A:** You are expected to have questions. This is your chance to interview the hiring manager to find out if the company is right for you. Take advantage of it!

**Remember:** Show sincere enthusiasm. Be creative. Smile. Remember to project confidence and professionalism. Demonstrate your skills and competencies. Ask intelligent questions. In addition, do not let your answers be more than a couple, three minutes long. If you see the interviewer looking at his or her watch, clock, or out the window, you are in trouble. Keep the interviewer interested and engaged.

## **TIPS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH CRIMINAL HISTORIES**

### **The Application Process**

<b>Question/Topic</b>	<b>Don't</b>	<b>Do</b>
<b>1. Have you ever been convicted of a felony?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> simply say yes.</li> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> lie and say that you haven't ever been convicted of a felony.</li> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> leave it blank.</li> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> write a lengthy explanation of past convictions on the application.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> write, "Yes, will discuss in interview" or something similar.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> remember that honesty is very important.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> create a letter of explanation that could be attached to an application (see example included later in this packet).</li> </ul>
<b>2. What was your wage/salary at your job?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> say the actual amount paid (\$20/hr).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> write "minimum wage". After all, a dollar a day was the minimum wage!</li> </ul>
<b>3. What was your reason for leaving?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> use negative words like "went to prison" or "paroled."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> use terms like "relocated" or "contract ended." Both of these are true. You could also say: "It wasn't a good fit."</li> </ul>
<b>4. What experience do you have?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> 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).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> be honest.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> "sell yourself." If you have the experience, let the employer know why you should be hired!</li> </ul>
<b>5. Grooming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> take this for granted!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. <b>DO</b> 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 – you never know!!</li> </ul>
<b>6. Follow-up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> forget that you filled out an application.</li> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> simply wait for an employer to call you back.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> call back within 5-7 days to check on the status of your application. This shows you are really interested in the job.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> keep a list of the places where you filled out an application. This will make it easier to do callbacks.</li> </ul>

Question/Topic	Don't	Do
7. <b>Volunteering information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> volunteer information that might be considered "negative" by employers (for example your criminal record, substance abuse history, job terminations).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If you have to explain, <b>DO</b> write "will discuss in interview."</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> know your rights and which questions are considered illegal (see examples included later in this packet).</li> </ul>
8. <b>Overall . . .</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> give up!!!!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> 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!!!</li> </ul>
9. <b>Social Security Number</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> carry your Social Security card with you in your wallet/purse.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> memorize your Social Security number.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> keep it in a safe place where you will always know where it is at. When you are hired you will have to present it to the employer – you cannot legally work without it!</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> call Social Security if you need a replacement card. (1-800-722-1213).</li> </ul>
10. <b>Address and phone numbers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> provide an employer with a temporary address or phone number.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> provide the employer with a permanent address where you can always count on receiving your mail/phone messages.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> make sure that you provide a phone number with an answering machine and/or a person who will be available to answer in a courteous and professional manner (and be sure this person will be reliable and get you your messages).</li> </ul>
11. <b>Blanks on a job application</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> leave any questions blank.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> use the letters N/A (not applicable). Or write something like "I will be happy to explain in person" or "See letter of explanation."</li> </ul>

## HOW CAN I GET A COPY OF MY CRIMINAL RECORDS?

You can obtain a copy of your criminal history through the Internet by logging onto the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) website at: <https://cch.state.mn.us/>. The page will look like this:

### Minnesota Criminal History

*Welcome to the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension's Public CCH on the Internet application. This is a free service offered by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension as of August 1, 2005 as required by Minnesota statute.*

*This website contains public data maintained by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. Data on criminal convictions is public for 15 years following the completion of the sentence. Public information includes offense, court of conviction, date of the conviction and sentence information. Information not available on this website includes: arrest data, juvenile data, criminal history data from other states, federal data, data on convictions where 15 years or more have elapsed since the completion of the sentence, and other data deemed private or confidential.*

*You may obtain private data on another individual through the Informed Consent Procedure, or if you are the subject of the record, you can request a copy of your public and private criminal history information by visiting us in person at the St. Paul BCA office or by mail.*

*The subject of a record has the right to contest the accuracy and/or completeness of the record by visiting us in person at the St. Paul BCA office or by calling 651-793-2420 for more information.*

*Public users may visit one of the BCA office locations to view public criminal history information for no charge. A printed copy requires a fee of \$4 in the form of cash or check.*

*Individuals listed on this site have been convicted of one or more of the following offenses:  
[Begin Search]*

Be sure you know how to read these records correctly if you elect to utilize this search!

## The Interview Process

**Purpose of a job interview:** To answer 3 questions:

1. **Are you qualified?** The employer assumes the applicant is qualified based on the resume or job application, however they will still ask questions to gain a better understanding of the applicant's skill level and abilities to perform the work required.
2. **Are you motivated?** The employer expects the applicant to be motivated. They are looking for clues that the applicant will actually do the required work without constant supervision.
3. **Are you suited to the team?** The applicant needs to be able to get along well with others on the team and *add-to*, **not** *take-away-from*, the productivity of the group. Employers are looking for people who can come into a work environment and get along with other employees. No matter how skilled or motivated an employee might be, if he or she cannot get along with other workers he/she will drag the whole group down. This last point is a very important one. Remember that being able to discuss and show how you are a good team player who will be a dependable employee is critical!!

**Having a pleasant attitude and demeanor will increase the likelihood of being hired.**

<b>Don't</b>	<b>Do</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> be unprepared for questions about your criminal history.</li> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> see yourself as an ex-convict unworthy of employment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> be prepared.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> 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.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> see yourself as worthwhile and a valuable asset who has the skills and abilities an employer needs.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> have a positive self-image and confidence in your skills and abilities to "sell yourself" to an employer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> be lengthy in explaining things. <b>DO</b> keep it short and discuss only necessary items.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> have an "incarceration speech" prepared for your interview – be sure to practice it!! (see example included later in this packet)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When asked about your criminal conviction, <b>DON'T</b> 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."</li> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> 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!!</li> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> use "jailhouse jargon" (i.e. "pen, slammer, joint, prison, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> be honest.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> explain what you learned from your prison experience or how you want to better yourself after being in prison.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> take responsibly for the actions that led you to prison.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> stress that although you were incarcerated, you haven't been lazy; explain things you did to stay busy or improve yourself (worked, read, etc.)</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> use the word "incarceration" only once – it is has been researched to be the least harsh word when describing such a situation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> stress out!!!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> relax and be comfortable in explaining your criminal conviction.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> practice ahead of time.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> maintain eye contact; this shows that you have nothing to hide.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> believe in yourself – it will show.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> add something positive about your skills and abilities or positive information about the company.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DON'T</b> be blind to programs that can help you get a job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> remember the Federal Bonding Program. This program allows employers to hire ex-offenders 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. Mention this program to the potential employer.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> remember the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). This is available as an incentive for employers to hire people with criminal histories and others who may have difficulty getting work. Inform the potential employer about this.</li> <li>▪ <b>DO</b> make sure you are familiar with and understand these programs before discussing them with an employer.</li> </ul>

## **How would you answer the question: “Have you ever been convicted of a crime?”**

**Incarceration Speech:** the brief and direct information an individual with a criminal history can relate to an interview about their reason for incarceration.

- Doesn't have to be the first thing the individual tells an interviewer
- Should be addressed early in the interview.
- An example of a good time to disclose and present this “incarceration speech” would be if/when an interviewer asks a question such as: “Can you tell me about yourself?”; “Can you tell me about your time in jail/prison?”; or “Have you ever been incarcerated and if so, why?”
- It is probably a good idea to show sincerity by saying that you are sorry and you regret what you have done. Most people are looking to see if you are remorseful. This is a good time for an apology; society and the employer wants to hear this.
- Only use the word “incarceration” once. Research shows that the word “Incarceration” is the least harsh word. Avoid using profanity or “jailhouse jargon” (i.e., prison, joint, convict slammer, felon, etc.)
- Use the letters **RSLA**:

**R= Right to know** (the employer has the right to know).

**S= Sincerity** (they made a mistake and they are sorry – they are prepared to do whatever it takes to prove themselves).

**L= Learned** (they take full responsibility for their actions and they have learned from their experiences).

**A= Advantages** (what is in it for the employer - - get a hard working and dedicated employee AND the company should be aware that they will be eligible for the Work Opportunities Tax Credit).

### **Example Incarceration Speech**

*"Before we get started (or continue) there is something you have the right to know. I have made mistakes and was incarcerated for (felony). At the time my judgment was clouded. I made a wrong choice and I did something stupid. I am sorry. I admit this was a serious error in my judgment. But during this time, I re-evaluated my life and decided I wanted to make a positive change. I took advantage of this time to better myself by taking classes in . . ." I'm aware that my past actions could cause you to question my judgment and character, but I'm willing to do whatever is necessary to prove myself.*

This is the point where you can mention a summary of your skills, strengths and abilities. You should also mention the advantages for the employer (WOTC, Bonding, etc.).

### **Interview Questions Regarding Criminal History**

If the employer asks a question regarding your criminal history, briefly explain what happened, but **keep it positive and don't dwell on the past**. Explain that you have learned from your mistakes and you are currently interested in making a positive contribution to the employer's operation. For example:

### **Example Incarceration Speech**

*"I don't want to mislead you. I do want an interview and the chance to explain myself. I have a felony conviction. I'm sorry for the grief I caused other people and I'm embarrassed about having committed a crime. Since I wasn't sure about the confidentiality of this information, I wanted to explain in more detail to you personally about the situation. I feel so bad about what I did that I didn't want anyone knowing about it, except those of you who need to know. What would you like to know about my situation?"*

It is best if you bring up the topic yourself. The following guidelines will assist you in addressing your conviction.

- Show no intention of lying.
- Indicate wish for an interview.
- Point out your need to explain the situation.
- State that you have a conviction (not the type of conviction).
- Indicate sorrow for your victim.
- Specify your own embarrassment.
- Give reason for incomplete information on the application.
- Restate your sorrow for committing the crime.
- Designate desire for confidentiality.
- Ask interviewer for next move.

Answering the question...What was your crime/conviction?"

- Indicate the last conviction.
- Show remorse and accept responsibility.
- Indicate sorrow for victim of crime.
- State what you lost from the crime.
- State you learned something.
- Indicate what you learned.
- Focus on most important thing learned.
- State you made best of situation.
- Relate prison experience to work.
- Indicate need to earn way back in
- Indicate willingness to talk about things.

If you tell the truth, the law is essentially on your side. However, once you lie, you have effectively given up rights protecting you from discrimination or regarding you damages in the event of being discriminated against. Having given your employer a valid pretext for firing you (dishonesty, supplying false information, etc) you will no longer have the law in your favor.

Employers cannot discriminate against you for being arrested, but they do have the right to question your employability if you have been convicted of a crime. They can't ask..."Have you ever been arrested?" They can ask..."Have you ever been convicted of a "specific" crime?" The type of crime specified must be related to the job for which you are applying. For example, a nursing home, might ask if you have ever been convicted of a crime against a person?

As an ex-offender you need to be prepared for the questions that may arise in the interview process regarding your criminal history. One way to prepare is to have an "incarceration speech" ready to address these questions. An incarceration speech is an explanation of the time, crime and identifying a new direction in your life.

To develop an incarceration speech you will need to identify what you gained while in prison and what you lost in prison.

**What you gain while in prison:**

- Improved education which will help in your job.
- A healthy respect for authority and rules.
- A genuine respect for other people's rights.
- A better understanding of why you do things.
- Increased ability to get along in hostile situations.
- Much more patience in handling problems.
- Job related skills training.
- Counseling which helped you change your behaviors.
- A desire to do what's right so you don't return.
- Improved self-discipline.
- Renewed respect for the value of hard work.

**What you lost in prison:**

- Access to and respect from your children.
- Trust from your family and friends.
- Your own personal dignity and self-respect.
- Freedom to control your own life.
- Personal property (car, home, etc).
- Time you could have been advancing your career.
- Money you could have made working.
- Opportunity to enter certain type of careers.
- Ability to travel anywhere you wanted (if paroled).
- Right to enter job market on your terms.
- Network of friends who could help you find work.

**Example Incarceration Speech**

*On the job application, I stated that I had been convicted of a crime, which I said I would explain during the interview. I would like to do that now if it is okay with you. In (year) I was arrested and convicted of (crime). As a result I was sentenced to (years) in prison. I was released early because of good behavior and I successfully completed (treatment program). I know I made a bad choice and it resulted in a serious mistake. I truly regret that. I am highly motivated to do whatever it takes to grow beyond my past mistakes"*

**Four Step Strategy for Answering the Felony Question**

The following questions may be asked in a job interview:

- "I see you were convicted of a felon. What happened?"
- "Why should we hire you, an ex-felon?"
- "What makes me think you won't commit another felony?"
- You marked on your application that you committed a crime, did you go to prison?"

**Why should I hire you?**

- I am bondable up to \$5,000 at no cost to an employer. The U.S. Department of Labor has a Fidelity Bonding Program available for returning ex-felons to aid us in finding meaningful, full-

time employment and to protect employers against theft, fraud, forgery, larceny, or similar events. The Bond is good for six months and renewable at the employer's cost for another six months.

- Business insurance policies that protect against theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement of money or property by an employee who is covered by the bond.
- The Department of Labor (DOL) will post a \$5,000 bond at no cost to the employer for a 6 month period.
- Contact: Federal Bonding Coordinator at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) (651) 296-8400. [www.deed.state.mn.us/bonding](http://www.deed.state.mn.us/bonding).
- A \$2,400 Tax Credit could go right to your bottom line.
- The Internal Revenue Service can authorize up to a \$2,400 Tax Credit for your business. This is an incentive to hire ex-felons and is known as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC).
- This can only be used for a new hire.
- The employer cannot have used the tax credit for the same person in the past.
- No fee to the employer.
- Very little paperwork is required
- Needs to be done within 21 days from the employee's start date.
- Contact: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development WOTC Unit. 651-297-2219. [www.deed.wotc@state.mn.us](mailto:www.deed.wotc@state.mn.us).

**EXAMPLE ANSWER:**

**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 me 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 company."*

**-OR-**

*"When I was younger I got mixed up with the wrong crowds and got I 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. Because 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?"*

**REMEMBER that communication is not just about the words you use!!!! Your total message is:**

- **7% actual words**
- **38% tone, pitch, volume, and rate**
- **55% body posture, clothing, facial expressions, and gestures**

**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 list of difficult questions that you may want to practice answering.

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

**EXAMPLES OF OTHER DIFFICULT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

- Tell us about yourself.
- Why do you want to work here?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- Name three strengths and weaknesses.
- How do you respond to having to work under pressure?
- How many days of work did you miss last year?
- I see on your application that you have had many jobs in the past year; is there a reason for this?
- Would you have any objections if we contacted any of your former employers?
- Where do you see yourself five years from now? What are your long-range career plans/goals?
- Why should I hire you?
- 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?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- Do you have any questions? (it is ALWAYS good to have 3-5 questions in mind before the interview for the interviewer = shows your true interest in the job and the company)

**TIPS FOR ANSWERING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS:**

- Think before answering – you may want to respond with “That’s a good question” and then pause for a moment before responding. This allows for more time to collect your thoughts before responding.
- Ask the interviewer to restate the question – by asking for the question to be restated, it can give you more time to think about the answer and to help you understand more about what the interviewer is asking.
- Be brief and respond in a factual way – This is perhaps one to the best ways to respond because it makes you sound sure and confident in your response.
- Focus on what is really being asked – be sure not to get off track
- Never lie, exaggerate or overstate – If you lie, exaggerate, or overstate in an interview or on an application or resume and the employer finds out, no matter how big or small, that can become grounds for immediate firing.

## Criminal History 3-Minute Drill Worksheet

"I made a mistake. This is something I've regretted ever since, but through my rehabilitation I've learned a lot about myself and set some goals that I'm proud of. I've been out of trouble since I was paroled and I intend to stay that way."

On the application I stated that I had been convicted of a crime, which I'd explain during the interview. I would like to do that now, if it's OK with you.

**-OR-** I need to share an unpleasant part of my past.

In \_\_\_\_\_ (year), I was arrested and convicted of \_\_\_\_\_.  
As a result, I was sentenced to \_\_\_\_\_ years in prison. I served \_\_\_\_\_ years in the Department of Correction and was released early because of good behavior and successful completion of an intense, substance abuse program.

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I am currently on parole, **-OR-** I have successfully completed supervision.

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At the time I committed my crime my judgment was clouded by \_\_\_\_\_ (drugs) (alcohol) (divorce) (friends-peer pressure) (financial stress) (poor values). I know that I made a bad choice and it resulted in a serious mistake. I truly regret that. **-OR-** At that time, I thought that I could cope with my problems and my personal pain by drinking and doing drugs. I know that I made a serious mistake and truly regret it.

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I now know that my mistake caused a great deal of grief for many people. I truly regret I used such poor judgment but I did and I am dealing with that. **-OR-** Looking back, I can see how harmful it all was. Before I was incarcerated I thought I could cope with my problems by using drugs and alcohol. I know that I made a serious mistake and I truly regret using such poor judgment. Understanding the impact of my poor judgment on both others and me has changed my perspective and brought significant meaning to using my life for a positive influence.

The situation caused me to examine my life and I found a number of things that I needed to change. I've used my time in the Department of Corrections system wisely and dealt with the defects of character that were at the root of my problem. I addressed and changed with them in a mature manner. The most important result is that I am highly motivated to do whatever it takes to continue growing beyond my past mistakes. This is one of the reasons I'm interested in working here.

I am now \_\_\_\_\_ (married) (have a new baby) (an usher at my church) (enrolled in a local trade school), and I \_\_\_\_\_ (continue to see a counselor) (am an active member in AA or NA) (have been clean and sober for \_\_\_\_\_ years) (have completed my GED) (have my Associates Degree) (have my HVAC Certification) (am enrolled in a local trade school) (have my welding certificate). I am a volunteer at \_\_\_\_\_ (The Red Cross) (Habitat for Humanity) (The United Way) (The YMCA) (The March of Dimes) (The Adult Literacy Program).

I am aware that my past actions could cause you to question my judgment and character, but I'm willing to do what ever is necessary to prove myself. I'm willing to submit to close supervision, serve a long probationary period, or do whatever it reasonably takes to prove myself to you as a responsible employee.

# **SAMPLE LETTER OF EXPLANATION**

Date

Name

Business Name

Address

Dear (Prospective Employer):

Please accept this letter of explanation regarding the lack of information on the Employment Application about my felony conviction(s) of \_\_\_\_\_ that occurred on \_\_\_\_\_. I certainly do not want to mislead you nor misrepresent myself to you by not providing more detailed information on the application; however, due to the confidentiality of this information and the embarrassment I feel over my past mistake(s), I very much want the opportunity to explain this to you in person.

I'm sure you have reservations considering hiring an ex-felon, and rightfully so. If the positions were reversed I would probably feel the same way. I can only hope to try to explain the specifics, my true regret for what I have done in the past, why that will never happen again in the future, and now that I have the opportunity to turn my life around, why I will be an outstanding employee.

To back that up, the U. S. Labor Department is willing at no cost to you, to post a \$5,000 Fidelity Bond for a period of 6 months with you on my behalf. Additionally, the IRS offers a one-time \$2,400 Work Opportunity Tax Credit to employers who hire ex-felons. These employer benefits are available to you through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development at no fee with very little paperwork.

Whatever your decision, I thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully

Joe Applicant

# Federal Tax Credits for Employers

**Hire workers who can keep more of your money in your business!**

**Increase your bottom line** by taking advantage of the **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)**. The WOTC provides a **federal income tax credit** for hiring new employees who meet certain criteria. Any size employer is eligible for the credit. Jobs can be full-time, part-time, permanent or temporary. There's no limit to the number of new hires who can qualify you for these tax savings.



The Tax Credit is up to **\$2,400** for each new hire. Hire a disabled veteran, and it's up to **\$4,800**. Hire a long-term family assistance recipient and it's up to **\$9,000!** Use these savings to offset the costs of hiring and training workers. As the employee earns and learns, you reduce your federal tax liability. It's money you keep working in your business.

**An employer may qualify for the tax credit if a new hire meets eligibility in one of the following targeted groups:**

- Short-term assistance (MFIP) recipient
- Veteran - receiving food stamps or disability compensation
- 18-39 year-old food stamp recipient
- Rehabilitation Services/Ticket to Work recipient
- Ex-felon
- Resident in Minneapolis Empowerment Zone (EZ) or in Rural Renewal County (ages 18-39)
- EZ resident (ages 16-17) hired as a summer youth employee
- Supplemental Security Income recipient
- Long-term assistance (MFIP) recipient

### *For More Information:*

**Internet:** [www.deed.state.mn.us/wotc](http://www.deed.state.mn.us/wotc)

**Email:** [deed.wotc@state.mn.us](mailto:deed.wotc@state.mn.us)

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development  
WOTC Unit  
332 Minnesota Street, Suite E200  
St. Paul, MN 55101-1351

Twin Cities Metro: 651-259-7507  
Greater Minnesota: 888-234-5521  
TTY: 651-296-3900

The **paperwork is minimal! The tax savings are huge!** For each new hire who indicates he/she may meet one or more of the criteria above, Minnesota employers need only do the following to receive certification to claim the tax credit:

- Complete the **IRS Form 8850** and the U.S. Department of Labor **Form ETA-9061**. These forms can be downloaded from [www.deed.state.mn.us/wotc/page5.htm](http://www.deed.state.mn.us/wotc/page5.htm)
- Mail the signed and dated forms to the Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development, WOTC Unit, **no later than 28 days** after the new employee's start date.

# Minnesota Federal Bonding Service

## Hire At-Risk Employees with No-Cost Bonding Insurance

Fidelity Bonding is no-cost employee dishonesty insurance that protects employers against employee theft of any money or property. The Minnesota Federal Bonding Service provides individual Fidelity Bonds to employers for new or current employees who may be denied coverage by commercial carriers because of a:

- Record of arrest, conviction or imprisonment
- History of alcohol or drug abuse
- Poor credit history
- Dishonorable discharge
- Lack of employment history

### How the Program Works

**Eligibility** - To be eligible for the bonding service, a person must have a full or part-time job or a job offer with a date set to start work. Also, the wages must be paid with Federal taxes automatically deducted from the paycheck. Self-employed people are not eligible for the service.

**Application** - The Fidelity Bond is issued as a policy of Travelers Property Casualty. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development is an authorized agency for the issuance of these Fidelity Bonds. New or current employees or the employer can contact the Minnesota Federal Bonding Coordinator to apply for a Fidelity Bond.

**Processing** - There are no papers for the employer to sign. The Fidelity Bond coverage for current employees is effective when the Minnesota Federal Bonding Coordinator certifies the bond. For new employees, the Fidelity Bond is effective the day the employee begins work.

**Coverage** - The Fidelity Bond has "no deductible" and the amount of insurance usually issued is \$5,000. The Fidelity Bond is mailed to the employer by Travelers Property Casualty. The duration of the Fidelity Bond is six months. If the bondee demonstrates honesty during the six months, Travelers Property Casualty will make a standard commercial policy available for the employer to purchase.

### Federal Bonding Coordinator Contact Information:

**WEBSITE:**

[www.deed.state.mn.us/bonding](http://www.deed.state.mn.us/bonding)

**EMAIL:** [deed.jobbank@state.mn.us](mailto:deed.jobbank@state.mn.us)

**PHONE:** 651-259-7500 or  
1-800-345-2537

**TTY:** 651-296-3900