

EXPLAINING A FELONY CONVICTION TO AN EMPLOYER TIPS FOR THE EX-OFFENDER

Dealing with potential employers is never an easy task for clients with criminal records. Ex-offenders who lie on a job application may get hired, but then fired if their criminal 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 information, the following hints may be helpful. Speak with your Probation Officer for additional information and referrals to employment resources.

To tell or not to tell. It is up to you, but we recommend honesty. On the application, write “will discuss in interview” rather than a lengthy explanation of past convictions. In an interview, keep explanations brief, and stress what you have learned from your conviction and time in prison, how you have changed, and your skills or assets. 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 although you were incarcerated, you have been acquiring valuable experience and skills.

Reason for leaving. Avoid negative words like “went to jail” or “paroled.” Instead put “relocated” or “Contract ended.” Both are true.

The interview. Relax – be comfortable discussing the conviction. Practice ahead of time and maintain eye contact. Again, keep explanations short and focus on what you have to offer the employer. Believe in yourself and it will show.

APPLICATIONS

If you are asked about felony convictions on the application, put “Will discuss in interview.” Since the purpose of an application is to get an interview for the job, putting “will discuss” instead of possibly damaging information, you are encouraging the employer to either give you an interview to get more information or to eliminate you without really knowing why. If you are a qualified applicant, most employers want to interview you.

Remember: When you fill out an application in a company’s employment office, you should be groomed and dressed as if you were going for an interview. Sometimes, you may be interviewed on the spot. When you file an application, don’t forget about it and hope the employer calls you. Follow-up after five to seven days. A phone call to check on the status of your application is recommended. In fact, the best advice any job seeker can get is, “Don’t give up!” There will probably be many “no’s” before you get a job. However, if you’re willing to work at getting a job, you will be successful.