

CPCC Career Guide

Conducting a job search in today's economy is difficult for anyone, but individuals with a criminal background face additional challenges in obtaining employment. Understanding how to navigate the job search is important for ex-offenders and can increase your chances for success!

First, know that you will have to work hard to gain employment. They say that finding a job IS a job in itself, and this is definitely true for you. Today's job market is flooded with job seekers many of whom have excellent skills and a clean record. This is your competition. What can you do to beat out the others? Read on!

Where do I start? Before you begin your job search, it will be helpful for you to prepare. Research the industry you are interested in and keep in mind there are certain industries that will be easier for you to enter. Air conditioning, refrigeration, HVAC, construction, painting, sheet rock, carpentry, culinary, electrical, general labor, janitorial, hospitality/restaurant, sheet metal, and welding are some industries and occupations that are typically easier for ex-offenders to enter. Fields that may exclude people with criminal records include childcare, education, security, nursing homes, healthcare, and some financial institutions.

Be familiar with the types of positions that are available in your targeted industry and the skills that you would need. You can get this valuable information by looking at job postings. Compare the skills needed to your current qualifications and upgrade your skills if needed. Identify at least three good references and verify that they are willing to speak to employers on your behalf. Create a resume to highlight your career related knowledge, skills and abilities. Consider using a functional format for your resume. This can help you emphasize your skills, rather than potential gaps in your employment. Make a list of 5 things you want the employer to know about you and create your elevator speech. See the article in our Career Guide entitled "My Elevator Speech".

Where should I look? It is important for any job seeker to focus their efforts in order to maximize positive results. Consider starting with the following resources:

- Agencies and non-profit organizations dedicated to working with ex-offenders exist in most large cities nationwide. These agencies are in place to assist ex-offenders with re-entry and many help their clients find jobs. This means they speak with employers regularly and may know of job leads or companies that want to work with you!
- Temporary agencies and employment services work with a wide variety of businesses and have an excellent understanding of which companies hire ex-offenders. Register with several agencies to increase your chances of finding a job. Remember, many temporary and employment agencies offer temporary, temp-to-hire and permanent positions. They can be a great way to get your foot in the door and show an employer your skills, knowledge and work ethic.
- Many times, small companies are more willing to work with those with a criminal background. Larger companies often have policies in place that prohibit them from hiring ex-offenders. Smaller companies may have more flexibility in their hiring policies.
- Self employment is another great option for those with obstacles to employment. Many ex-offenders find success operating their own small business.

- Career Services can help you identify and connect with the resources above. We also have lists available of companies that have hired ex-offenders in the past. Speak to a career counselor today for assistance!

How do I prepare? Preparation is the key to a successful job search. As an individual with a criminal background, you will need to be prepared to discuss your situation. When you go to fill out the application, be honest about your background. Always read the question carefully and answer the question that is asked. Questions vary: “Have you ever been convicted of a felony?” “Have you been convicted of a felony in the past 7 years?” “Have you ever been arrested?” To answer this question, indicate, “I will be happy to explain in person,” and be prepared to explain your situation in a positive way. Practice this so that it sounds natural. A career counselor can help you prepare and practice your answer.

If you are not honest about your background on an application or in an interview, many employers will run a background check and find out on their own. You will most likely lose your job. Give the employer a chance to work with you by being upfront about your past.

Keep in mind that the Federal government has programs in place to give employers incentive to hire those with a criminal background. Employers are offered a tax credit when they hire specific populations including those with a felony conviction, so you may be able to save employers money. The Federal government also “bonds” or insures qualified ex-offenders who will be working with money or valuable tools or goods since commercial insurance companies may not insure you. This lowers perceived risk to employers.

Your job search may not be easy, but it can be successful if you are prepared and determined! Career Services would like the opportunity to help you create a customized job search plan. Contact us today!