



Before You Apply

There are steps an ex-offender job seeker should take before applying for jobs. Before you start your job search, use this helpful checklist to see if you have completed all of the necessary steps to be successful.

Have you...

- Applied for a Certificate of Rehabilitation (**Certificate of Relief from Disabilities** or **Certificate of Good Conduct**) if you are eligible to do so?
- Requested a copy of your **rap sheet** (criminal history) to check for errors?
- Prepared or updated either your **resume** or **fact sheet** with all of the places and dates of where you have worked in the past?
- Collected all of the **documents** you will need for employment, such as a driver's license or non-driver identification card?
- Registered with the nearest **Career Center** for employment assistance?
- Used career development tools like **JobZone** to think about what kind of work you want to do and what skills you may need?
- Determined whether or not you will need more **school or training** to get the type of job you want?
- If you do need more school or training, have you identified a **school or training program** you are interested in that will allow you to attend based on your criminal history? Also, most schools will require that you take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and meet with a student affairs official before being accepted.
- Checked to see if there are any **restrictions** to getting the job or license you want based on your criminal history?
- Learned about hiring incentives for businesses such as the **Federal Bonding Program** and the **Work Opportunity Tax Credit** so that you can give this information to businesses before a hiring decision is made?

Need help?

If you have checked all or most of the steps in this checklist, you should be well prepared to start your job search.

You can get help with your job search at any of the **Career Centers** in New York State. A complete list of all Career Centers with hours and contact information is available online:

<http://labor.ny.gov/workforcenypartners/osview.asp>

You can also contact the **Special Populations Unit** for assistance at any time by calling (518) 485-2151 or emailing SpecialPopulations@labor.ny.gov.

RESUME and JOB APPLICATION FACT WORKSHEET

Use this fact sheet to record all the locations, dates and other information related to your past jobs to help you create a resume and prepare to fill out job applications. Use as many copies of the worksheet as you need to record all your work history.

Your Career Highlights:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Your Qualifications & Skills:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Employment Experience: List 10 years of employment if possible, using following example:

Job title: Cashier

Employer: Your Beautiful Home Inc.

Employer address: 247 Main St. Kingston NY 12401

Dates of Employment (month/year to month/year): 12/2010 – 07/2012

Responsibilities: Welcomed and helped customers with purchasing home items, Rang up customer orders and bagged items, Completed special orders for items to be shipped directly to customer.

Supervisor name and phone number: Natalie Ortiz, 555-555-5555

Job title: _____

Employer: _____

Employer Address: _____

Dates of Employment (month/year to month/year): _____

Responsibilities: _____

Supervisor name and phone number: _____

Job title: _____

Employer: _____

Employer Address: _____

Dates of Employment (month/year to month/year): _____

Responsibilities: _____

Supervisor name and phone number: _____

Education:

Formal Degree Name: _____

School name: _____

City, State: _____

Certificate Name: _____

School name: _____

City, state: _____

Volunteer Experience:

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Other Activities, Awards:

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____



Answering Conviction Questions on Applications

Almost any job application you fill out, whether it is a paper application or an online application, will ask you about your conviction(s). This can be a difficult question to answer – above all, you should be honest and not lie.

Lying on a job application is legal grounds to be fired from a job, and since almost every business conducts background checks, information about your conviction(s) can easily be accessed. It is far better to develop your strategy for answering conviction questions before you fill out applications.

Use this worksheet to prepare for answering these questions. Keep in mind that there is no “one right way” to answer these questions for every job seeker. However, here is some commonly accepted advice recommended by workforce staff based on feedback from businesses.

Step 1: List your conviction(s) with penal code(s) and date(s)

Again, it is important to be upfront about your conviction(s) since this information will show up in a background check. If you are not sure about what information is on your rap sheet, you should request a copy to review before filling out applications. Adding the dates/years for your conviction(s) is especially good if they happened a long time ago. You can search for New York State Penal Codes here: <http://ypdcrime.com/penal.law>.

Step 2: Show how you have changed

Beyond listing your conviction(s), you should indicate if there are any other factors the business should consider as part of your rehabilitation. For example, do you have (or have you applied for) a Certificate of Relief from Disabilities or a Certificate of Good Conduct? Can you describe a positive way you have changed in one sentence or less?

Step 3: Create a personal marketing opportunity

There are benefits businesses can receive for hiring individuals with convictions, such as free fidelity bonding through the Federal Bonding Program and in some cases, a tax credit (the Work Opportunity Tax Credit). Educate yourself about these hiring incentives and list any the business would be eligible for by hiring you. This may be enough information to get a business interested in contacting you for an interview, where you can explain your conviction(s) and rehabilitation in more (but not too much) detail – please see the **Preparing Your Conviction Speech** worksheet on this topic.



Conviction Questions: Examples

One of the most difficult parts of your job search can be figuring out how to answer the “conviction question” on job applications. Here are some examples of how to do it.



Many businesses require you to fill out a job application online or at a kiosk at the workplace. You should answer all questions about your conviction honestly, as in this example. Notice here (see below) how Steve takes advantage of a text field for extra comments about his application to highlight his positive work qualities (e.g., responsible, hard-working, proactive) and is upfront and positive about what happened. He also provides the employer with valuable information and a resource to get more information about hiring incentives.

8. Have you been convicted or received deferred adjudication for a felony under any state or federal law?

Yes

1. Were you convicted for a federal offense?

No

Is there anything else we should consider about your application?

I have a conviction from over 10 years ago for larceny (NYS Penal Law S 155.40). I am the kind of person who takes responsibility for my mistakes. I served a sentence and worked full-time while incarcerated, and I took as many vocational training courses as I could while in prison.

I would be more than happy to discuss this in person during an interview with you. Thank you for your consideration.

Steve Jones

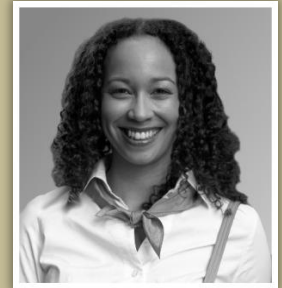
P.S. Did you know that your company can receive \$2,400 in tax credit and up to \$25,000 in free bonding insurance if I am hired? Check out the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and the Federal Bonding Program at www.labor.ny.gov.

Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense (felony or misdemeanor)? [X] Y or [] N

If so, please explain for each conviction.

Monroe County Court PL 177.10 Disposition Date: 4/2007
Applied for Certificate of Relief from Disabilities 6/2012
Eligible for bonding under Federal Bonding Program

(Note: No applicant will be denied employment solely on the grounds of conviction of a criminal offense. The date of the offense, the nature of the offense, including any significant details that affect the description of the event, and the surrounding circumstances and the relevance of the offense to the position(s) applied for may, however, be considered.)



*After checking **Yes**, Pam gives the disposition date, court of conviction and section of the Penal Law that corresponds to her offense. She also adds that she applied for a certificate of rehabilitation to show some evidence of her rehabilitation, and that she is eligible for bonding under the Federal Bonding Program.*

Yes No Have you ever been convicted of any crime (felony or misdemeanor)?
Yes No Are you now under charges for any crime?
If you answered YES to any of these questions, provide details under REMARKS on Page 3. Your failure to answer any of these questions or to provide details will significantly delay any determination concerning your qualifications and may deprive you of potential employment opportunities.

Pg 3



REMARKS

NYS Penal Laws 220.25, 220.46, 220.43, 220.44 (1998-2002)
Received a Certificate of Good Conduct to demonstrate rehabilitation
Eligible for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit
Eligible for bonding under the Federal Bonding Program

Hector answers all questions about his convictions honestly and then includes the penal codes for his offenses and the date range when they occurred (had multiple offenses within the same time period over ten years ago). He includes that he has received a certificate of rehabilitation to show evidence of rehabilitation and he also adds that the business can receive a tax credit and bonding insurance if he is hired.



Preparing Your Conviction Speech

At some point during the employment process, you will need to be prepared to discuss your conviction(s). A business may ask you to talk about your conviction(s) based on information you wrote on your application or in your resume, or it may come up in a background check. You will want to be prepared ahead of time.

Use this worksheet to prepare for your conviction speech. You do not want to read directly from this sheet during an interview, but it will help you organize the information beforehand.

Step 1: Acknowledge your conviction(s)

This step should be brief, no more than one or two sentences. Take responsibility for the conviction – be positive and do not blame anyone or anything else for what happened.

Step 2: Discuss your steps to rehabilitation

This section should also be fairly brief. It should let the business know that you sincerely want to have a rehabilitated life and that you have a support system in place (e.g., family and friends, counselors, etc.). You should mention any certificates of rehabilitation you have.

Step 3: Describe how you will be an ideal candidate for the job

This is the “move on” step – once you have acknowledged your conviction and discussed your steps to rehabilitation, move on to talking about how you would be great at this job, just as any job seeker would do. Discuss any training and work experiences you have that are applicable, including any you have from incarceration.

Tips

- Be honest and positive when speaking about your conviction(s).
- Letting the business know about hiring incentives such as the **Federal Bonding Program** and the **Work Opportunity Tax Credit** can make the difference in whether or not a business decides to hire you.
- Need help? Contact the Special Populations Unit by emailing SpecialPopulations@labor.ny.gov or calling (518) 485-2151.

THE 3 R'S:

RESPONSIBILITY, REGRET, REDEMPTION

A question most individuals with legal history are required to address on a job application and/or during an interview is:

"Have you ever been convicted of a felony? OR Have you ever been convicted of a crime? If yes, please provide details."

Follow the 3 R's: Responsibility, Regret and Redemption

- **Responsibility:** Take responsibility for previous actions. Give a very brief overview of what happened – the crime, the conviction, the outcome. This should be done in less than a minute.
- **Regret:** Honestly express being sorry/remorseful about what happened. After this, quickly move to the third "R".
- **Redemption:** Focus on how the experience/consequences were life changing. Remember, the employer wants to hire a future not a past. Let the employer know who this job candidate is NOW.

People who work at businesses are like many other people; sympathetic to those who have made mistakes but who are willing to take responsibility and make sincere efforts to change their lives. It's part of our culture of forgiveness, redemption, and self-transformation.

Make sure that current state and future are stressed rather than the past. However, having said that, it is important to acknowledge that some criminal convictions are more challenging to deal with in the job market. For example, someone who has been convicted of assault, murder, or a sex crime, has a red flag that may be larger than most red flags due to the nature of these offenses and how people respond to them. These are frightening crimes for many businesses that are not comfortable with the liability that some individuals may pose in working with their employees. If an individual's legal history includes any of these crimes, it will be important for the individual to put together a rehabilitation portfolio and to seek jobs with employers who are known to have a history of hiring ex-offenders.

Here is an example of how an answer might be structured during a job interview:

Employer/Interviewer: I noticed that you've marked "yes" to the question about having been convicted of a crime, can you please explain?

Applicant: Last year I became involved with a few new friends. Even though these people were negative influences, the choices I made were my own fault and I don't blame anyone but myself. Due to the choices I made and the actions I took, I was convicted of burglary and vandalism. I am now under supervision by the court, but that supervision has saved my life by getting me back on track, including going back to college part-time as well as referrals to services I have benefitted from. I've worked hard this year to understand the poor choices I made and to learn new ways to avoid making those kinds of choices a second time. I've focused more on my studies by taking on extra work through a special

program. I deeply regret the harm that I have caused, but I've learned valuable lessons about myself. I'm a hard worker, learn new things very quickly, and from what I know about your company, I believe I could be an asset to your business. You won't find anyone who will work harder than I will to earn your trust.

This template can be used to craft a response and practice it.

Employer:

I noticed that you've marked "yes" to the question about having been convicted of a crime, can you please explain?

Applicant's Response:

Last year (whatever length of time ago), I was convicted of _____.

This resulted in _____ (consequence) due to my poor decisions. As a result, I have had the opportunity to improve my life by focusing my attention on _____. I deeply regret the harm/damage I have caused, but have learned a valuable lesson (identify what it is you have learned). I am now involved with _____ doing _____ (actions, skills, abilities, experiences, contributions). From what I have learned about your business, I believe that I could be an asset to your organization by _____.



Conviction Speeches: Examples

Now that you've seen the steps of how to develop a conviction speech, here are some examples to consider. Notice that these speeches are brief, to the point and give just enough information to explain what happened before moving on to the rest of the interview.



Pam expresses regret, yet she remains positive. She also uses the time to market her experience.

"I made a decision I deeply regret over five years ago. I served five years of time and it has changed the way I choose to live my life now. I am a dedicated hard worker with a driven focus on succeeding. I have more than fifteen years in a customer service-oriented field, and I can bring a lot to this company."

"Yes, I did commit a breach of ethics at a previous job, for which I served two years. It was a violation of their trust and I'm very sorry it happened. I've kept myself busy since then learning new skills, and I now have several years of certified training and experience in building maintenance. I would love a chance to use these skills and prove myself at this company. I am also eligible to be bonded under the Federal Bonding Program."



Steve is accountable and upfront about his past. He talks about what he has done since that time and also mentions a free hiring incentive.



Hector talks about how his life has changed and the supports he has in place. He expresses enthusiasm about this job and closes with his experience and references.

"Yes, I do have some previous convictions for drug-related offenses, but they will not affect my ability to do this job. I have been through rehab and I am a changed man. After serving all of my time, I can honestly say that I don't want anything to do with my old life. Now, I'm happy spend time with my family and friends who support me.

I am seriously looking forward to working with this company and starting a new and better future. As you see on my application, I have three years of mechanical skills training I can bring to this job, as well as several excellent references."



Thank-You Letters

After you have interviewed with an employer, you should send a thank-you letter to the interviewer. This shows the business that you are highly interested in getting the job, and it also serves as a timely reminder of who you are before a hiring decision is made.

For most all jobs, a thank-you letter or email should be sent soon after the interview. Here is a sample thank-you letter you may use as a model.

July 24, 2013

Donald Finn
457 New Hope Road
Rome, NY 13443

Martha Jones
Director of Human Resources
Riverworks Manufacturing
11 Tower Street, Suite 3-C
Rome, NY 13440

Dear Martha,

Thank you for the opportunity to interview with you last Friday for the General Repair Worker position at the Riverworks Franklin Street location. As we discussed at the interview, my two years of previous work history in repair maintenance and my three years of repair and mechanical training at Mohawk Correctional Facility make me a very competitive candidate for this job.

Also, there are free hiring incentives available to your business if I am hired. Riverworks can qualify for up to \$25,000 in free fidelity bonding for six months and up to \$2,400 in employer tax credit through the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program.

More information is available about both of these programs on the Department of Labor website, www.labor.ny.gov.

Please feel free to contact me if you need anything else. Thank you for your time and considering me for this position. I will follow up with you about this position later this week.

Best Regards,

Donald Finn
Phone: (315) 555-5555
Email: DFinn325@gmail.com