



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.
