

Interviewing/Discussing Your Conviction Record

Be aware that the law prohibits felons from holding some types of jobs. However, there are many jobs available for offenders. Remember it is most important to tell the truth.

For many just out of prison and applying for a job, the most difficult part is facing the conviction question on the application. However, let's say the employer needs someone with your energy and skills and he or she says "I see that you checked 'yes' on the felony question. Can you please tell me about that?" What will you say?

Three Choices for Discussing Your Record

- Tell the truth, always the best choice
- Lie about it and get disqualified for the job
- Avoid the subject. Refusing to discuss it will kill the interview

Steps to Discussing your Conviction Record

Step 1: Own it. Take **responsibility** for your actions. Show them you own up to your behavior. Statements should begin with "I". Placing blame on someone or something else (it wasn't my fault or I didn't know), is the worst thing you can do.

Suggested openers could be:

In the past...

- I made some bad choices
- I made a bad decision
- I did something I shouldn't have

Step 2: Tell them what you have learned or realized. Express your **regret** and speak about the lessons you have learned

- I'm not proud of what I've done; I'm sorry it ever happened
- I wanted fast money and now I see it was wrong
- I wish I had realized sooner just how immature and irresponsible I was being
- I lost sight of what was really important; my priorities were really mixed up

Step 3: State the positive changes you have made since the conviction (**redemption**)

- Completed GED or enrolled in college or trade school
- Completed a Critical Thinking Skills course
- Paid restitution
- Participated in counseling, treatment or anger management, and maintained aftercare

Step 4: Talk about the new goals you have and how that part of your life is over

- I now have new goals in life
- I'm very focused on establishing a successful career
- I'm moving forward and am willing to work hard to make it happen
- I can't un-do the past, but I did learn from it and will not repeat the same mistake

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DO NOT EVER SAY:

- I was in the wrong place at the wrong time (No excuses!)
- I was influenced by bad people (You made the choice)
- I'll try to stay out of prison (Or are you saying you will try not to get caught this time?)
- I think I can (You either can or you can't)

Remember the 3 R's:

Responsibility: Be sincere. The employer wants to know that you have taken responsibility for your actions. Don't make excuses or place blame on others; express that you are sorry for what you did. This shows the employer that you are on the path to rehabilitation.

Regret (or remorse): Discuss what you have learned from your experience and that you are sorry for what you did.

Redemption - List the positives things you have done and the changes you have made in your thinking and life. What actions are you taking now in your life?

HOW CAN I EXPLAIN MY OFFENSE?

Pick a suggestion from the following or come up with your own from each category

Put it behind you:

- In the past...
- One time...
- When I was young and stupid...
- Twenty years ago...

Express remorse:

- I made some poor choices
- I made a bad decision
- I did something I should not have

Tell them what you have learned or realized:

- I'm not proud of what I've done; I'm sorry it ever happened
- I wanted fast money and now I see it was wrong
- I wish I had realized sooner just how immature and irresponsible I was being
- I lost sight of what was important; my priorities were really mixed up

Instead of the stating your crime, use the following wording:

- Theft - "I took something that didn't belong to me."
- Prostitution - "I used my body as a way to support myself."
- Possession - "I had some _____" (marijuana usually ok to mention but cocaine is NOT)
- Sales - "I was looking for some fast, easy money."
- Terrorist Threat - "I got angry and said some things I should not have said."
- Mental Health - "I was struggling at the time."
- Violent - "I was involved in a situation that got out of hand and someone ended up getting hurt, and I am sorry for what happened."

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- Gang Activity - "I got involved in a group of people that I never should have been involved with."

State the positive changes you have made since the conviction; since then I have:

- Completed my GED or other education/training
- Completed a Critical Thinking Skills Course
- Paid restitution
- Participated in Counseling or treatment
- Maintained aftercare
- Performed community service
- Volunteered at my church (or other organization)

List the positive things you have accomplished:

-
-
-
-
-
-

Talk about your goals you have and how that part of your life is over.

Suggestions:

I now have new goals in my life. I am very focused on establishing a successful career. I am moving forward and am willing to work hard to make it happen. I can't undo the past, but I did learn from it and will not repeat the same mistake.

Write your "3 R's/Felony Speech:

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EXAMPLES OF FULL 3 R's/FELONY SPEECH:

"In the past, I made some poor choices. I am not proud of what I've done and see it was wrong. I drove my car when I shouldn't have. Since then I have paid restitution and completed my GED in order to improve my life and grow as a person. Now my goal is to do a good job at work and be the person that I need to be for my family and myself."

Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

"Unfortunately, yes. When I was younger and very foolish, I was convicted of a felony. I absolutely regret my actions and committed myself to changing _____, which I have. Since that time I have taken courses, had excellent job reviews and become focused on where I want to go with my life. I am never going to make those kinds of choices again. I understand you may have concerns about this, but please be assured that I have left those poor decisions in the past. I am committed to doing an excellent job for you. I have the skills required for this job, and I hope you will consider me for this position."

In your application, you wrote "will discuss at interview," in answer to the question of whether you've been convicted of a felony, could you explain that to me now.

"I want you to know that in the past I made a poor decision which was to get involved with drugs. It got to the point that the Courts got involved and I can honestly say that it was the best thing to happen to me. Because of that I completed substance abuse treatment and have been clean for two years. I am a productive member of my community and will never go back to that life. I completely understand if you have concerns. However, I want you to know that I am tested regularly; I am committed to clean living and going to work every day. I have a lot of skills in this area and know I can do a great job for your company if you allow me the opportunity to show you."

Is there anything in your personal history that I should be aware of before doing a background check?

"I don't think that there is anything that will prevent me from being an outstanding maintenance manager for your company. However, I would like to share with you that I was convicted of a felony. I grew up in a bad neighborhood and made some poor choices. While I was incarcerated, however, I made a decision to turn my life around and completed my GED. I'm also working towards completing a welding certification program. I believe I have the skills I need to be successful and am eager to also learn on the job. Most importantly, I'm willing to work as hard as I need to in order to convince you that I am an honest, dependable and motivated employee."

Things to Keep in Mind:

- Tell your "conviction story" in 2-4 minutes or less
- Do not use prison lingo or slang
- Maintain consistent body language throughout the interview
- Maintain good eye contact
- Write your "incarceration Speech" and PRACTICE IT!

*If you fail,
Never give up F.A.I.L means
"First Attempt in Learning"
End is in fact not the end, E.N.D means
"Effort Never Dies"
You may get NO as an answer but remember N.O Means
"Next Opportunity"*