

# Great Job Interviews After Incarceration

Think of the interview as your chance to sell your skills to the employer. Honesty is the best policy and this is your one chance to get that particular job. If the employer required you to fill out an application they already know about your felony so be prepared for questions about your conviction. Be courteous, respectful and honest.

## Communicate Your Best Image by Being Prepared

- Arrive early. Plan your schedule and route so you arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the appointment. Allow time to stop in the building's bathroom, if there is a public one, for a last-minute check on your appearance.
- Bring a black pen, extra copies of your résumé, your reference list, copies of licenses, driving record (for jobs requiring it), and social security or alien card.
- Bring any other documentation supporting your qualifications (portfolio, work samples, references, etc.).
- Introduce yourself politely using your first and last name and stating the first and last name of the individual you are to see.
- Do not chew gum.
- Do not smoke. It is best not to smoke just before an interview as many people find the smell on your clothes and hair offensive.
- Say, "It's nice to meet you" in your initial greeting to the interviewer. Shake hands firmly.
- Address the interviewer as Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ unless you are requested to do otherwise. Don't assume that if the interviewer calls you by your first name you are both on a first-name basis!
- Be willing to make a bit of small talk, possibly about the weather, about the interviewer's good directions, or about traffic on the way to the interview.
- Speak clearly, and in a positive, audible manner – but don't be too loud.

## Communicate Your Best Attitude

- Sit straight and relatively still. Avoid distracting wiggling or jiggling of your hands or legs or tapping and clicking of a pen.
- Fold your hands comfortably in your lap or on top of your résumé materials. Do not cross your arms over your chest, or spread them across the back of the chair or couch.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Show reserved confidence. Let the interviewer start the dialogue. Listen carefully.
- Avoid interrupting, even if the interviewer does most of the talking.
- Ask questions if you don't understand something.
- Be positive and upbeat in your remarks.
- Avoid complaining about a previous job or employer. Whether or not your remarks are true, you won't appear professional if you "harp" on these subjects.
- Avoid criticizing or disagreeing with the interviewer.
- Tell the employer about your skills. If you don't, no one else will! Don't make the employer work harder than you during the interview.
- Welcome all questions and give direct, honest answers. Take your time by developing the answer in your head before you respond.
- Try to plan ahead for tough questions and practice your answers before the interview.

## Communicate Your Best Image by Finishing Strong

- Summarize why you are qualified. This is the time to state strengths and qualities you may have forgotten to emphasize earlier.
- Thank the interviewer for his or her time and interest and extend your hand for a strong parting handshake.



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- Be proactive in your follow-up. Ask how you will be notified or arrange to call the employer to learn their decision.
- Send thank-you letters or notes within 24 hours to each person with whom you interviewed.

Use each interview as a building block for the next one. You may go through many interviews before you connect with the right job. It is not what happened at the last interview that is important, but what happens at this one.

## 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 important to tell the truth.

For many just out of prison and applying for a job, the most difficult part is facing the question on the job application, "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" Let's say the employer needs someone with your energy and skills. 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?

## 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 bad judgments
- I made a bad decision
- I did something I shouldn't have

**Step 2:** State the positive changes you have made since the conviction:

- Completed GED
- Completed Cognitive Skills Programming for thinking and decision making

- Paid restitution
- Participated in counseling or treatment. Maintained aftercare.

**Step 3:** 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.

More information is available at <https://joblink.alabama.gov/ada/>

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APEC provides free training, information, and consultation to families. Visit our training calendar for more information about learning opportunities at [www.alabamaparentcenter.com](http://www.alabamaparentcenter.com) or call our center.

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