

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?

Three Choices for Discussing Your Record

- Tell the truth—always the best choice.
- Lie about it—and get disqualified or fired.
- 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 are owning 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 a Critical Thinking Skills course.
- Paid restitution.
- Participated in counseling or treatment. Maintained aftercare.

Step 3: 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 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.

CRIMINAL HISTORY 3-Minute Drill Worksheet

I made a mistake. This is something I've regretted ever since, but throughout my rehabilitation I've learned a lot about myself and set some goals that I'm proud of. I've been out of trouble since I was released and intend to stay that way.

Provide information about your conviction and sentence.

- In _____ (year), I was arrested and convicted of _____ (offense). As a result of that conviction I was sentenced to _____ (months in prison and years on supervised release or years of probation). I was in custody in the the U.S. Bureau of Prisons from _____ (dates) and was released to a term of supervised release on _____ (date).

Provide a brief description of what you did:

- I robbed the XYZ Credit Union of \$500.
- In my job as a loan representative, I used customer information to open fraudulent credit accounts.
- Over the course of 8 months, I sold 28 grams of crack cocaine.

Discuss some of the things that contributed to your criminal behavior:

- At the time I committed my crime, my judgment was clouded by _____ (Drugs, alcohol, divorce, financial stress, poor values). I know that I made a bad choice and it resulted in a serious mistake. I know that I made a serious mistake and truly regret it.

Discuss efforts to address the things that contributed to the criminal conduct. Spend time on positive things accomplished while in prison as well as progress on the streets. Show how these efforts have made a difference.

- While in prison I completed residential drug treatment. Since starting supervised release I have completed drug aftercare group and attend weekly NA meetings. I have been providing drug tests to my probation officer on a regular basis with no positive results. I have been sober for _____ (months/years). As a result, I have been able to _____ (mend my relationship with my wife and children, attend school, remain crime-free, become involved in my church)
- While incarcerated, I completed _____ (my GED, vocational training, other relevant training or certificates). As a result I have _____ (HVAC certificate, enrolled at the community college, etc.)

Reflect on your experiences:

- I know that my mistake caused a great deal of grief for many people. I truly regret I used such poor judgment, but I did and I am trying hard to deal with that.
- Looking back, I can see how harmful my behavior was. Before I went to prison I thought I could cope with my problems by _____ (using drugs/ alcohol, acquiring money). I have a better understanding of these things now and realize the impact of my poor judgment. This has changed my perspective and I am trying hard to make positive changes.
- The situation caused me to examine my life and I found a number of things that needed to be changed. I've used my time in prison wisely and dealt with things that I think were at the root of my problem. The most important thing is I am highly motivated to do whatever it takes to get beyond my mistakes.

Ask for a chance:

- I'm understand why my past actions could cause you to question my judgment and character, but I'm willing to submit to close supervision, serve a probationary period, or do whatever it takes to prove myself to you as a responsible employee.

With your probation officer's approval, provide your probation officer's name and telephone number as a reference.

- I am currently on supervised release to U.S. Probation Officer _____. I have discussed this matter with him/her and you may contact him/her at _____ (telephone number) if you have any other questions or want to verify any of the information I have provided.