

CPC Newsline for People with Less-than-Ideal Backgrounds

Cypress College **Career Planning Center** – (714) 484-7120 – Student Center Bldg.
www.cypresscollege.edu/services/cpc

Table of Contents

Test Your Job Knock-Out Potential..... 1

Seven Steps to Finding a Job Fast.....2

Do You Have Red Flags in Your Background When Interviewing for a Job?.....2

*Lowering Your Red Flags During a Job Interview.*4

Workplace Skills.....5

Skills for Ex-offender Job Seekers7

Barriers to Employment for Ex-offenders.....10

Felony on Your Record? 10 Job Hunting Tips ...12

Resume Tips After Being Fired.....13

Job Interview: Best Answers to Why You Were Fired14

Find a Job after Getting Fired: 10 Tips.....16

How Ex-Offenders Can Find a Job17

Ten Ways to Improve Your Interpersonal Skills..19

Resources available at the Career Planning Center:21

- 1 = Strongly agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Uncertain
- 4 = Disagree
- 5 = Strongly disagree

Test Your Job Knock-Out Potential

Some aspects of your background may create doubts in the mind of a prospective employer and lead him/her to eliminate you from consideration for a job. Test yourself to determine how "not-so-hot" your background may be. Read the following statements and circle the number that best represents your degree of agreement or disagreement with that particular statement.

1. I have no work experience at all.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I have work experience, but it is doing very different work from what I want to do.
1 2 3 4 5
3. My grades in school were not very good.
1 2 3 4 5
4. I have no high school diploma or GED.
1 2 3 4 5
5. I have been fired from one job.
1 2 3 4 5
6. I have been fired from more than one job.
1 2 3 4 5
7. I have held several jobs in the last year.
1 2 3 4 5
8. The jobs I have held have each been very different from each other in terms of the work to be done and skills required.
1 2 3 4 5
9. I don't have a past employer who would give me a good reference.
1 2 3 4 5
10. I have been convicted of a felony.
1 2 3 4 5

TOTAL _____

If you circled a "1" or "2" for any of these statements, you may raise a red flag in the eyes of most employers. If your total score is between 10 and 35, you will most likely appear to have a not-so-hot background in the eyes of most employers. You'll need to develop interview strategies to overcome your job market weaknesses.

Seven Steps to Finding a Job Fast

- Create a positive image and environment.
- Identify your skills.
- Identify your targets.
- Get your documents in order.
- Use the most effective job search methods.
- Improve your interviewing skills.
- Follow up on all job leads.

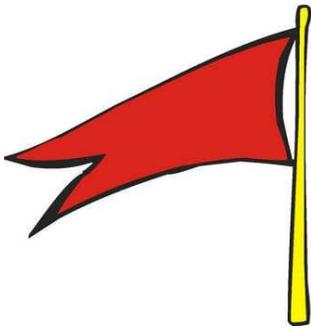


Figure 1 Red Flag

Do You Have Red Flags in Your Background When Interviewing for a Job?

Interviewing, selecting, and hiring a new employee is risky business. Employers know that some job applicants will stretch the truth and some will even blatantly lie about their past to cover up problems that might knock them out of consideration for the job.

So, most interviewers find it easier to look for reasons not to hire a job seeker than to focus on identifying reasons why that person should be hired. Employers assume a person's past behaviors are the best predictors they have of how the applicant might perform on the job at their company.

Let's examine several of the most common knock-out objections employers hold. If you have any of these red flags in your background, be prepared to respond to employers questions about them during a job interview.

You Have No Experience

Experience is not necessary for many entry-level jobs or jobs requiring few specialized skills, such as stocking shelves in a store or bagging groceries at the check-out counter. But for many jobs employers do prefer or even require experience, or an applicant will not even be considered for the job.

Employers see experience as an indicator the applicant has the ability to do the work and will not need as much training as someone with no similar experience.

You Received Poor Grades

Employers like job candidates who have a reasonably good academic background and a record of success. Good grades are not only an indicator of your level of intelligence and your capability to learn, but also are thought to be an indicator of your drive to succeed your motivation to stick to a task, complete it, and do it reasonably well.



Figure 2 Poor grades on report card

Really poor grades (mostly Ds or Fs) are bright red flags!

You Don't Have a Diploma or Degree

Having no diploma at an age when most people have been graduated from high school, or failing to pursue a GED is another red flag.

If you attended college or a special school and never completed the degree or certification work, be prepared to explain to the prospective employer your reasons for not finishing.

You Have Been Fired

If you have been fired from a past job, a potential employer will have real concerns about what kind of problem(s) you will bring to his/her company. He will wonder why you were fired, and will be afraid your former employers problems will become his if he hires you.



Figure 3 Book-like resume

You Have Been a Job Hopper

Except in a few high-turnover employment fields, such as restaurants, hospitality, and construction, if you have had several jobs in the last year or two, the interviewer will wonder why.

Frequent job changes raise questions about your real reasons for leaving. The employer may assume you will continue this pattern of behavior and leave this new job after a short period of time.

Your Past Jobs Were Unrelated to Each Other

You may have stayed at each of your previous jobs for a significant period of time, but you did a lot of things in different workplaces, making it appear as though you take almost any job offered to you. This lack of focus or continuity of a field of work will raise a red flag with many employers.

You Have Poor References

Recommendations that carry the most weight with employers are those that come from your past employers. Many former employers, though, are reluctant to go into detail about your behavior at their companies. Thus, they may only verify employment dates.

If you have no reference or if there are no employers you can count on receiving a good recommendation from, this will raise red flags with prospective employers during an interview.

You Have a Criminal Record

Having been convicted of a felony, which is a question frequently found on employment applications, will definitely raise red flags. Again, the problem is the assumed pattern of behavior.

To get around this, you'll need to acknowledge responsibility for your previous acts and present a convincing case that you have significantly changed your behavior since your conviction.

You Are Over-Qualified

Even though this is a problem many job applicants think they would be happy to have, being or appearing over-qualified for a position will raise a red flag with most employers.

They will wonder what motivates you to take this job and whether you will stay on the job for long. They will wonder why you would be willing to take a position lower than your skills/experience qualify you for, and perhaps speculate on what deep, dark secrets about your past work life you are keeping from them.



Figure 4 Person panicking about red flags prior to job interview

Lowering Your Red Flags During a Job Interview

When an employer spots one or more red flags in your background during an interview, you need to be able to give an explanation for the red flag behavior and convince him/her that you have changed your behavior. **How can you most effectively lower those red flags so that you won't be screened out by the employer?**

You want to convey to the employer:

- what changed in your situation.
- what you have done to overcome the negative behavior.
- what you learned from the experience.

To do this, you can:

- frankly and truthfully explain the situation.
- acknowledge the former employer's need for a dependable employee.
- say that you respect the former employer's decision regarding your employment.
- take responsibility for your behavior.
- be concise, straightforward, and factual about it, and not ramble on and on.

Before the interview, as you plan how you will handle red flag questions, do not try to memorize your responses. If you do memorize, chances are you will forget your lines or your answers will sound "canned" - or both. Neither will be convincing to the employer.

- Tell the truth in the most positive manner possible, but do not confess more than is necessary.
- Avoid blurting out all your weaknesses or negatives, limiting your answer to the work situation, and do not bring your home life into the discussion.
- Keep your comments concise, focused, and to the point.
- Avoid talking too much, rambling on and on out of nervousness. A little silence is all right.
- Try to avoid discussing a red flag behavior at the beginning or the end

of the interview, which are most likely to be remembered with greater clarity by the prospective employer. Try to end on the most positive note possible.

As you explain what you did to change the situation, you will reveal some important elements in your character that are desired by employers: honesty, integrity, forthrightness, responsibility, change, and self-transformation.

Dealing With Questions About a Difficult Background

Prior to a job interview, you may be worried about how to handle questions about things in your background that probably will not be plus factors in an employer's hiring decision.

If you did not complete high school, are likely to receive negative comments about your work or work habits from a former employer, have a record of job hopping, have been fired from a job, have a criminal record or a record that includes alcohol or drug abuse, you must be prepared to address questions or even raise the issue yourself to put the red flag to rest and have a chance at being hired.



Figure 5 Two men during an interview

Here are some general guidelines for dealing with questions about red flag behaviors:

- Give the information asked for - no more. This is not the time to confess all your past negative behaviors or talk excessively.
- Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer throughout. Remember, you do not want to seem dishonest by avoiding looking the interviewer in the eye.
- Talk briefly about what you have learned from the mistake you made in the past. Acknowledge and take responsibility for your actions.
- Talk about what you have done to change this aspect of your life. What have you done to modify the red flag situation and behavior, as well as what positive behavior(s) have you put in place?
- Make your comments positive and concise. Do not ramble on and on.
- If you are the one bringing up the subject of a red flag behavior, avoid introducing the subject early in the interview. You want to have a chance to impress the interviewer with your positive attributes and make a favorable first impression. Also, avoid introducing the subject of a red flag behavior at the very end of the interview unless you have overcome the problem in a truly significant way. You want the final thing the interviewer remembers about you to be positive.

SOURCE:

<http://impactpublications.com/jobinterviewtipsforpeoplewithnot-so-hotbackgrounds.aspx>

Workplace Skills

Your skills are what make you stand out to your boss or prospective employer. If you can

identify your skills, you can highlight them in a resume or hone them with more education.

What is a skill?

A skill is a learned or natural ability to accomplish a particular task. Certain skills help you accomplish certain tasks. For example,

- A skilled reader can understand an article, book, or set of written instructions faster and better than an unskilled reader.
- Someone with social skills can teach, communicate, or persuade others more effectively than someone without them.
- Someone with programming skills can write computer code better than people without this ability.

Skills are learnable. You can gain or strengthen any skill with practice or training. That's why it's important to continually assess your skills at all phases of your career.

Common Skill Sets

Skill Set: Basic Skills

Description: Skills needed by almost all workers. It's hard to overestimate the importance of these skills. Writing, for example, is a basic or "threshold skill" that can get you into (or keep you out of) a good job.

Examples:

- Learning new things
- Listening
- Math
- Reading
- Science
- Speaking
- Thinking critically

Skill Set: People Skills

Description: Sometimes called soft skills, these are among the most sought-after and marketable skills. These skills enable people to work easily and effectively with others in the workplace.

Examples:

- Being aware of others
- Coordinating with others
- Helping others
- Negotiating
- Persuading
- Teaching others



Figure 6 Man teaching others karate techniques

Skill Set: Management Skills

Description: Not just for managers anymore. If you can organize projects, money, and your time, you'll be a more valuable member of any team.

Examples:

- Managing money
- Managing people
- Managing things
- Managing time

Skill Set: Systems Skills

Description: Can you understand how parts and wholes work together? For example, can you predict what would happen to your

organization if a particular employee left? Or how a new tax law might affect prices at the grocery store? Then you have systems skills.

Examples:

- Evaluating a system or organization
- Understanding a system or organization
- Making decisions

Skill Set: Technical Skills

Description: Almost all jobs today require some comfort with equipment and technology. Computers are common and there is some expectation, from entry level to advanced positions that employees work with computer applications and technology.



Figure 7 CPU undergoing repairs

Examples:

- Choosing equipment or tools
- Controlling quality
- Designing equipment or technology
- Installing equipment or programs
- Maintaining equipment
- Monitoring equipment
- Operating equipment
- Programming computers
- Repairing
- Troubleshooting

Source: <http://www.iseek.org/careers/skills.html>

Skills for Ex-offender Job Seekers

You might have skills that employers want and not even know it. Use your free time to gain skills and experience.

Employers are looking for candidates that have the skills that match the job. Each type of career has its own set of technical skills that are learned at past jobs, at school, job training programs, and other ways. But soft skills are sometimes more important to employers.

Soft skills

Job seekers, including those with criminal records, who have the technical skills needed to do a job are sometimes turned down by employers because they didn't have the right set of "soft skills."

Soft skills are your **personality traits**, **attitudes**, and **manners**. They can also include the **clothes you choose to wear**, your **hairstyle**, and **overall appearance**. Soft skills are sometimes called **people skills**, **interpersonal skills**, or **work-readiness skills**.

Employers value people who can interact comfortably with coworkers and customers, including people of different cultural backgrounds. In other words, employers want to hire people who know how to behave properly in the workplace. That's why employers look for people with good soft skills.

Unlike technical, or hard skills, soft skills are transferable. **The same soft skills are used in all types of jobs.** A person who knows how to show employers that they have the technical and soft skills needed to succeed in the workplace has an advantage during the job search.

Know your skills

Some soft skills can be taught in school, such as how to use proper grammar, but most soft skills are **learned in everyday life situations**. That means that you might not be aware of all of the skills that you have to offer an employer.

Employers sometimes don't want to hire ex-offenders because they think that people who have been incarcerated do not have the people skills needed to behave appropriately in the workplace or interact with customers.

The more you know about your skills, the better you will be able to talk to employers about what you have to offer. Examples of the soft skills that you can list on a resume or talk about in a job interview include:



Figure 8 Man providing respectful customer service.

- Ability to serve customers in friendly and respectful manner
- Able to accept change and easily stop, start or switch duties
- Comfortable working with people of diverse backgrounds
- Listening, understanding and following

- Reading and understanding reports and charts
- Speaking clearly to coworkers and customers
- Taking criticism or being corrected by supervisors or coworkers
- Taking responsibility for decisions and actions
- Understand industry and business practices
- Understanding and willingness to follow company rules and procedures
- Willing to take initiative and work with little supervision
- Willingness to learn new skills or take on different projects
- Working as part of a team
- Working calmly in busy environments and completing tasks quickly and accurately
- Writing reports, e-mails or business letters that are easy to understand

Employers say that **most job seekers could improve some of their soft skills**. Practicing and increasing your soft skills is often easily done, and could lead to more job offers.

Work with a career advisor or someone who knows about the type of jobs you are applying for to help you identify the skills that employers want.

If you are still not sure of your technical or soft skills, take a skills assessment. An assessment measures your skills in several categories, such as communication skills, problem-solving, physical abilities and more. Assessments can be found online or at career centers in schools, community centers and Workforce Centers.

Gaining skills

Acquiring technical skills often requires formal training, such as earning a college degree as a dental hygienist, enrolling in a job-training program to be an administrative assistant, or completing an apprenticeship as a plumber.



Figure 9 Man working as a plumber

Some technical skills can also be learned on the job. However, most high-paying occupations ask for candidates with formal training and/or previous experience. Job seekers with little or no related work experience can feel cut off from applying for jobs that require experience, but are not able to get hired so they can gain that needed experience.

There are several ways for someone to gain new skills and show employers their work experience without getting a paid position in their field. Some of these options include:

Volunteering

Nonprofit agencies and community groups need people willing to help them with office work, computer projects, accounting, working with clients, planning events, building maintenance, transportation and many other tasks related to their everyday business operations.



Figure 10 Volunteers Needed sign

As a volunteer, you could help with a short-term project, or work at an organization on an ongoing basis. Volunteering gives you the opportunity to learn new skills, prove that you can complete projects and meet deadlines, and work with people who will likely be willing to give you a good recommendation.

Find a volunteer opportunity that will allow you to do work related to your chosen career so you can add it to your resume.

Internships

An internship is a learning opportunity that gives you on-the-job training in your career path. Most internships are unpaid. However, prospective employers are less interested in the wage you earned for the experience on your resume, than they are in knowing which skills you can bring to the job. In other words: an unpaid three-month internship in your field is more valuable to an employer than an unrelated job on your resume.

Most large companies only accept interns who are students (by law everyone working there has to be either collecting a paycheck or earning school credit). However, smaller companies and most nonprofit organizations don't have the same restrictions on who can intern or volunteer with them. Call companies that you want to intern with and ask their

human resources department if they allow for non-student interns. Or call a nonprofit agency and ask if they need volunteers with your skills.

Have clear goals for yourself before setting up an internship. Talk with the intern provider so you both know how long the internship will last, what your job duties and title will be, and who will be your direct supervisor. Also, let the internship provider know that you are job searching, so you might have to leave the internship when you find employment.

Treat the internship and the company with the same respect and professionalism that you would a paying job. Prove to the company— and yourself— that you are a competent, skilled worker.



Figure 11 Woman working as an intern

Don't expect to be offered a paid position at the end of your internship. Instead, ask for a written letter of recommendation from those who know your work the best. You will also gain a job title and duties to put on your resume.

Hobbies

If you have a personal activity that is directly related to your career path, then add it to your resume. An example of this is a person who rebuilds computers and created a LAN in their house could talk about that experience when looking for work as a computer technician. Or a person who has planned large family or community events could add that to their resume as a caterer or event planner.



Figure 12 Person keeping accurate records

Be prepared to provide documentation for any experience you add to your resume. Keep track of dates, people's contact information, important documents, marketing materials, photographs or other proof of personal projects you've completed. Also, ask other people involved in the projects to write recommendations for you.

SOURCE:

<http://www.iseek.org/guide/exoffenders/exoffenderskills.html>

Barriers to Employment for Ex-offenders

Finding work can be a challenge for some job seekers with criminal backgrounds. It helps to know which barriers might be in the way and how to handle employer attitudes.

Ex-offenders looking for work often have a harder time than other job seekers. A felony conviction can be considered a barrier to employment. A barrier is something that makes it more difficult for a person to job search or successfully complete the hiring process.

Barriers to employment include:

- Criminal record
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Employer biases
- Job seeker's attitude
- Mental health issues
- No work history or gaps in employment
- Not enough education or training
- Poor health or physical disabilities
- Unreliable transportation to get to work
- Unsafe housing or living situations

Having one or more barriers to employment does not mean that you will not be able to job search or get hired. It means that you need to be aware of potential barriers so that you can resolve or reduce them.

Employer attitudes

Unfortunately, there are some employers who think negatively of any job seeker with a conviction on their record. Some employers are even hesitant to hire someone who has been charged or convicted of a misdemeanor offense where the maximum sentence might be to pay a fine.

In these cases, a job seeker might have to work a little harder to win over the employer, but getting hired is not impossible. With the help of an employment counselor, a job seeker can show employers the benefits of hiring an ex-offender, including:

- Being eligible for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which encourages employers to hire qualified ex-offenders
- Participating in the Federal Bonding Program that limit an employer's risk, liability and insurance costs
- Eligibility for low-cost training programs

Not all employers think negatively of ex-offender job candidates. Many businesses are experiencing the benefits of hiring people who are hardworking, honest and loyal.

Legal restrictions

While employer attitudes can factor into any job search, state and federal regulations can stop a person with a felony conviction from getting hired in certain occupations. Most of these occupations involve either interacting with small children, being responsible for large sums of money or require the employee to carry a weapon.

Examples of these occupations include:

- airport security screener
- childcare provider
- armored car crew member

Other occupations require a person to be licensed by the state in order to practice in that profession. Examples of licensed occupations include dental assistants, teachers, doctors and engineers. Depending on the requirements for that profession, Minnesota statutes can restrict a person with a felony conviction from obtaining employment in that occupation.

Before you start training or looking for a job in a career that requires a license, find out about the state licensing board's policies for that occupation. Employers of some

occupations, like those who hire nursing assistants and truck drivers, are more willing than others to help candidates to obtain that occupation's license.

SOURCE:

<http://www.iseek.org/guide/exoffenders/exoffenderbarriers.html>

Felony on Your Record? 10 Job Hunting Tips

If you have a criminal record in your past, are you forever barred from rejoining corporate America and taking advantage of professional opportunities? Not necessarily. It is achievable, but definitely an uphill battle, says Pat Kendall, career coach and author of *"Jumpstart Your Online Job Search and eResumes: Everything You Need to Know"*.

According to Kendall, an estimated **80 percent of companies perform background checks on job applicants**. Today's terror-aware atmosphere and litigious society makes employers responsible to a greater degree for checking out the candidates they hire.

It can be very difficult for most employers to get past a conviction on an applicant's record, so be prepared for rejection. You also have to realize you are starting over fresh after a conviction and must begin the laborious process of gathering experience and gaining society's trust.

Here are some suggestions for getting back to employment:

1. First, consult legal council about the possibility of getting your record expunged, sealed or the conviction reduced. These actions may not be available

for every case, but it is definitely worth looking into.

2. Contact local human services organizations in your area to see if they offer programs and support for ex-felons.

For example, Metropolitan Family Services in Chicago, www.metrofamily.org, operates the Young Fathers Initiative, a program that helps young dads, many with felony records, re-enter the workforce and reconnect with their children. Quincy Roseborough, case manager for Metropolitan's Young Fathers Initiative, says "There are companies that will hire ex-felons as long as the crimes are not violent crimes."

3. "Take whatever job you can to start rebuilding your experience and credibility," Kendall advises. Now is not the time to be picky. "Many of our clients start with jobs in manufacturing and fast food," Roseborough says. "The pay is mostly minimum wage and often the hours are long. But, some have opportunities to go to warehouse jobs where they can learn to drive a fork lift and gain other skills." Take the job and use it as an opportunity to showcase good job performance and to rebuild your experience and others' trust in you.

4. "Look to personal contacts and friends to help you get a job," Kendall asserts. Someone who knows you will not be as wary to take a chance on you.

5. Seek employment with small and local companies. "We promote looking for jobs with small companies and independent businesses and employers, instead of major chains," Roseborough divulges. Local businesses may have less stringent hiring requirements and are more willing to give you a chance.

6. Consider self-employment. Walt* was convicted at age 19 of drug possession and attempted sale. After serving time in prison, he took odd jobs in various auto shops and car dealerships to learn about car repair. He now works as an independent contractor and operates his own auto repair business.

"We encourage the young men we work with to look into entrepreneurship. We suggest taking up a trade that a felony record wouldn't hinder, such as plumbing, construction or janitorial work. You can be your own employer with these skills," Roseborough says.

7. "Don't put the conviction on your resume," Kendall declares. "Consider putting it in your cover letter and enclosing letters of recommendation. Be honest and upfront." Most applications will require you to indicate if you've ever been convicted of a felony. If the question is not on the application, you don't want to let the process go too long without coming clean. You should let them know early on that you have a past record because it will show up in the background check.

8. Be professional and confident. "Many young men we see lack people skills. We tell them that when they go to an employment office or are in an interview if they are dressed appropriately, speak well, and have confidence it will show," Roseborough says. "We explain that their resume is like an ad in the newspaper, but they are the 'product;' and they have to go in and 'sell' themselves. Some employers will take a chance if there is a nice presentation."

9. Don't harbor false hope. "It's going to be hard. Having a felony on your record is a real obstacle, and it is only getting harder,"

Roseborough warns. You will be rejected. **Just don't give up.**

10. Seek emotional support. Whether it's family, close friends or a professional counselor, you will need to talk to someone for encouragement. Many ex-convicts experience depression when they meet repeated resistance in trying to once again find employment. Having that support system will help you stay focused and motivated when you feel discouraged.

**Name changed to protect his identity*

Source: [MSN/CareerBuilder.com, February 20, 2007](http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/fr/1787792/posts)
<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/fr/1787792/posts>



Figure 13 Man displaying his resume

Resume Tips After Being Fired

Getting fired can be stressful not only because you have lost your means of employment, but there is a natural fear that it will be difficult to find a job if future employers find out you were fired. There are several things you can do to help your chances of finding a job after you have been fired, and it all starts with how you handle your resume.

Considerations

Your resume is a presentation of your qualifications to see if the company wants to talk to you personally. You can address the issue of being fired at the interview, but there is no reason to put it in your resume. Listing the reasons you left previous companies is not usually a good thing to put on a resume unless they were upward career moves. Your resume is supposed to point out your positive career achievements, so it is best to leave the details for the interview.

If you were not at your previous job for a long period of time, then do not list it on your resume. Normally jobs that you held for three months or less can be left off your resume, and you can work out an answer for those open periods of time when you get to the interview.

Resume Format

A resume should showcase the positive achievements of your career, and it should outline your positive career milestones. Use the format of the resume to emphasize your achievements and downplay your employment time line. Begin your resume listing your achievements in detail, and then follow it with a quick listing of the companies you have worked for in the past. Allowing potential employers to see what you have accomplished will make the interview process more positive.

Have a professional resume writer look your resume over to be sure that it accents all of your positive accomplishments properly. How your resume is structured, and how the information is presented, is extremely important to how it is perceived by an employer. A professional resume writer will know how to bring out all you have achieved in your career, and allow the subordinate

information such as employment history to be overshadowed.

Practice the Interview

When you are fired, the structure of your resume should not change. Your resume should always point out why companies should hire you, and avoid putting too much emphasis on where you received your experience. Be sure to practice the answers to questions before you get to the interview, because while you can avoid putting a dismissal on the resume it will come up at an interview. How you handle that question then will determine your chances of getting the job.

SOURCE:

http://www.ehow.com/way_5154657_resume-tips-after-being-fired.html



Figure 14 Man yelling "You're fired."

Job Interview: Best Answers to Why You Were Fired

Fired from your job? Don't know what to say in an interview? Career expert and author, Joyce Lain Kennedy, shares her twelve best job interview answers to the question "**Why were you fired?**"

Joyce Lain Kennedy is the nation's first syndicated careers columnist. Her work is distributed by Tribune Media Services and

appears in more than 100 newspapers and Web sites. In addition, Joyce is author of eight career-related books including *Job Interviews for Dummies*, where you can read additional excellent interview advice, *Cover Letters for Dummies* and *Resumes for Dummies*.

Joyce Lain Kennedy's sample answers to the interview question "Why were you fired?"

- Being cut loose was a blessing in disguise. Now I have an opportunity to explore jobs that better suit my qualifications and interests. My research suggests that such an opportunity may be the one on your table. Would you like to hear more about my skills in working with new technology?
- My competencies were not the right match for my previous employer's needs but it looks like they'd be a good fit in your organization. In addition to marketing and advertising, would skills in promotion be valued here?



Figure 15 Employer interviewing potential employee

- Although circumstances caused me to leave my first job, I was very successful in school and got along well with both students and faculty. Perhaps I didn't fully understand my boss's expectations or why he

released me so quickly before I had a chance to prove myself. The job wasn't working out so my boss and I agreed that it was time for me to move on to a position that would show a better return for both of us. So here I am, ready to work.

- After thinking about why I left, I realize I should have done some things differently. That job was a learning experience and I think I'm wiser now. I'd like the chance to prove that to you.
- A new manager came in and cleaned house in order to bring in members of his old team. That was his right but it cleared my head to envision better opportunities elsewhere.
- Certain personal problems, which I now have solved, unfortunately upset my work life. These problems no longer exist and I'm up and running strong to exceed expectations in my new job.
- I wanted my career to move in a different direction, and I guess my mental separation set up the conditions that led to my departure. But by contrast, the opportunity we're discussing seems to be made for me and I hope to eventually grow into a position of responsibility.
- I usually hit it off very well with my bosses, but this case was the exception that proved my rule of good relationships. We just didn't get on well. I'm not sure why.
- My job was offshored to India. That's too bad because people familiar with my work say it is superior and fairly priced.

- I outlasted several downsizings but the last one included me. Sign of the times, I guess.
- I was desperate for work and took the wrong job without looking around the corner. I won't make that mistake again. I'd prefer an environment that is congenial, structured and team-oriented, where my best talents can shine and make a substantial contribution.

Kennedy also says, "Practice in advance what you'll say. Then keep it brief, keep it honest and keep it moving." That way, you'll get past the sticky issue of getting fired and can move on to your skills and why you're qualified for the job.

SOURCE:

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/interviewfired.htm>

Find a Job after Getting Fired: 10 Tips

Getting fired isn't exactly fun. It throws a spanner [wrench] in the resume, and a big one. It also leaves you trying to make up ground with having to explain your situation to prospective employers. That's awkward, and needs some management. Finding a job can be tough enough without added difficulties. We've got a few tips for defusing this situation.



Figure 16 Man holding his resume

The resume situation

The immediate problem is that your resume now has its most current entry as a job from which you were fired. That is fixable, quite easily, but it requires some effort. There are several ways of relegating the firing to ancient history on your resume:

1. **Volunteer work:** This is a real job, with real work, and it takes the top spot on your resume. It also proves you're motivated, and can self start as an employee.



Figure 17 Volunteer sign

2. **Part time work:** Part time jobs fit the bill very well as resume material. It's paid work, and it's a definite proof of employability.

3. **Studies:** Moving from a position of "fired" to one of "student" is another resume-reviver. It's hardly wasted time, because you're adding skills and improving your chances of getting other work.

4. **Self employment:** If you can operate your own business, you'll get at least some respect from any potential employer. Self employed people are often excellent employees, and have a wide range of additional skills, which makes them good value as employees. Self employment looks very good in many professions, particularly the "portfolio" professions like media, web design, architecture, landscaping, and some of the academic professions.

5. **Contract work:** Contract jobs in their various forms can be considered very good employment options. They can also enhance

the resume considerably, particularly if you do a lot of short term contracts. The job from which you were fired recedes into irrelevance.

Note: All these jobs have the added benefit of providing current experience, invaluable when job hunting.



Figure 18 Woman fired from her job carrying box of personal items

The "fired" issue in finding a job

People sometimes freeze up when having to discuss the issue of being fired. They lose confidence, and in some cases go backwards. This is really counterproductive. As a matter of fact, a very large percentage of the workforce has been fired at some time, usually early in their careers. The fact is that people are fired regularly, and a percentage of people looking for work at any given time have been fired.

Some tips:

1. Do not allow being fired to stop you:

The only way is forward. Get moving, and don't look back.

2. Be honest, both with employers and yourself:

If you were in the wrong, admit it,

and learn from it. Don't invent excuses for stupid mistakes, and you'll make fewer mistakes.

3. Think objectively: Stick to trying to achieve your goals. Anything else is wasted time.

4. Don't be afraid to try new things: The loss of confidence can also mean regularly missing opportunities. That's definitely not what you need.

5. Don't allow yourself to drift: The real danger in unemployment is time spent unemployed. You can find a huge gap opening up in your resume. Make sure you have a plan, and real, tangible, goals.

source:<http://www.cvtips.com/job-search/find-a-job-after-getting-fired-10-tips.html>

How Ex-Offenders Can Find a Job

There are several assistance programs available to help ex-offenders in their job search. The assistance officers at these programs interview the applicants and refer them to employers that are willing to hire them. The process also entails some screening of the applicant's criminal record to prevent possible temptations or situations that may lead to the repetition of the crime. The assistance officer will for instance not refer a person with a record for fraud to a position where he will be tempted to do the same crime again. These programs help ex-offenders to find suitable employment and become part of the community.

People with criminal records may find the job search in their preferred career field difficult since the majority of companies in the USA follow strict policies of thorough background investigations. People who come out of drug

or alcohol rehabilitation find that companies are more lenient towards them. The human resources officers are willing to give a chance to the person with a minor violation of the law on his record.

Why do companies employ ex-offenders?

The main reason for employing people with criminal records is the creation of support. A second reason for this is to get valuable work skills back into the corporate and job environment. Rather than having ex-offenders turn back to crime, companies provide opportunities for these people to become part of the productive workforce.

One of the assistance programs is geared towards incentives for the employers. It is an insurance cover for employers that protect them against damages that may result from the employment of ex-offenders. You can find more information on the federal bond assistance at the US Department of Labor <http://www.dol.gov/>.

Another incentive for employers is tax credits for up to a maximum amount of just over 300 for every person with a criminal record, hired. The employer receives tax reductions when they hire ex-offenders in applicable categories. US Department of Labor has full details for employers.

Disclosure rules and regulations

The law in the USA states that no employer may discriminate against ex-offenders.

The law however is aimed at persons with minor offence records. Serious offences such as rape, murder and violent acts do not fall in the scope of protection.

Several types of criminal offences are pardoned after a certain period depending on

the nature of the offence. Imprisonment of six months or less is seen as pardoned after seven years, while minor offences are excused after only five years. If you were imprisoned for more than 30 months, the record is never wiped or excused. If an offence took place before the age of 18 years, the period is halved.

You are under no obligation to disclose an offence that has been pardoned and the employer may not discriminate against you on the grounds of pardoned offences. Certain jobs such as senior positions in financial institutions, working with disabled people, children or senior citizens, law or protection services, military positions, pharmaceutical jobs and specific prison positions are exempt from this and you will have to disclose pardoned offences.

When is it applicable to disclose offences?

Whenever there is a question on the application form or when the employer asks you in an interview, you should disclose offences. The best way to disclose your offenses is to attach a separate page to the application form with a full explanation for the reasons and the type of offences, as well as the date and relevant rehabilitation steps taken.

The Criminal Records Bureau acts as a policing agent to protect innocent people against persons who get employment, where they work with children or older people while they have a record of offences, such as child molestation, rape, murder, or violent acts. Employers may make use of their services when they screen applicants for certain job types.

Correctness of your record

It is your responsibility to make sure that the information on your criminal record is correct. You can obtain a copy of your criminal record from the relevant authority in your state or country. The Police Records Office is a good starting place.

Other tips for the job search

- Be honest about your past on your application form. If an employer finds out that you have lied, you will be disqualified as a candidate and if you are already employed you may be fired right away.
- Make use of the functional resume, which focuses on all your skills. You can indicate what types of relevant experience or skills you gained while you were in prison.
- Develop interview skills. Prepare for possible questions about your past. You need to show repentance and should be able to demonstrate that you have changed.
- Emphasize your achievements and determination to enhance your job skills.
- You can for instance mention your attendance of night classes to get certification in a certain career field.
- Networking is essential in the job search process. Talk to your friends, former colleagues and family about your career interests, skills and expectations. They may be able to refer you to a relevant employer and may serve as character witnesses.
- When you list your job experience, also consider the jobs you did while in prison as well as any part time positions held, while you did the job search.

Resources for ex-offenders job search in the USA:

- UNICOR - Federal Prison Industries inc.
<http://www.unicor.gov/>
- NIC - National Institute of Corrections
<http://www.unicor.gov/>

SOURCE: <http://www.cvtips.com/job-search/how-ex-offenders-can-find-a-job-.html>

Ten Ways to Improve Your Interpersonal Skills

Don't discount the importance of interpersonal skills in the workplace. How you are perceived by your manager and coworkers plays a large role in things as minor as your day-to-day happiness at the office and as major as the future of your career.

No matter how hard you work or how many brilliant ideas you may have, if you can't connect with the people who work around you, your professional life will suffer. The



Figure 19 Professional woman smiling on the job

good news is that there are several concrete things that you can do to improve your social skills and become closer to your colleagues. All of these tools will ultimately help you succeed in today's working world.

Try these 10 helpful tips for improving your interpersonal skills:

1. Smile. Few people want to be around someone who is always down in the dumps. Do your best to be friendly and upbeat with your coworkers. Maintain a positive, cheerful attitude about work and about life. Smile often. The positive energy you radiate will draw others to you.

2. Be appreciative. Find one positive thing about everyone you work with and let them hear it. Be generous with praise and kind words of encouragement. Say thank you when someone helps you. Make colleagues feel welcome when they call or stop by your office. If you let others know that they are appreciated, they'll want to give you their best.

3. Pay attention to others. Observe what's going on in other people's lives. Acknowledge their happy milestones, and express concern and sympathy for difficult situations such as an illness or death. Make eye contact and address people by their first names. Ask others for their opinions.

4. Practice active listening. To actively listen is to demonstrate that you intend to hear and understand another's point of view. It means restating, in your own words, what the other person has said. In this way, you know that you understood their meaning and they know that your responses are more than lip service. Your coworkers will appreciate knowing that you really do listen to what they have to say.



Figure 20 Group working together on a common goal

5. Bring people together. Create an environment that encourages others to work together. Treat everyone equally, and don't play favorites. Avoid talking about others behind their backs. Follow up on other people's suggestions or requests. When you make a statement or announcement, check to see that you have been understood. If folks see you as someone solid and fair, they will grow to trust you.

6. Resolve conflicts. Take a step beyond simply bringing people together, and become someone who resolves conflicts when they arise. Learn how to be an effective mediator. If coworkers bicker over personal or professional disagreements, arrange to sit down with both parties and help sort out their differences. By taking on such a leadership role, you will garner respect and admiration from those around you.

7. Communicate clearly. Pay close attention to both what you say and how you say it. A clear and effective communicator avoids misunderstandings with coworkers, colleagues, and associates. Verbal eloquence

projects an image of intelligence and maturity, no matter what your age. If you tend to blurt out anything that comes to mind, people won't put much weight on your words or opinions.



Figure 21 Woman who is open and approachable

8. Humor them. Don't be afraid to be funny or clever. Most people are drawn to a person that can make them laugh. Use your sense of humor as an effective tool to lower barriers and gain people's affection.

9. See it from their side. Empathy means being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand how they feel. Try to view situations and responses from another person's perspective. This can be accomplished through staying in touch with your own emotions; those who are cut off from their own feelings are often unable to empathize with others.

10. Don't complain. There is nothing worse than a chronic complainer or whiner. If you simply have to vent about something, save it for your diary. If you must verbalize your grievances, vent to your personal friends and family, and keep it short. Spare those around you, or else you'll get a bad reputation.

SOURCE: <http://www.allbusiness.com/human-resources/careers-career-development/11134-1.html>

Resources available at the Career Planning Center:

- ***The Ex-Offender's Job Hunting Guide: 10 Steps to a New Life in the Work World*** by Ron and Caryl Krannich, Ph.Ds
- ***The Ex-Offender's Quick Job Hunting Guide: Putting the 10 Steps into Action*** by Ron Krannich, Ph.D.
- ***Job Hunting Tips for people with Hot and Not-So-Hot Backgrounds: 150 Smart Tips That Can Change Your Life*** by Ron and Caryl Krannich, Ph.Ds
- ***No One Will Hire Me! Avoid 17 Mistakes and Win the Job*** by Ron and Caryl Krannich, Ph.Ds
- ***Overcoming Barriers to Employment: 127 Great Tips for Putting Red Flags Behind You*** by Ron and Caryl Krannich, Ph.Ds
- ***Quick Job Search for Ex-Offenders: Seven Steps to Finding a Job Fast*** by Michael Farr and Maurice Stevens



Cypress College
 Career Planning Center
 Student Center Building, 2nd Floor
www.CypressCollege.edu/services/cpc
 (714) 484-7120

Career Counseling available on an
 appointment basis