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# Employment Guide for ex-offenders in Canada

“If we are unwilling to hire ex-cons or give them any assistance it only puts them back into the same situation prior to their past offence”

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## Getting a job with a criminal record, getting back into the workforce after Incarceration

Please visit <http://www.conshelpingcons.com/employment.html>

There are a number of factors that need to be considered when looking for a job with a criminal record. An ex-offender will have to learn which companies and types of jobs to avoid applying for. Then you need to develop good contacts with people who can help you secure employment. I have read some other information about this topic on the internet and various sources. The information is good in some ways, and very lacking in others. However, much of it has an outside of the box approach, meaning someone who has never gone through it writes most of them. Well I have gone through it for quite a while now and it is a very difficult task, and in many cases I have felt sub-human, degraded and abused, and shamed in this whole process. So I am not going to play with your emotions, by feeding you a bunch of bullshit. You're going to get the real truth of the matter, like it or not. It will not be easy and there are no set of rules or guidelines that you can follow that are guaranteed to work every time. There are no promises to be made on this page, just a lot of hard work required for an ex-con to find high-quality employment.

### Why should we hire ex-cons or ex-convicts?

Public Safety is of the utmost concern, a society with fewer victims is what we all desire, and by giving ex-cons employment this will not have an indirect effect, but a very direct effect in decreasing repeat offenders. Often we think that by not hiring them or by not giving them anything we are protecting ourselves, however the opposite is true. We are only helping to increase the level of recidivism in our society today, thus causing the very problem or issues we fear.

If we do not give ex-cons a chance or a job they often find themselves back in the same situation prior to their past offence. With little or no options it is not hard to understand why they turn back to crime. They have problems and issues and like anyone else need our help. Even though people do not like what they do or did, it will not go away because we try to ignore it.

Regardless of what society, or more important what you think about this topic, most peoples way of thinking must change. We need to realize that our present way of thinking is not working and we must embrace change

### Resume Building & Mistakes

#### A. *Lack of working experience*

The first thing that will be the hardest to explain, especially if you had a long incarceration period, is the huge gap of time when you were not employed. While I was inside I worked and obtained a trade, and was working selling and making crafts, while in prison. In a sense I was self-employed and that was what I reflected on my resume. This will vary depending on your situation.

### **B. Education**

You might be asked where you did your upgrading. You have to decide how to answer these questions. You can say while in prison, which could be and in many cases will end the possibility of employment. A second answer if you obtained some work in prison like me, in which you could claim being self-employed, could be while I was working for myself. Or you could make up a story. You have to decide.

### **C. Building Contacts**

The best thing to do during your first 6-12 months after your release is spend that time building up your network of positive contacts. Your parole officers, contacts at the halfway house, chaplaincy, friends or family may be some good resources.

Do not look on Internet job boards right away or apply for jobs in the paper. You need to develop a network of people who are aware of your situation and still will recommend you. These people are out there. At this point Remember, you're not looking for a job, your looking for someone to give you a chance. This is not easy but it can be done.

### **D. A Job**

Your first job might not be the job you want, but it will help build your resume and give you a future reference if you do well. In some cases you will get the biggest shit jobs out there, and stuff that no one else wants to do. Trust me you will feel horrible, and wonder if it is really worth it. Sometimes you will be told how lucky you are to have this job because you have a criminal record. In some cases crime will look attractive, you have to develop an attitude that your freedom is worth everything, and your pride needs to be negotiable. I have seen so many convicts leave prison and tell me they were going to get out and get a good job, start a family, only to come back to prison in shame, and tell me all they could get was the worst job you could image making minimum wage. I do not want to be totally negative as some do better and have good employment. Do not leave a correctional facility, prison or any form of incarceration thinking the world owes you something, and everything is just going to fall into place. You are going to face obstacles, not only with finding work, but finding new friends, girl/boyfriend. However at first you are going to have to compromise more then you want. You have to prepare yourself for this or it is going to be a breaking point for you and could lead you back to the correctional facility.

### **E. Resume**

If you do not know how to write a resume have someone help you. I have seen some resumes that just do not cut it, and even if you have a grade 6 education you do not want your resume to reflect that. It is all how you say it and not so much what you say. There are usually a lot of places that will assist you with this or just perhaps a friend. So finding someone to help you with this is a must. Don't be afraid to ask for help! Professionals who are looking for better positions in their chosen field do not write their résumés themselves, they get help.

**Should an ex-con be honest and truthful in a job interview?**

Well this would be the best way to go; however, it will not always give you the desired results. You must be at a point in your life where you are ready and be able to handle this approach. If you are not emotionally ready to handle rejection, and criticism honesty may not be your best policy. Keep in mind that twisting the truth as described below may not really yield any better results. However, if you are not ready to be truthful and open with your past and still suffering from the shame, you may find that you will only end up making your chances worse. If you are a confident person and one who has accepted your past and crime, your confidence will show and your ability to articulate it properly will make all the difference. It really is something you should be motivated to work towards. When you are ready to do this, there is a feeling of freedom within this, and you never have to worry about the employer finding out in the future if they hire you. Ex-cons need to realize there is no easy answer here and this will haunt you for the rest of your life. There is no proven method or set of circumstances that will work in all situations. Finding employment for an ex-offender will not be easy, and will have more obstacles than a person without a criminal record.

**Employment for Ex-cons with Life Sentences and Ex-offenders still on Parole**

There is one exception to the rule here. For lifers or persons doing life sentences; honesty is your only option. As most of you already know by now you need to secure employment through your contacts and local support groups. It would be very hard to explain your parole officer showing up to your place of employment, if you were not truthful. Also if you are still on parole and have not completed your sentence, you will find that honesty in securing employment will work best.

**Ex-cons and ex-offenders...choices matter**

One choice is education, and this is a choice many ex-cons will have to take. Many start with a G.E.D. however you will need to get your skills and education beyond that. It will not carry any weight in the interview and will not provide any help in securing employment. You will need to develop skills employers need. Everyone needs carpentry, plumbing, skilled labor, etc. Many ex-cons have found these blue collar trades more rewarding and able to secure employment. They are often in such demand that an ex-offender can be hired on the spot or contract basics; and more likely to get a fair chance in this field. Actually some employers in this field have had brushes with the law at one time or another, or often have some people working for them with criminal records. While training in school you may meet employers and other workers and it will give them a chance to know you personally long before the question of a criminal past comes up. After all, the best resume you have is the walking and talking resume.

There are also the midway trades; computers and customer service related, etc. This lowers your chances of getting employment with some companies; however, labor may not be suitable for all of us. You need to choose your educational directions carefully and avoid trades or degrees that are hard to get employment in. For example if you have normal citizens without a criminal record finding it hard to get employment in that profession, it would be best to avoid it. You need to keep in mind that even people who were never in prison often find it hard to secure work in some professions. There are many

who have graduated only to be making the same amount of money or doing similar jobs they were before they went back to school. So your choices here really do matter. You need to make wise choices and choose professions that you actually have a chance of getting employment in.

The advantages of trades or secondary school to an ex-con are invaluable (blue-collar jobs); you will get accepted into college almost right away. You have more people in those professions that will be sympathetic to your situation. Most trades can be completed in less than 2 years and you can work on the side as an apprentice while doing it. There are less people doing them so skilled labor in the workforce is often in demand. In many cases your interview consist of what equipment do you have, and can you be there tomorrow morning?

A good rule of thumb here is the more responsibility the position requires the harder it is to acquire, with a criminal record. If you are dealing with money, confidential information, or in charge of others welfare, you could be in for an uphill battle. Another issue to be aware of is the larger the companies, the better the chances are of them doing a criminal record check, although more and more employers are requiring these checks. The more violent the offence the more difficult it will be to obtain employment. If you have a non-violent offence just tell them and be honest, that goes for any criminal offence that no one got seriously hurt in, or minimal damage was caused. Most employers heard all of this before and it is not something that they cannot work around. However if you are one of the not so fortunate ones, telling someone in an interview you killed someone, for example, will often result in a less then desired outcome. However, one needs to keep in mind that they will find out sometime later. In the mean time here are some techniques in getting around this that may help you secure employment.

- If they do not ask do not volunteer the information. It is not your responsibility to tell them nor is it to make them aware of your criminal background (I am writing this in Canada and am not aware of other jurisdictions).
- By law they are not allowed to discriminate against you if you have a criminal record, however that law is ineffective as they will never come out and say that is reason why they will not offer you employment.
- If you get an application that you have to select a check box whether you have a criminal record or not (not common anymore however some companies still do). I am sure some of you may disagree with me on this, however, this is only for the more serious offenders, and choosing "No" may be the better choice. I would really recommend you tell the truth, however as stated above it is something you need to be realistic about and you may need the position more then they need to hear the truth. Over time there will come a point in your devolvement and understanding that you will accept it and learn to be more open with it. One thing should be noted here, once you select "No" on the application there is no turning back, if they find out later you had a criminal record and lied, it is almost certain they will find a way to terminate your position and the trust will be broken. If you make them aware up front and you do gain employment, you will have very little to worry about in the future. To be honest however you may never get the job in the first place, so it does come with drawbacks. Perhaps, the position is a temporary solution until you find something else, and you really do not want to do it long-

term anyway, this would make the decision much less cumbersome. Deciding what to do in this situation is more an understanding of what the future will hold for you in this company. If you select "No" you won't have a future that will last, eventually they will find out, however it could hold you over for a period of time. Selecting "Yes" may give you a future with them if you are fortunate enough to get hired, however, you must be aware you are more likely not to be hired for the position. It is nothing short of a dilemma.

- These steps are for an ex-con who wants to go beyond the minimum wage pay scale. After all, we all can get most of the lower paying jobs with or without a criminal record as most people do not want those types of employment or just use them as a quick fix or short term position. No one, including an ex-con, wants this for the rest of their lives. If you look at it that way what do you really have to lose by trying?

I will give you an example of what happened to me some years ago while working for an employer. This was at a point in my life where I was not ready to be open with my criminal past and unable to handle the shame on a public level.

I was working for a place for two years, then all of sudden out of the blue they accused me of something I didn't do. They were willing to keep my employment with them only if I was willing to provide them with a criminal record check. What they accused me of was not even a crime but yet they felt it required a criminal record check into my past. It was an unusual situation, I got shafted and there is no easy way to put it. Once they found out about my criminal past they were willing to use any excuse they could to get rid of me, despite the fact I had a good work record for the two years there. I refused to get them the background check; I talked to my lawyer and wrote them a letter. They gave me some more time and as I kept refusing the end result was I was fired. Here is where the law that they cannot discriminate against you may work to your advantage. I filed for EI, it took about 6 weeks but once I explained the circumstances I was granted full benefits. I also had the option to sue and would have won, however the money for that in Canada is not that great-only two months salary. Plus at the time I was more worried about others finding out and it could ruin my chances of future employment. So after awhile I just decided I would not go through with a law suit. Some might be thinking, if I would have told them the truth it would have never happened, you're absolutely right, but for this company I would have never been hired in the first place. Regardless of what happened there were some positives that did come from this situation. I obtained two years of experience that I received there, that was added to my resume, which I would never have had otherwise. Another positive from it was I started my own business afterwards. The original business did fail after a couple of years. The humorous part of it all was I learned more from the failure than I would have if it would have been successful. Within that time period I started doing more websites which eventually lead to this site. It is imperative that an ex-con learn from his/her mistakes, however what will serve you better is learning the ability to turn a negative into a positive.

### **Self Employment for ex-cons and ex-offenders**

If the crime is of a serious nature, looking at other options should be considered. If you can start your own business for example, you might be better off, however that is not always an option for everyone.

It may be hard to come up with an idea that will work, or limited funds may be a problem as well. Especially when just released from prison, the funds and means are not usually there for most ex-offenders. However it is not impossible and will depend on how motivated you are.

### **Interview process for ex-cons and ex-offenders**

Never appear to be too anxious to obtain the job or position, just handle it as if you have more options for employment, even if you do not.

If you go into any interview and they want you to sign a criminal record check that they can do themselves, this is where not appearing like you want to start right away may be a benefit to you. Tell them you would like more information about the position, or you have not decided yet and want to learn more about it before you complete anything. If they insist you fill out the disclosure form for them before you proceed, get up and thank them for their time and leave. You could stay and tell them the truth; however you will just be wasting your time and effort. Most of them will understand that, and then you can continue on with the interview. It also makes you look like you're more relaxed and gives the impression you have more options than just them. That can really work in your favor even if you do not have a criminal past. At the end of the interview inform them you would like some time to think about it. Here you are going to have to make a choice, do you go back for the next interview and tell them the truth, or do you just give them the line you're not interested when they call you. All this does is enable you to walk out without them knowing you have a criminal past. In my experiences they seem to recall more when you told them you had a serious past offence. It is not like they come across that everyday; however they do come across people getting other job offers all the time. It is a gamble either way you look at it.

Some companies want you to obtain the criminal record check from the local police station yourself before they employ you. Usually they will ask for this in the first interview. You have two choices: Go and get the criminal record check and take your chances, or when they tell you to get one just say, "Yes, I will do that", and show no concern about it. If you want the job and would like to take an attempt at getting it, wait till you get the second interview and do not take the criminal record check in with you, just make up some excuse as to why you forgot it. However, this is important, do not even bring it up unless they ask you about it in the second interview. I have actually had someone forget about it and they hired me. If they offer you the job based on you providing a criminal record check, you will have better odds of securing it now. If they give you a start date or a deadline for the criminal record check, a day or two before this date. Call the employer and tell them you have criminal record. Very Important, do not tell them on the phone what the nature of the crime is, ask if you can come in and talk to them about it. They will most likely assume it is not that bad and think you are over reacting. What this approach does is give them a little chance to meet you a few times before they find out. It also puts them in the unique situation that the job offer was extended to you and they have very little time to fill your spot, also they would almost have to come right out and say now that they are not willing to hire you on the grounds of the criminal record. If you handle this conversation well and your past offence does not directly affect the position in which you are applying for, you may be able to talk your way into

the job. This will not work every time, but if you provide the criminal record immediately your odds are lower.

Another good point or method to use is focus on jobs you want, but center your attention on the size of the company. For example smaller to mid sized companies are less likely to ask you for a criminal record check, if you give them a good impression in the interview. This is not always the rule however, and many do ask or require it. They are however the companies that will be more likely to give you a chance even if the truth comes out. With large companies or big business they are not going to take the chance. They would rather get sued or take heat from the workforce laws then take a gamble on someone with a serious criminal offence in their past.

There is yet another exception. If you were convicted of fraud in the workplace, or stealing from a past employer, this is a slippery situation. Just remember it is not going to say on your criminal record you stole from your last employer it is just going to have the offence. If you want to be honest I commend you for it. However, I will say this. I am self employed and even with my past, if you told me you stole from your former employer, I am not sure I would hire you. I would recommend you come up with some explanation that does not have anything to do with an employer. Seriously consider this mistake! When you steal from an employer you steal his/her livelihood, and most of them will take this personally. The one thing you do not want in an interview is the employer having any feeling that this crime may be repeated to him/her if they hire you.

## Conclusion

If you have a criminal record that is not that serious, for example no one died or was seriously hurt, especially no violence at all, just be honest about it. Even if some minor violence was involved, a period of time will usually heal or amend this situation. Most employers will be ok with it and still hire you; some won't but your going to find that the majority will. If you were convicted of a minor sexual offence, you can explain that and be honest and get around it. If you were convicted of sexual assault or rape against another adult; the reality is in this the world climate around sexual offences you are going to have a very difficult time finding employment.

If you were convicted of a crime against a child or a person under the age of 14 years old, you are in a mess with the way society views these types of crimes. You may be on a sex offender's database depending on the type of crime. It would be best and highly recommended that you build a network of support and go with employers willing to give you a chance, and know what they are getting into before you're hired.

If your crime was of a serious nature, or one of violence where someone got seriously hurt or died. Follow the steps above and don't get discouraged with the many rejections and denials. Look at the bigger picture and the long run; you may get a pardon someday if you remain consistent and crime free. (Those doing life sentences have never been granted a pardon in Canada). Be honest, and do not waste your time on people who are not willing to hire you. By that time you will have learned where your chances of obtaining employment are and where your efforts will be best suited.

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#### **Free Pardon Services**

<http://conshelpingcons.com/free-pardon-services-canada.html>

#### **Social Community**

<http://www.conshelpingcons.com/socialnetwork/home.php>

Cons Helping Cons is online support community for anyone who has left prison, jail, penitentiary, correctional facility, halfway house, or anyone dealing with the aftermath of a criminal past or criminal record. It is only for those who want to live a law abiding, honest lifestyle, of whom wish to seek help and understanding or assistance in dealing with the day-to-day obstacles we face. We welcome you to post comments, create groups, blogs, events, albums, share your struggles and hardships, and make friends. We are also working on getting employers to post more Jobs/employment listings for ex-cons in the classifieds.

The community is also for families of offenders, friends, and anyone who may have come into contact with the effects of crime. Crime can make victims of us all including the families of the offender and they are often always the ones in the middle with little or no support offered. We also welcome victims of crime, who have dealt with their victimization and have become healthy survivors.

The community is a great place for volunteers who work with prisoners or offenders on the outside, or families of offenders, etc. Groups or individuals who offer programs and assistance to offenders and ex-offenders, such as cognitive skills, drug and alcohol, anger management, violence, domestic violence, sex offenders, as well as programs for special needs, female offenders and Indigenous offenders, etc. Non profit or organizations in this field we welcome you to join the community and promote your services on the community. We need to have a place where an offender or family members can find access to all these services in one location.

Once you signup you will have access to resources and others in the same situation, people who understand. The community is complete with forums, classifieds, polls, events, groups, blogs, chat, etc. If you offer any type of legitimate services for ex-offenders or families you may promote your services on this community, in fact we encourage it.

The Social Community welcomes anyone from Canada, United States and United Kingdom. Our issues and concerns as ex-offenders and families of offenders often transcend the borders of our countries. Please enjoy yourself, relax no one is going to judge you there.