

Despite broad recognition that ex-prisoners need jobs — and are less likely to return to crime if they have jobs — many people are reluctant to actually hire them.

One survey of employers found that 54 percent feared being victimized if they hired an ex-offender. Victimization, however, was not the employers' greatest concern. More than 80 percent feared that previously incarcerated individuals will lack the necessary people skills for contact with customers. Many were also concerned that both customers and co-workers would feel uncomfortable if they knew an ex-prisoner worked at the business.

Prison Fellowship volunteers can help prisoners and ex-prisoners overcome these barriers and learn how to complete tasks essential in job hunting — such as writing resumes and filling out job applications. Today, most employers prefer to receive resumes and job applications online. Here are some helpful websites where you will find a wide range of resources for job-seekers:

- www.careerbuilder.com
- www.careeronestop.org
- www.indeed.com
- www.monster.com
- www.snagajob.com

PF reentry volunteers also need to help prisoners and ex-prisoners practice basic social skills such as shaking hands, making eye contact, smiling, and treating people with respect and courtesy. Role-playing activities are very important in helping job-seekers prepare to introduce themselves, answer typical job interview questions, and interact with future co-workers.

One job-search dilemma is the question that pops up, in some form, on just about every job application — have you ever been convicted of a crime? While it is tempting to conceal one's prison record, this will only get the ex-prisoner in trouble if caught in the deception.

Instead of simply stating “yes” to the question, the job applicant might add something like, “and I would like to discuss this in more detail.” In the interview, ex-prisoners should be prepared to talk about the positive things they learned during their prison experience. This shows they used their time responsibly and constructively.

These are some examples of how some ex-prisoners have successfully addressed their prison experience in job interviews:

- “I am going to be the best cashier you have because of my time in prison. I really turned my attitude back to a positive one, and I learned how to handle negative situations, talk with a variety of people, be patient, listen, and be more outgoing.”
- “I consider my time in prison to be the most valuable education I had and one of the major reasons I am so qualified for this job. For two years I worked in all areas of auto mechanics, and I have proven skills to work on cars, trucks, vans, and construction equipment.”

- “I spent five years digging ditches, picking potatoes, and cleaning floors in prison. You are looking for a dependable, hardworking employee who doesn’t drink and is not on drugs. I’m that person, and I believe I have as good or better experience and work record than anyone else applying for this position.”

Although applying for jobs is largely done online today, job interviews are still a face-to-face experience. Our task as a reentry volunteers is to prepare ex-prisoners to make a good first impression and convince the employer they are the best candidate for the job. Remember to support job-seekers with lots of prayer and words of encouragement as they step out in faith.