

Nationwide, as many as 60 percent of ex-prisoners are unemployed one year after their release from prison. This signals pending disaster — not only for the ex-prisoners and their families, but also for the broader community. Without a source of income, many ex-prisoners have trouble finding housing. The stress of unemployment also puts people at higher risk of alcohol and drug abuse, particularly for those who already have a history of drug problems.

Confinement in prison distances prisoners from their community. Once they return, unemployment only adds to this sense of disconnection.

Unfortunately, many ex-prisoners lack even the basic skills to start hunting for a job once they get out. Nationwide, 70 percent of men and women who are incarcerated function at the low end of the literacy range — making it tough to understand an employment ad, fill out a job application, or write a business letter. With so many challenges stacked against them, re-arrests are common within the first six months of release.

By contrast, employment provides ex-prisoners with many benefits: income, of course, but also identity, healthy social interactions, a sense of purpose, and stability. These help to promote a sense of well-being as well as a connection to the community — all of which cuts down on recidivism.

As a reentry ministry volunteer, you can help increase the chances of newly-released prisoners finding jobs.

## Here's how to get started:

1. **Talk to your pastor or ministry leader.** Discuss your desire to help returning prisoners find employment. Then look for other volunteers who will join you in creating a ministry team.
2. **Plan your strategies.** Schedule a team meeting to discuss the services you will offer job-seeking ex-prisoners. Define the scope of your outreach.
3. **Select training materials/methods.** How will you help ex-prisoners improve their people skills as well as their job-hunting skills? Plan a series of classes, workshops, or seminars and allow plenty of time for role playing.
4. **Access community resources.** Collect information about local agencies and organizations that assist ex-prisoners with employment needs. Cultivate a relationship with your nearest One Stop employment center, a government agency that helps many ex-prisoners find jobs.
5. **Research benefits of hiring ex-prisoners.** Learn how the Federal Bonding Program can protect employers and how Work Opportunity Tax Credits can benefit employers.
6. **Reach out to potential employers.** Once you have a training program set up, begin contacting potential employers in your church and community. Let them know what you are doing to help ex-prisoners improve their job readiness and why you believe hiring ex-prisoners might benefit employers.
7. **Listen to employers.** Give them a meaningful role in influencing the shape and type of job-readiness training and job-search services you offer.

8. **Provide job-application assistance.** Offer workshops on how to write a resume, how to fill out job applications, and how to deal with questions about prior felonies. Invite ex-prisoners who now have jobs to visit your workshops and help encourage current job-seekers.
9. **Match ex-prisoners with mentors.** It's important that returning citizens have a loving, moral adult who will help them think through the challenges of finding and keeping a job, coaching them and praying for them all along the way.

The work you do to help ex-prisoners get and keep good jobs is vital to their successful reentry. Every paycheck boosts morale and helps provide stability for returning prisoners and their families.

Here are some additional resources for helping ex-prisoners with employment needs:

- ***The Ex-Offender's Quick Job Hunting Guide*** by Ron Krannich, Ph.D. (Impact Publications, Manassas Park, VA)
- ***Jails to Jobs: Seven Steps to Becoming Employed*** by Mark Drevno (Jails to Jobs, Inc., Lafayette, CA)
- ***From Prison to Paycheck*** by Pam Hogan (Community Press, San Francisco, CA)

Contact your local Prison Fellowship staff at 800-251-7411 to learn more about reentry needs in your community and to connect with others involved in reentry ministry.