

Job Search Strategies for Students with Conviction Histories

If you have a conviction in your past, it may seem like an overwhelming challenge to search for a job. Here are some strategies and resources to assist you in your job search process and help you find employment.

Preparing for the job search

Below are tools to help build your resume and make you that much more prepared to apply for a job after you graduate!

Networking

Networking is the number one way individuals find employment. This is particularly important if you have a conviction. Strong recommendations can give you the edge you need to land that job. You can start building your network at school, work, through your family and friends, or in the community.

Internships

If you are looking to build your experience in the field, internships (paid or unpaid) are an excellent way to build your resume and give you opportunities to network with potential employers. Even if an internship is not required for your program, talk to your faculty and an Academic & Career advisor about internship opportunities in your field.

Resumes & Cover Letters

Your resume and cover letter are your opportunities to show what skills you possess and experience that you have that makes you the best candidate for the job. As such, you do not need to include anything regarding your conviction history in either your resume or cover letter. Goodwill Training Center is a great resource to help you build your resume, as well as your academic & career advisor at BTC!

The Job Application

If you are asked if you have a conviction on your record in a job application, it is important to be honest. If you lie on the application, you may not be offered the job, or if you are hired and your employer discovers you were untruthful, you may be fired. However, it is important that you read each question carefully to make sure that you know exactly what is being asked. You only need to answer exactly what they asked for and no more. If the application asks for an explanation, then do so, but keep it short and to the point. Take a look at the examples below for how to answer potential questions on a job application.

Application Question Examples

For the purpose of this example, the student was convicted of a felony drug possession in 2005.

Example 1

Q: Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense (felony or misdemeanor)? If yes, explain.

A: *Yes, felony drug possession conviction in 2005.*

Example 2

Q: Have you been convicted of a felony within the last five years? Yes _____ No _____ if yes, please explain.

A: *Yes _____ No x _____ if yes, please explain: _____*

Example 3

Q: Have you ever been convicted of a crime? If yes, explain number of conviction(s), nature of offense(s) leading to conviction(s), how recently such offense(s) was/were committed, sentence(s) imposed, and type(s) of rehabilitation.

A: *Convicted once in 2005 for non-violent drug offense in Whatcom County, WA. Successfully completed probation and treatment. No problems since.*

The Interview

You have cleared the paper application and the resume! You may have a great networking connection giving you an “in” with the company. Now it’s time for the interview. How do you tell them about your conviction?

The first thing to remember is to be prepared and confident. This takes **practice**. You will want to have prepared a short speech about your conviction to give to the interview committee that gives them the necessary information about your conviction but focuses on what you have been doing since! Below is a template to help get you started.

In (year) _____ I made a poor choice and was convicted of (state the conviction) _____. I admit that this was a serious error in my judgment and I want to assure you that I have changed.

(Explain how you have changed)

Since that time I have

And I learned how to (skills)

My career goals are _____

I am prepared to do what it takes to prove that I am a reliable and capable employee.

Here are some tips:

- Be clear – don’t make excuses or blame anyone else. Keep it short and positive!
- Take responsibility, no matter the circumstances.
- Tell them what has changed in your life, why and how.
- State what you have accomplished since your conviction, for example: education, training, jobs, outlook on life.
- Use the term “Required Classes” rather than specific course names like Stress and Anger Management. These may raise red flags in the employers mind.
- Talk about future education and career goals – **don’t** skip this step. It is important and employers want to know!
- If you have a copy of your background check, provide it to the employer. This shows initiative and saves them time and money – just what they are looking for in a new employee.
- Make sure you focus on the skills that you have and why they should hire you!

Be aware: Sometimes, employers may ask you for some of the “grittier” details of your conviction. You, however, want to keep the focus on the positive – what you have been doing since. It is appropriate to re-direct the question say “That was a poor choice that I made previously, but I believe that I have made a number of positive changes to my life since then (list them) and I believe my skills (list some) will make me a valuable asset to your company”.