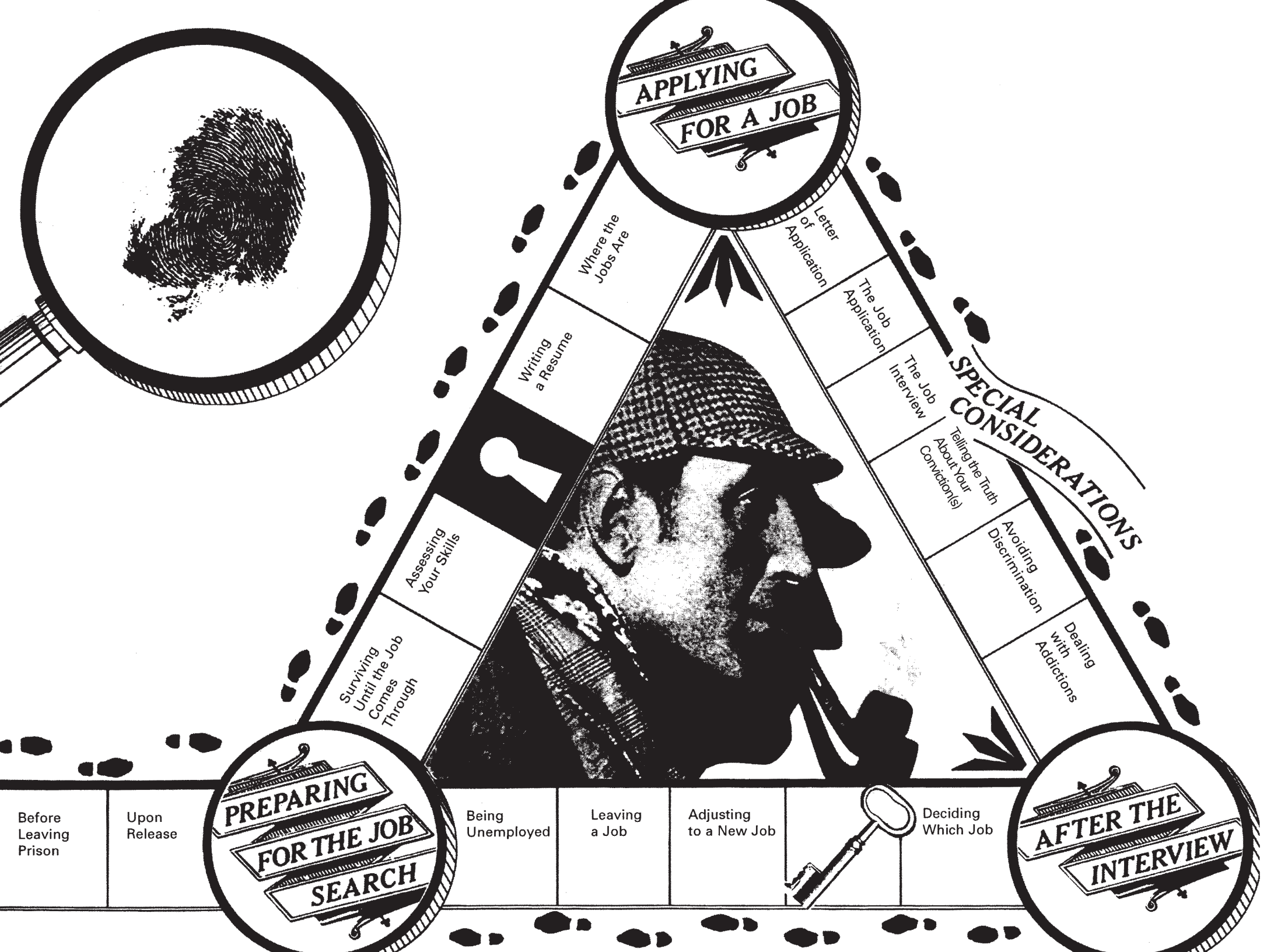


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**APPLYING FOR A JOB**

Where the Jobs Are

Letter of Application

The Job Application

The Job Interview

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Telling the Truth About Your Convictions!

Avoiding Discrimination

Dealing with Addictions

**PREPARING FOR THE JOB SEARCH**

Surviving Until the Job Comes Through

Assessing Your Skills

**AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

Deciding Which Job

Before Leaving Prison

Upon Release

Being Unemployed

Leaving a Job

Adjusting to a New Job

# Hey! I Need a Job

Hey, I need a job

not no promises

no handouts

Just need a nine to fiver with decent pay.

I need a job

Not just summer tokens to

cool the heat of riot thoughts

I NEED A JOB

Not monopoly money stamps to still

the hunger of belly but not mind

HEY!! I NEED A JOB

Not no dollar finger stuck

in the dike of my needs

## Introduction

Our booklet, *The Job Search*, is designed to carry you, step by step, through the entire job-hunting process. It has been written with you in mind. Thus, such questions as “What can I do before leaving prison?” “How do I answer for my record in filling out a job application?” and “How can I restore my lost rights?” are discussed in some depth. Certain sections of the booklet may be more relevant for you than others, but we hope that every reader will derive some important insight into how to look for a job from even a casual reading.

The first question a formerly incarcerated person needs to ask him- or herself upon being released is, “Am I ready to work?” The answer to this question is not as simple as it might at first appear to be. If it were posed, instead, as “Do I need to make money?” or “Do I need a job?” a simple “yes” would quickly suffice. But being ready to work raises issues other than just a willingness to earn money. In order to succeed in the “outside” world, many of us need to do a lot of critical thinking about ourselves, and about how hard we are willing to work at staying out of prison, a place to which, according to statistics, no small number of us will be returning.

So let us begin with the most obvious question of all, and that is, “Why work?” For many, the most pressing answer to this question is: “It will keep me out of jail.” Now, I’m sure no one needs to be told, at least while incarcerated, that jail is not a very nice place to be. What happens, however, for some of us, is that once out in the streets, we choose to forget our jail experience, and before we know it, we are back to the same old patterns of destructive behavior. “I’m going to be the exception this time,” we reason, “the person who won’t get caught.” What those of us who think this way choose to ignore is that there is probably not a single person among the hundreds of thousands who have been imprisoned who hasn’t at one time or another thought the same thing. When committing an illegal act, who ever plans on getting caught and going to jail? So when we need that extra shot of incentive, it’s good to think back to our prison experience, the regimented life behind the walls, the lack of contact with family and friends, the relentless tensions and boredom to which we’ve been forcibly subjected, and to remember that a job, at the very

least, will help keep us functioning on the outside — where we can proceed to get our lives together. For most of us, getting and maintaining that first job after release will be an accomplishment of which we can be proud.

Work also, of course, means sacrifice. It requires waking up early every day, and getting to work on time. It means, for many of us, beginning at a low weekly salary, which might not seem like much. Work also means having to muster up or develop enough self-discipline to keep our tempers under control, follow orders that may make little sense to us, and concentrate carefully on a single job assignment for long stretches of time. And this is another reason why work is important: it allows us to reclaim responsibility for our lives. In prison, we had little or no control over most of the decisions which affected us — what programs to enroll in, for example, what kinds of food to eat at mealtime, or how and when we might enjoy our privacy. We were forced to become dependent on others for fulfilling even the most basic of human needs.

Once out in the streets, however, we have the freedom to decide how we would like to conduct our lives. We have within us the power to make innumerable choices: where to work, with whom to live, which television station to watch, what to eat for dinner, etc. Of course, some of our choices may be limited by such factors as our financial situation, the skills we currently have, or the opportunities that knock at our door. Still, with determination and some good planning, we can utilize our work experience to broaden our options and, as time goes on, create new possibilities for ourselves. In this way, holding a job not only proves to us and to others that, after being dependent for so long on others, we are capable of directing our own lives, but it promises, also, to reward us with growing financial returns, which can translate into the support needed for raising a family, new opportunities for returning to school, and much more we might define as desirable.

Lastly, work enables us to enrich our lives. It exposes us to a variety of new people and experiences. It teaches us skills that can prove beneficial in our career development later on, and it can give us a sense of pride and accomplishment in knowing that at the end of a day, we have done our job, and done it well.

Once we have decided we are committed to finding work, it is helpful to examine some of the negative attitudes that we

may have about ourselves. Such attitudes, otherwise, will surely frustrate our efforts, and no job counselor, no matter how adept, or job-hunting guide, however well written, would then serve much use.

The negative attitudes most commonly heard are:

- I'm an ex-con; no one will hire me.
- I have no skills.
- I don't want any dead-end or low-paying job.

### **I'm an ex-con; no one will hire me.**

This argument can be dismissed as being simply untrue. In fact, it only serves to keep us in a cycle of self-defeat, and to justify a decision to do nothing at all to better ourselves. Remember that many people with criminal records, or drug histories for that matter, are now gainfully employed at all levels of society. The key to their success is their having developed a better sense of their own self-worth. The past is gone. Let's not forget that we've done our time and paid our debt to society. We now have as much right to work as any other person. It's true that finding work is not easy, and discrimination does exist. However, there are laws to protect us, as formerly incarcerated people (or ex-addicts), from being discriminated against. Also, with a little preparation, we can learn techniques to avoid job discrimination or, if confronted with it, successfully combat it.

### **I have no skills.**

This second statement is, like the first, categorically untrue. There is no such thing as a person with no skills. We have all acquired skills, even if they are not job related. A typical homemaker, for example, in caring for his or her family, is likely to have had experience in family budgeting, child care, and cooking, all skills which can be of use to him or her in obtaining a paying job. Many individuals, similarly, have developed skills in caring for cars, helping to raise children, or maybe painting and plastering an apartment. The trick here is to examine our past experiences, preferably with the aid of a job counselor, to determine just what skills we do possess and to what types of jobs they can be most applicable. We will then be much more able to persuade potential employers how we can be of value to them.

**I don't want any dead-end or low-paying job.**

We can certainly sympathize with the person who doesn't want to work at a low-paying or dead-end job. Yet, the reality is, many of us have to start our careers at entry-level positions, or at least take such jobs for a period of time.

It is important to be aware of a couple of things in this regard. First, many employers insist that new workers begin at the bottom and work their way up. This enables the employer to better judge the work qualities of a person before granting him or her more responsibilities. Secondly, dead-end jobs, or low-paying jobs, do serve some purpose: they help us pay our bills, afford us some work experience, and may provide us with some important contacts for further employment. If we must take a low-level position, let's try always to have some long-range goals set for ourselves. Our job can then be seen as only a small step in our overall plans and need not be viewed as permanent. Above all, avoid the attitude, "I'll never take such a low-paying job." For the vast majority of us, there are no easy ways of getting rich fast; if there were, you wouldn't be reading this at the moment, and I wouldn't be here writing it!

For a lot of us, surviving in the "outside" world can be very scary — especially if we've been behind bars for much of our lives. We may find ourselves having to adjust to a whole new style in the way we interrelate with others. If we are willing to be ourselves, however, and to deal with others sincerely, we have overcome the biggest challenge. Remember, always, that there is never any reason to be defensive about who we are, or apologetic. We made mistakes, as have others, and we have paid for them. Our task now is to retake control over our lives, remembering that the decision as to whether or not we return to prison will rest, ultimately, with us as individuals — not with our parole officers, our friends and families, or outside society. Finding a job, and holding on to it, will be the first important step for most of us in readjusting. We hope *The Job Search* will be of help in this regard.

## Author's Note

Information and advice in writing *The Job Search* came from many different sources. Books and brochures on job hunting were consulted, though very few, unfortunately, address themselves to the non-professional job hunter. Likewise, only a limited number of currently available written materials discuss the specific legal problems an ex-inmate or substance abuser may confront in job hunting. What does exist can usually be found only on the desks of professionals, such as legal advisors, parole officers, or substance abuse counselors. Yet knowing one's rights as an formerly incarcerated person, and knowing how to effectively present oneself as one when job hunting, can be vital issues for ex-inmates, even interconnected with their ability to stay out of prison. I was fortunate, then, when writing *The Job Search*, in having had the opportunity to meet with a number of persons whose expertise in these matters proved invaluable. They included legal advisors in the field of ex-offenders' rights, substance abuse counselors, parole employment officers, and job developers who work closely in programs with ex-inmates.

This booklet, it should be noted, is oriented to what might be called "a middle audience." Because prisons comprise individuals who manifest a full spectrum of reading abilities and experience, writing with all segments of the population in mind is impossible. I chose, then, to focus more on those individuals with fewer job-related skills in their backgrounds, and less formal education. Generally, they are the persons who are less aware of the resources available to them on the outside and of how to gain access to them. Still, I have little doubt that all of you will find some important pieces of information or advice within these pages.

Ultimately, the true test of this booklet's effectiveness rests with you, the reader. Thus, any advice or suggestions which you might have for its improvement would be very much appreciated. They can be sent to the Correctional Services Librarian, New York Public Library, 455 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016.



# Preparing for the Job Search

A wealth of useful information for the ex-inmate can be found on the web pages of the National H.I.R.E. Network, established by the Legal Action Center. Though it is not a job-placement service, the goal of this organization is to increase the number and quality of job opportunities available to people with criminal records by changing public policies, employment practices, and public opinion. Visit [www.hirenetwork.org](http://www.hirenetwork.org) and then click on “Resources & Assistance” for information on rap sheets, one’s rights as an ex-inmate when applying for jobs, and a list of helpful agencies by state.

## What You Can Do Before Leaving Prison

### **Take Advantage of Pre-Release Programs in Your Facility**

Many of the pre-release units in prisons have specially trained staff to help you plan your re-entry into outside society. Most pre-release units maintain updated listings of governmental and community-based agencies which can be of help to you in finding a job, locating an appropriate drug program, or addressing any of a multitude of needs. If you plan to return to, or remain in, New York City after your release, you may want a copy of this booklet for yourself. Copies of *Connections* can be obtained, free of charge to New York State residents, by writing: Correctional Library Services, The New York Public Library, 455 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016. You might also encourage your pre-release center to invite in, as some already do, representatives from community agencies or private companies that do a large amount of hiring, to give presentations.

### **Gather Together the Documents That You Will Need**

In order to apply for jobs and be eligible for most private or governmental programs, it is mandatory that you have available certain types of documentation. If you begin to collect what you need now, a lot of valuable time and much frustration will be saved. At the very least, be sure to have a Social Security card (sometimes a number alone is not sufficient) and proof of identification (a birth certificate, baptismal papers, driver’s license

or non-driver's photo ID, for example). Each agency has its own requirements as to documentation, but the following are commonly required, or may help in increasing your chances for eligibility:

- Military Discharge Papers
- Alien Registration Card (for non-U.S. Citizens)
- Prison Discharge Papers (given to you upon release)
- Proof of Education (college transcripts, or GED certificate, for example)
- Working Papers (required for persons under 18 years of age)
- Proof of Functional Disability
- Certificate of Relief from Disabilities
- Certificate of Good Conduct

Of course, not all of these documents can be obtained easily, if at all, while you are in prison, but collect what you can, and remember that, in some cases, a family member or friend on the outside may be of help.

Personal references are also required in applying for many jobs, or getting back into school. So start building yourself a file of recommendations from persons for whom you have worked in the past, or of people who can testify to your character. A letter from a member of the clergy in your neighborhood, a former employer, or a teacher may one day prove valuable in providing the necessary proof to a prospective employer that you have been rehabilitated and are ready to take on the responsibilities of a job.

Visit [www.hirenetwork.org/publications.html](http://www.hirenetwork.org/publications.html) for the Legal Action Center's brochure "How to Obtain Important Documents." Topics include: Social Security Cards, Birth Certificates, Naturalization Cards, Voter Registration, Driver's Licenses, Non-Driver ID, and Passports.

## What You Can Do Upon Release

### Restore Your Rights

As a result of a felony, or certain misdemeanor convictions, you may have lost your right to engage in certain types of employment, or apply for certain types of licenses. In some cases, you may be prohibited, legally, from applying for certain civil service positions,

which are classified as public office, such as fire fighter; also working in a liquor establishment, or being licensed as a barber or cosmetologist, real estate salesperson, pharmacist, notary public, security guard, etc.

To restore your rights, it is necessary to obtain:

- a **Certificate of Relief from Disabilities**, for which you are eligible if you have been convicted of only misdemeanors and not more than one felony, or one felony only.
- a **Certificate of Good Conduct**, for which you are eligible if you have been convicted of more than one felony.

### WHAT CERTIFICATES ARE

Certificates are an assumption of rehabilitation and evidence employers and licensing agencies must consider when licensing or hiring.

### WHAT CERTIFICATES CAN DO

Certificates have the power to remove any legal bar or disability imposed on you as a result of having been convicted of the crime(s) specified on the Certificate. If you have a Certificate, not only do you become eligible to apply for positions you might otherwise be barred from, but the Certificate informs the employer that the State or a court assumes you are rehabilitated, and that the employer should take this into consideration. Remember that under State law, it is illegal for an employer to deny someone a job based on his or her conviction, unless the employer can demonstrate it is job related. The law says that in deciding whether or not a conviction is job related, the employer must consider a number of factors including evidence of rehabilitation (a Certificate). With a Certificate, then, the burden of proof is on the employer to demonstrate that hiring you would be a risk to people or property, or that your conviction is directly related to the job for which you are applying. (A former bank embezzler, once released, would have difficulty getting a job handling cash at a bank, for example.) A Certificate is not a pardon and you would still be required to disclose your conviction record if you are asked about it.

Remember that some occupational licenses may be denied you for certain employment, such as with security firms, unless you have one of the Certificates.

#### APPLYING FOR A CERTIFICATE

You may apply for a Certificate of Relief from Disabilities, which is granted to persons without multiple felony convictions, immediately after your conviction. If no State time is served, you may apply at the court at which the conviction took place. If you have an out-of-state conviction or a federal conviction you have to apply for your certificate from the New York State Division of Parole.

To apply for a Certificate of Good Conduct, which is granted to persons who have multiple felony convictions, you may have to wait three to five years after completing your most recent sentence depending on the severity of your most serious conviction. For example: you may have two felonies, a class E felony from 1980 and a class B felony from 1990 and you were discharged from parole in 2002. Since your most serious crime was a B felony you would have to wait five years from the completion of your most recent sentence (2002). Therefore, you would not be eligible to apply for a Certificate of Good Conduct until 2007.

To request an application form for a Certificate of Relief from Disabilities if you have served State time, or for a Certificate of Good Conduct, write:

The New York State Division of Parole  
Certificate Review Unit  
97 Central Avenue  
Albany, NY 12206  
518.485.8953

Application forms are also available at the New York State Division of Parole website at <https://parole.state.ny.us/ParoleCert.pdf>

For more information, contact your parole/probation officer, or The Legal Action Center, 225 Varick Street, NYC 10014, telephone: 212.243.1313. The Legal Action Center also has a brochure for formerly incarcerated people entitled "Certificates of Relief from

Disabilities and Certificates of Good Conduct: What You Can Do About Criminal Convictions When Looking for Work," available at [www.lac.org/doc\\_library/Certificates of Relief 2007.pdf](http://www.lac.org/doc_library/Certificates_of_Relief_2007.pdf)

Certificates generally take one year to be processed.

Remember, you are eligible to apply for the Certificates even if your convictions took place outside of New York State.

#### Clean Up Your Rap Sheet

All too often, arrests that should be sealed (arrests not leading to convictions, youthful offender adjudications, or convictions for non-criminal offenses) remain open (unsealed) on your record, and available for potential employers to see.

You should assume that every employer will ask you questions about your arrest and conviction record. Employers who can legally fingerprint you and get from New York State a copy of your rap sheet are: civil service employers; banks and financial institutions; bonding agencies; hospitals; museums; child care agencies; home care agencies; mental health facilities; school bus driving companies; security guard companies; and law enforcement agencies (who are entitled to see sealed information as well). It is to your advantage, then, to clean up your record, and to have sealed whatever errors or unnecessary information may appear on it. Try to correct these mistakes before you begin to apply for jobs.

#### REVIEWING YOUR RAP SHEET

If you are currently serving a sentence in a New York State prison or in a county or city jail, you will be sent a copy of your rap sheet free of charge. You must include your name, any aliases, your date of birth, your DIN, and state how long you will be incarcerated. The Division of Criminal Justice Services will not send you your rap sheet if you will be incarcerated for less than 45 days. Send your request to:

NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS)  
Record Review Unit  
4 Tower Place  
Albany, New York 12203-3764  
518.485.7675 or 518.457.9847



If you are not incarcerated, or if you will be incarcerated for less than 45 days, you can receive a copy of your rap sheet by sending to DCJS a form called “Request for Record Review.” Obtain this form by writing to the address above, or e-mail

**RecordsReview@dcjs.state.ny.us**

You must provide your complete name and mailing address in order to receive the form.

Once you have filled out the form, there will be a \$50 fee for processing your request. Only Western Union, U.S. Postal Service, American Express, or bank money orders will be accepted. Money orders must be made out to “N.Y. State Division of Criminal Justice Services.” Do not send cash or any other form of payment. The \$50 fee may be waived if you can supply proof of financial hardship, such as evidence that you currently receive Public Assistance or Medicaid (be sure that the card is signed). If you are not incarcerated, your attorney may request this information for you; however, you must supply written, notarized authorization for him or her to do so.

Legal Action Center or your local office of the Legal Aid Society can also assist you in obtaining your rap sheet.

*NOTE: The Legal Action Center (225 Varick Street, New York, NY, 10014) has available for ex-offenders, upon request, a booklet entitled “How to Get and Clean Up Your New York State Rap Sheet.” The publication is available on the Internet by visiting [www.hirenetwork.org/publications.html](http://www.hirenetwork.org/publications.html)*

To obtain a federal rap sheet, you must write the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). State that your request is under the Freedom of Information Act, and send (1) a signed written request stating what you are requesting with your complete mailing address, (2) a full set of prints (available at any police precinct for a fee) with the date, your name, and your date and place of birth, (3) a money order or certified check for \$18 made payable to the Treasury of the United States. Send all of the above to:

The Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Criminal Justice Information Services Division

Attn: Record Request  
1000 Custer Hollow Road  
Clarksburg, WV 26306

Many employers are not authorized to get a copy of your rap sheet from DCJS. So you may find that a prospective employer will conduct a criminal background check using a consumer reporting agency. Both the Federal and New York State Fair Credit Reporting laws require that an employer get your permission before they conduct a background check using a consumer reporting company. There are a great many companies that provide this service to employers. You should get a copy of your consumer (credit) report for yourself as you prepare to look for a job. These reports are often incomplete or inaccurate and may require you to spend some time correcting the information. Usually there is a fee to get your credit report. However, three major credit bureaus will supply one free credit report per year. Visit [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) for more information.

An employer or individual may also get a copy of your criminal record from the Office of Court Administration (OCA). This is the agency that keeps all court information on file. An OCA background check costs \$55. Visit [www.nycourts.gov/apps/chrs](http://www.nycourts.gov/apps/chrs) for more information.

Remember that all of these procedures (obtaining and cleaning up errors on your rap sheet, sealing arrests not leading to convictions, etc.) will take time and cost you money. So start the process now, so you can be ensured that prospective employers do not see any unnecessary information or errors when obtaining access to your record.

In a like manner, upgrading a less-than-honorable military discharge can be advantageous to your future. To obtain an application, call or visit the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, at 245 West Houston Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY, 10014. Telephone: 212.807.7229 ext. 4877 or 1.800.827.1000 for National Office.

# Surviving Until the Right Job Comes Through

## Assess Your Resources and Plan Realistically

The search for work may take as long as a year, especially in periods of high unemployment. Thus, it is important to plan a long-term strategy. Here are some of the questions to ask yourself: Can my spouse help support me while I seek work? Am I eligible for unemployment insurance, or any other type of government assistance, such as food stamps or welfare? If I have savings, how long will they last? Do I have friends or relatives from whom I might borrow? How long will I be able to continue on a survival-type budget, given the resources available to me? Keep in mind that looking for work often turns out to be a full-time job in itself. To do it well requires a lot of concerted effort and persistence. The more time you can allocate to the task, the better your chances of landing a suitable job.

## Be Willing to Take a Less Desirable Job, or Part-Time Work, to Begin

Most people need to work, at least part-time, to support themselves while job hunting. Indeed, it is rare for anyone to find the job they desire most when they first (re)enter the job market.

But this is no reason to be discouraged. Whatever the job you choose, it will help pay the bills, provide you with work experience, teach you work habits if you are inexperienced, and possibly furnish you with contacts which can lead you to a better position.

It is important to be aware, also, that entry-level positions are not all necessarily dead-end. Indeed, at many companies it is required, regardless of your background, that you begin at the bottom and work your way upward. So in considering an entry-level position, also ask what opportunities exist for training and for advancement within the company.

The advantage of part-time employment, or day labor, for which you get paid at the end of each day worked, is that it can help support you in paying for the bare necessities of life, while still allowing you free time to pursue job contacts and interviews.

## Develop a Network of Personal Support

Looking for work is never easy. There will, in all probability, be many failures before the final triumph. Having one other or several other persons with whom you can share your experiences can be very important in job hunting.

If you have a family, or friends who are concerned, make yourself accountable to them. Tell them how each day went, and what your next day's plans will be. Also, if you can, join a job club. In a job club, members give each other the personal support needed in looking for work. They discuss with one another what can be learned from their daily job-hunting experiences; they role-play interviews and help one another in developing effective search strategies. When one member gets hired for a job, he or she can notify the others when openings occur at his or her place of employment. Ask a job counselor for a job club contact, or for help in starting your own job club.

## Explore Volunteer Work for the Advantages It Offers

Volunteer work, even on a part-time basis, has the following advantages:

- You can explore a career field in which you think you might be interested to find out whether or not it is what you'd like to pursue.
- You can gain experience and make contacts on the volunteer job which might later materialize into a paying job as openings occur.
- You will have the opportunity of gaining valuable work experience, perhaps in a field you'd like to pursue. This can go onto your resume or future job application as proof that you are a highly motivated individual, interested in advancing.

## Assessing Your Skills: Job Testing and Counseling

A very important step in preparing for the job hunt involves assessing your own particular interests and skills. Sometimes a person knows exactly what field of work he or she wishes to pursue. Perhaps such a person has had experience in this field and developed some useful skills which will make job hunting easier for him or her. Or perhaps they have been told the market for certain skills is growing rapidly, and they can be assured of finding work in that area of employment once they have been trained.

There are others, however, who are not sure what their occupational skills or interests are. Maybe they've worked for short periods of time in a variety of jobs, none of which they've enjoyed. Or perhaps they've just never had the opportunity to seriously think about what skills or interests they have developed or would like to develop if given the opportunity. Whatever the case, an occupational assessment, or evaluation, of yourself is extremely important. It helps make you aware of what you have to offer, and helps you in establishing some realistic career goals, both short- and long-range.

There are people, usually called employment or job counselors, who are adept at helping you assess your skills and interests. Usually they will interview you and then ask you to take one or more tests as part of the evaluation process. The test may be geared toward measuring your abilities in a certain skill, or measuring your attitude toward the particular field of work. (Referring you to a full-time typing job when you hate sitting at a desk all day would not be very wise.) The tests you may be asked to take are not ones you have to worry about or study for in advance. After you've taken the test(s), you will be able to discuss the results with a counselor as part of your assessment process.

If you would prefer to begin by assessing your own skills without the help of a job counselor, there are books which can help you do this. Visit the job information center of your public library

(see listings in *Connections* under "FINDING A JOB") and ask for materials on skills assessment. Some are organized like workbooks, and take you step by step through the procedure.

## Writing a Resume

### What Is a Resume?

A resume is a summary of your work experience, education, and special interests. It organizes the relevant facts about you in written form and shows the prospective employer what you have done and are able to do.

### Why a Resume?

- More employers are now requiring that you have a resume when applying for a job.
- A resume is a written presentation of you to the employer, and as such, can help you gain entry to a personal interview.
- A resume serves as a visual reminder for the employer, after the interview, of who you are and what you discussed.
- A resume, even if you were never to show it to anyone, helps you organize your thinking about yourself and what you have to offer.

### Help in Writing a Resume

Because a well-written resume is so important in job hunting, it is often a good idea to get some expert help or criticism in writing one. Try visiting your public library's job information center, for example, or an employment counseling service, where you will find materials on how to write a resume, plus sample resumes, from which you can choose a model appropriate for you. Also, specially trained staff will be able to look over what you have written and help you strengthen those parts of your resume which are in need of improvement.

Two of the many websites which offer valuable advice on how to prepare resumes and cover letters are:

**[www.jobweb.com/Resumes\\_Interviews.aspx](http://www.jobweb.com/Resumes_Interviews.aspx)**  
**[www.jobstar.org/tools/resume/res-what.htm](http://www.jobstar.org/tools/resume/res-what.htm)**

Remember that a resume should be neat in appearance and that it should always be typed. Your local public library should have public use computers with word processing capabilities and printers.

There are many job hunters who for one reason or another have little formal education or job-related experience in their backgrounds. Perhaps they've spent many years in foster homes or prisons, perhaps they've worked illegally, or maybe they've had a number of jobs but because of a personal or drug-related problem were never able to hold one for very long. If this is the case, they will need to evaluate their life experiences carefully in terms of the skills they have invariably picked up, and will need to learn techniques for presenting themselves in the most positive light to employers. There are some resume-writing books and job counselors available to help them.

### Helpful Points in Resume Writing

CHOOSE THE TYPE OF RESUME BEST SUITED TO YOUR INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE

Because the resume is a summation for the employer of who you are, it is important to organize the information on it to your best advantage.

Though there is no set format for a resume, generally it can be said to fall into one of two categories: the **Chronological Resume**, or the **Skills (Functional) Resume**.

The chronological resume lists the jobs you've had and the schools you've attended, all in chronological order, beginning with the most recent and going back in time. It is best suited for those people who have a relatively unbroken work record since leaving school, have worked at jobs for long periods of time, and can offer good explanations for any time gaps in their work record (a return to school, service in the military, etc.).

The skills (or functional) resume stresses your particular skills and abilities, and puts less emphasis on dates and names of employers and schools. It is best suited for those who have changed jobs

frequently, not worked for long periods of time, and/or acquired most of their skills while incarcerated or in non-job-related pursuits.

Be sure to include all of the skills you may have, not just the ones that you've learned on the job. Many of us have skills that we don't generally think of when applying for a job. Yet they can often be valuable in our ability to adapt to new job situations. If you can speak a second language, for example, include it on your resume. If you can type sixty words per minute, say so. Have you ever operated any special types of vehicles — forklifts, or trailer trucks? Say it. Or trained and supervised someone on the job — another inmate, for example, at the facility's library or pre-release center? Have you ever exhibited leadership skills such as working with young people in a neighborhood youth program, or coaching an award-winning basketball team at summer camp? Don't neglect to list such things. Remember also that employers are interested in your ability to get along with others on the job as much as they are in formal skill training. Show them in as many ways as possible that you possess the attributes they're looking for.

CONSOLIDATE YOUR INFORMATION

Most employers prefer one-page resumes. If you've done six carpentry jobs, each lasting eight weeks, over the last ten years, write "Carpentry Skills—1 year's experience."

LIST THE SKILLS AND RESPONSIBILITIES THAT ACCOMPANIED EACH OF YOUR JOBS AND USE ACTION VERBS WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

It is not enough to say you worked for a particular company X number of years. Compare the following two examples as to the impression they might make upon the employer.

(a) 1999–2002 Whitney Paper Co., Bronx, N.Y.  
Clerk

(b) 1999–2002 Whitney Paper Co., Bronx, N.Y.  
Storeroom Clerk.  
Responsible for deliveries of all incoming and outgoing orders in the stationery and desk supplies department.

Organized and filed order records to a total of 600 invoices per month.  
Trained and supervised two beginning clerks.  
Operated a forklift.

Some action verbs to help with your resume:

achieved, adapted, addressed, administered, arranged, assessed, assisted, authorized, collaborated, conducted, demonstrated, designed, developed, devised, directed, edited, enforced, evaluated, filed, formulated, fostered, generated, handled, hired, implemented, improved, initiated, launched, maintained, managed, marketed, mastered, motivated, operated, organized, oversaw, planned, procured, programmed, promoted, provided, publicized, recommended, reorganized, repaired, represented, researched, scheduled, screened, set up, simplified, supervised, trained, used.

#### HOW TO ACCOUNT ON YOUR RESUME FOR TIME INCARCERATED

Employers don't like to see time lapses on your resume. They surmise that a person who has a strong record of employment or schooling is a more stable and dependable person, and thus less of a risk to hire. In being honest about the time you spent in prison, you will not have to worry about time lapses on your resume.

In fact, the vast majority of counselors who work with formerly incarcerated people advise that you be honest about the time you spent incarcerated. Though there is discrimination in hiring practices in the "real world," any short-term gains from not telling the truth are far outweighed by long-term consequences. Here are some issues to consider: if an employer learns that you are being dishonest, you will most certainly not be hired, and if already hired, you will probably be fired, no matter how well you are doing on the job. In hiring you, an employer puts trust in you, and it is only natural that he or she will feel hurt in learning that he or she has been deceived. For a fuller discussion of the reasons why you should choose to be honest, including the legal ramifications of choosing to be dishonest, see page 239 (Special Considerations: Telling the Truth About Your Conviction(s) When Applying for a Job). To learn more on how to avoid discrimination as someone who has been incarcerated, see page 240 (Special

Considerations: How to Avoid Being Discriminated Against When Looking for Work).

When composing your resume, be sure to explain how you spent the time in prison to your best advantage. If you finished your GED program, or received tutoring, or took a correspondence course, say so under "Educational Background." If you were trained and did work in the prison optics program, Corcraft, or in asbestos removal, list this under "skills," or "work experience." Did you do porter work in prison, maintenance, landscaping? Ever work in a prison office, or library, or transitional services center? List it. It is the rare formerly incarcerated individual who cannot list at least a few positive skills or programs he or she was involved in while in prison.

On the following pages are the resumes of three fictitious persons looking for work. Note especially the manner in which these formerly incarcerated people have chosen to present their time in prison on their respective resumes.

To help you in resume construction, numbered notes ( **8** ➔ ) have been added alongside each resume, and correspond to explanations following the resume.

# Sample Resume I: Chronological Resume

## **DARRYL COOPER**

1432 East 6th St.  
New York, NY 10040  
Tel: (212) 555-1141

**Occupational Goal:** Automotive Mechanic

### **EDUCATION:**

#### **Plattsburgh State College**

Plattsburgh, NY 21430  
GED (High School Equivalency), Spring 2001

#### **Essex Correctional Facility Automotive Shop**

Certificate of Excellence, upon Completion of  
1500 Hours of On-The-Job Training,  
January 1998

#### **Henry Hudson High School**

New York, NY 01441  
Course Work:  
English                      Electrical Shop I and II  
Automotive Shop        Mechanical Drawing  
History                      Mathematics

### **EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:**

Intramural Football  
Photography Club

### **ASSOCIATIONS AND AWARDS:**

NAACP, Essex Correctional Facility  
**Treasurer**, Merrick Jaycees,  
Merrick Correctional Facility  
**Inmate Assistant**, Pre-Release Center,  
Little Kills Correctional Facility  
**2nd Prize**, Merrick Valley Art Fair,  
“Most Original Oil Painting”

### **WORK EXPERIENCE:**

#### **1 → Community Services Crew, Rehabilitation of Essex County Fire House, Summer 2000.**

Responsible for electrical wiring and new window installation.

#### **Self-Employed Toy Vendor, New York City, 1996–97.**

Purchased toys in wholesale lots and sold them at neighborhood block parties, day care and community centers, and flea markets.

#### **Service Station Attendant,**

Joe’s Service Station, Bronx, NY, 1994.  
Pumped gas and did light auto body repair.  
Supervised a second attendant in the owner’s absence.

#### **3 → House Painter — 1 year’s experience.**

### **HOBBIES:**

Model Car and Toy Making  
Photography

#### **4 → REFERENCES:**

Mr. John McIntyre, Parole Office Resource Unit  
NY State Division of Parole  
Essex, NY 21255

Ms. Jeannie Sanchez, Counselor  
Department of Social Services  
Merrick Correctional Facility, Merrick, NY 09966

## Notes to Sample Resume I

Darryl Cooper spent three years, from 1998 to 2001, incarcerated in a New York State Correctional Facility. In his resume, he has learned to use his experience to his best advantage.

- 1 → Show that while in prison you've done constructive things with your time, not just "done" time. Mention any educational achievements, for example, or work experience you've had while incarcerated.
- 2 → If you've been involved in any organized prison activities or programs, list them. They help indicate to a prospective employer what you may have experienced while away in terms of personal growth and development.
- 3 → Consolidate and make use of your short-term employment experience. Four three-month painting jobs over a four-year period can be presented as "1 year's experience."
- 4 → In choosing references, select persons who can testify as to what you are like today, how you have changed, and your readiness to settle down and take on the responsibilities of a job.

## Sample Resume II: Chronological Resume

### **HECTOR DIAZ**

741 Arctic Terrace, Apt. 3  
Brooklyn, NY 10000  
Tel: (718) 002-5432

**Occupational Goal:** Asbestos Remover

### **EDUCATION:**

**Mid-Apple C.F.**, Warwick, NY  
Asbestos Abatement Program  
2003. Licensed as Asbestos Handler

**Ulster Community College**, Ulster, NY  
2002. Associate Degree in Business Administration

**U.S. Army**, 1998–2000  
2000. Certificate in Power Plant Mechanics

**Walt Whitman High School**, Brooklyn, NY  
1990. High School Diploma  
Business Course

### **WORK EXPERIENCE:**

2003–2004 **Asbestos Handler**, Mid-Apple C.F.  
Responsible for removing asbestos materials in steam pipes, air ducts, heating plant equipment, and tunnels at various sites throughout Orange County. Worked with team of six.

1994–1998 **Manager**, Puebla Market,  
133 Verrazano Avenue, Brooklyn, NY.  
Managed the fresh produce and canned foods department of a medium-size neighborhood market. Responsible for all aspects of produce and canned goods sales, from ordering to pricing, display, and retail selling. Supervised and trained two part-time clerks and cashier.

2 →

3 →

1991–1994 **Salesman**, Sam Stein’s Sporting Goods, 2342 Plumber Avenue, Brooklyn, NY.  
 Responsibilities included: organizing stock in swimwear and tennis departments; creating attractive displays of new, incoming items; inventory control for entire summer sports department; and selling of merchandise.

4 →

**PERSONAL DATA:**

Speak Spanish fluently  
 Have New York State Driver’s License  
 Willing to relocate  
 Able to work evenings and weekends, if necessary

5 →

**SPECIAL INTERESTS:**

Painting in acrylics; basketball coaching; conga player

**REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST**

**Notes to Sample Resume II**

Hector Diaz spent 2001–2004 incarcerated at an upstate correctional facility. His training as an asbestos remover at the prison has provided him with marketable skills that he can use now that he is being released. He has learned that the New York State Labor Department lists asbestos handling among the fastest-growing occupations in New York City. Although Hector realizes he must acknowledge his conviction when asked on his job application or during an interview if he has ever been convicted of a crime, he names the school upstate which granted him a degree without mentioning that he received the degree as a prisoner, and he lists the facility where he received his asbestos training only as “Mid-Apple C.F.,” not “Mid-Apple Correctional Facility.” This assures that information about his incarceration remains between him and the interviewer, not screeners or whoever else might have access to his resume. After gaining access to an interviewer, he will have the opportunity to explain his conviction and his personal growth and change while incarcerated. (For a more detailed discussion on accounting for time incarcerated, see *Appendix*, page 257.)

1 →

Be sure to include all of the formal training and education you may have received, including courses in the armed forces and in prison, for example. It is to your advantage to show the prospective employer that you spent your time productively while incarcerated.

2 →

When listing your work experience, always emphasize your responsibilities on the job, and the skills that you learned or needed to employ. This is as true for “low-level” jobs as it is for more professional ones. Make your jobs sound important. Hector was sent with fellow asbestos workers from his facility to work in non-profit and local government sites throughout the county. He makes reference to this as well as to the fact he worked as part of a team.

3 →

Use action verbs for more effect (managed; supervised, trained, organizing, selling, etc.).



- 4 → Play up any personal data and advantages that might be useful to your job (fluent in Spanish, driver's license) or in explaining your character (basketball coach).
- 5 → It is not usually necessary to list specific references on the resume.

## Sample Resume III: Skills Resume

1 →

**Jennifer B. Blake**

36-04 Archibald Street  
 Jamaica, NY 90001  
 Tel.: (718) 311-1234; eves. (718) 400-1109

**Job Objective:** Nurse's Aide

**SKILLS:**

**Homemaking:** Four years' experience helping to care for an elderly, diabetic, and visually impaired grandparent.

Responsibilities included:

- Preparation of special diet
- Administering of insulin injections
- Serving as visual guide
- Housekeeping tasks of a wide variety, including cooking and cleaning

**Health Care:** Experience in caring for up to sixteen patients in a nursing home.

Responsibilities included:

- Delivering and serving meals
- Making beds
- Bathing patients
- Taking temperatures
- Responding to patient calls
- Transporting patients

**Food Preparation/Cooking:** Experience includes all aspects of meal preparation for a medium-sized institution. Learned and practiced food handling and sanitation procedures. Helped prepare banquets for special occasions.

**Relating to the Public:** Two years' experience as a security guard at a major life insurance company. The job required disseminating information and relating well with the public, often under considerable pressure.

**WORK EXPERIENCE:**

February 2002–present: Volunteer Orderly  
Mt. Marcy Convalescence Home  
Jamaica, NY 67666

March–October 2001: Cook’s Assistant  
Lily M. Crooner Center  
East Elmhurst, NY 11370

1998–2000: Security Guard  
Grass Knuckles Security Co.  
Hoboken, NJ 02143



1996–2000: Homemaker

**EDUCATION:**

Currently registered for a course in Health  
Counseling and Preventive Medicine at the Steuben  
Adult Education Center, NYC Dept. of Education,  
Jamaica, NY



Malcolm X High School, Jamaica, NY  
Concentration in Home Economics

**AWARDS:**

Certificate of Expertise in Swimming and Life-  
saving, including Mouth-to-Mouth Resuscitation  
and First Aid. Maspeth Red Cross, Queens, NY

Best Women’s Team Basketball Player, Malcolm X  
High School

**Notes to Sample Resume III**

Jennifer Blake spent most of 2001 incarcerated on Rikers Island in New York City, convicted on a misdemeanor charge. Because she has had little formal education and no long history of job experience, Jennifer has decided to construct a skills-type resume. She will focus on the many skills she learned while being a homemaker living with a disabled grandparent (Homemaking), a volunteer health worker (Health Care), a security guard (Relating to the Public), and working as an inmate in jail. While incarcerated, she learned skills as a cook’s assistant. (For a more detailed discussion on accounting for time incarcerated, see Appendix, page 257.) Many job counselors advise that it is no longer necessary to state “References available upon request,” as it is self-evident.



In choosing a skills-type resume, emphasize the skills you have learned from your non-job-related experience, including volunteer work, as well as from your paid job experience. List your responsibilities and make them sound important, especially in light of your career objective.



If you have little job experience in your past, volunteer for work in the field in which you are interested. It provides you with legitimate work experience and possible contacts for paying jobs. It also gives you the opportunity to show a prospective employer that you’re motivated to move ahead.



Why not consider furthering your education? Many free or low-cost courses exist throughout the city in a variety of fields, such as High School Equivalency and vocational skills. Listed on a resume, they will impress an employer and show that you are a person who wants to learn and has taken the initiative to do so.



If you didn’t finish high school, omit the dates. If, however, you are asked specifically about being a high school graduate, be honest. Remember that any information on the resume can always be checked for verification by the employer.

- 5 ➔ Be sure to include all information that might be relevant to your job objective or revealing of your character. Certificates in swimming and first aid, for example, are relevant to pursuing a career in nursing. Being a basketball player at school indicates that you are skillful as a team player, competitive, and confident.

### How to Use a Resume

1. Clip a copy of your resume to your job application. You can do this at a personnel office, for example, especially if the resume contains information not asked for on the application.
2. Bring copies of your resume to job interviews, and leave a copy with the interviewer.
3. Leave copies of your resume with the any job-placement agency with which you establish contact.
4. Give copies of your resume to friends, relatives, or associates, who may run across job openings from time to time and notify you of them.
5. In job hunting some people may need to construct two or more resumes to focus on different aspects of their experience. If, for example, you've had many different jobs in your work history, you may wish to emphasize some in applying for one job and others in applying for another job. You might also want to readapt your "job objective" depending on the opening for which you are applying.

## Finding Out Where the Jobs Are

- Search the classified ads
- Apply directly to the employer
- Use employment agencies
- Use employment or placement services
- Visit union offices for information about union jobs and apprenticeship programs
- Notify friends, relatives, and neighbors
- Make use of bulletin boards
- Use the computer to find a job

### Searching the Classified Ads

It is wise when looking for work to make a daily habit of checking the "help wanted" or classified ads in your local paper. In New York City, daily papers which include help wanted ads include the *Daily News*, the *New York Post*, the *New York Times* (see especially the Sunday edition), *El Diario*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Weeklies include the *Village Voice* and the *Amsterdam News*. The local branch of your public library will carry subscriptions to some of these papers. Better yet, you may choose to visit The New York Public Library's Job Information Center, where you will find the latest help wanted ads from newspaper and job information sources in one location, already clipped and posted for your convenience.

Job ads are sometimes listed first under general categories, such as General Help, Business Help, or Professional, then alphabetically by job title. Some ads ask that you submit a letter of application, resume, and references. Otherwise you may be given a telephone number which you can call to find out more information before deciding whether or not to apply.

Three samples of classified ads follow, along with explanations and a listing of common abbreviations used.

## HELP WANTED

### **Office Associate**

Must type 45 wpm and be comp. lit. mature, responsible, expd. Midtown area. Gd. Oppty. & sal. F.T. job. Pls. FAX resume to Decklan Bianco (212) 005-7431.

To apply for this job, it is necessary that you be able to type 45 words per minute, and be experienced in basic computer skills ("computer literate"). You must be a mature and responsible person. The job is located in Midtown Manhattan, and offers good opportunities for someone in addition to a good salary. It is a full-time job (generally this implies Monday through Friday 9-5). FAX your cover letter and resume to Decklan Bianco at (212) 005-7431.

### **Salesperson**

P.T. No exp. nec. Mfct. of beauty aids requires energetic person to cover Queens. Includes car allowance and gd. bnft. pkg. Sal. negot. Send resume & refs. to Mickey Raton, P.O. Box 12, Jamaica, NY 11340.

This is a part-time sales job that requires no previous experience. The person hired would help sell beauty aids throughout Queens. You would need to have a car, but an allowance toward transportation costs would be given to you. There is a good benefits package and the salary is negotiable. You are asked to send a copy of your resume and a list of references to Mickey Raton at the address given.

### **Sheet Metal Mechanics**

Immed. employment yr. round work. min. 1 yr. exp. in duct work. Gd. working cond., pd. hosp., room for advancement. Apply 1315 W. 10th St. bet. 9 & 5.

There is an immediate opening for a person to work as a sheet metal worker. He or she must have had at least one year's experience in duct work. The job offers good working conditions, paid hospital insurance, and chances for career advancement. Come in to apply to the address given between 9am and 5pm; we can presume Monday through Friday

### Common abbreviations used in classified ads

&	and	maint.	maintenance
appt.	appointment	mfct.	manufacturer
asst.	assistant	mfg.	manufacturing
benfs.	benefits	min.	minimum
bnft. pkg.	benefit package	nec.	necessary
bus.	business	negot.	negotiable
clk.	clerk	ofc.	office
co.	company	pd.	paid
comp. lit.	computer literate	perm.	permanent
cond.	conditions	pls.	please
dept.	department	p.o. box	post office box
EOE	Equal Opportunity Employer	pref'd	preferred
exp.	experience	P.T.	part-time
expd.	experienced	refs.	references
ext. or x	telephone extension	req.	required
401K	Retirement Savings Plan	sal.	salary
F.T.	full-time	secy.	secretary
gd.	good	sr.	senior
hr.	hour	trnee.	trainee
hrly.	hourly	typ.	typing
H.S. grad.	high school graduate	w.	with
immed.	immediate	wkr.	worker
inc.	includes	wpm.	words per minute
lt.	light	yr.	year

### Applying Directly to the Employer

One of the most obvious ways to learn where job openings are is to contact employers directly. You can begin with the Yellow Pages of the telephone book. There you will find businesses listed by classification. If, for example, you decide you would like to work in a hotel or department store, simply check under "Hotels," or "Department Stores," and you will find an alphabetical listing by name, accompanied by address and phone number.

If you know of no specific person to contact, go to the personnel or human resources office of the firm, and tell the receptionist you are looking for work and are interested in filling out an application. Sometimes you will be interviewed by a personnel officer as soon as you have filled out the application. Other times you will be asked to leave the completed form and told you will be notified as soon as they have an opening.

If you can make a direct contact with a person in the firm who does the hiring for his or her department, this is usually more effective than being processed through a personnel office. Common ways of learning the identity of the person who is hiring include: (1) making a personal contact with an employee at the firm, (2) telephoning the company to see if you can learn the information by phone, or (3) if the firm is large enough, obtaining a listing of its department heads through a business directory (available at the public library) or the company's website. When you have this person's name, call him or her, or write directly, including a copy of your resume. Ask if you can come in for an interview. You can do this even if you know of no immediate openings. By arranging in this way for an "informational interview," you will be able to meet the employer and find out some of the requirements needed to work in his or her area, and you will have the opportunity to make a positive impression upon the person. Then, whenever a job opening does occur, you will be viewed as more than just "one more resume" piling up on the employer's desk.

### Job-Searching on the Internet

In recent years job-hunting using the Internet has become increasingly common. Many companies and agencies use the Internet to advertise their openings, both on the company's own website and on websites created for job-seekers. Some job websites are informal bulletin boards, such as the jobs section of Craigslist ([www.newyork.craigslist.org](http://www.newyork.craigslist.org)), while others such as Career Builder ([www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com)) feature places to post your resume for prospective employers and offer a range of job search choices. When searching for a job online, you will need an e-mail address, both to e-mail your resume to employers and to sign in

on the job search websites. E-mail addresses are also requested on quite a few paper job applications today. You can sign up for a one-session class on using e-mail, or ask for help setting up a free e-mail account, at most public libraries and some formerly incarcerated people's organizations.

### **Employment Agencies**

Another important source of finding out where jobs are is the employment agency. At an employment agency, you will be interviewed, and an attempt will be made to match your skills with those required for a specific job opening. Then you will be sent for an interview to an appropriate employer.

Employment agencies operate as businesses. You and/or the employer will have to pay for the services of having you placed. Be aware, however, that you should never pay in advance for a service that is only promised. Also, in your dealings with employment agencies, be sure to read any contract carefully before signing.

For a listing of employment agencies in New York City, check the phone book's Yellow Pages under the heading "Employment Agencies." Some, but not all, will specialize in specific job fields. If you are interested in temporary work, look in the Yellow Pages under "Employment Contractors — Temporary Help."

### **Employment or Placement Services**

Employment services, or placement services, as they are sometimes called, are similar to employment agencies in that they both provide job placement. Employment services, however, do not charge fees. They are usually attached to a government or neighborhood agency, a school, or a job-training program.

Check carefully the two chapters of this booklet entitled "Organizations for Formerly Incarcerated People" and "Finding a Job." Many of the listings, such as the New York State Department of Labor, Job Services Division, are employment services; others, such as the Center for Employment Opportunities, include place-

ment services in their descriptions. Note that some of the employment services listed specialize in job placement for specific groups, such as formerly incarcerated people, the economically disadvantaged, veterans, recovering alcoholics, or people with disabilities.

### **Sources of Information for Union Jobs and Apprenticeship Programs**

Union offices are still another source for help in job hunting. Each trade has its own local union office, which you can call for information on available job opportunities. For a listing of union groups, look under "Labor Organizations" in the New York County Business to Business Yellow Pages (available at your public library). Be aware, however, that a difficult economic situation makes it very unlikely that a non-union person will be accepted into a union for a position. Apprenticeships are similar to on-the-job-training programs in that a person learns a job skill by doing it. The apprentice is taught by a person who is an expert at the skill, called a journeyworker, in a training program which lasts usually from two to six years. Often, a trade union controls the number of apprentices to be chosen and is responsible for selecting and training them at the work site. It is very difficult to obtain information about available apprenticeship programs. However, you can learn what groups in private industry are currently recruiting for apprentices by calling the New York State Department of Labor, New York Regional Office, at 212.775.3354 or checking

[www.labor.state.ny.us/apprenticeship/appindex.shtml](http://www.labor.state.ny.us/apprenticeship/appindex.shtml)

### **Notifying Friends, Relatives, and Neighbors That You Are Looking for Work**

Many times jobs are filled when employers learn about possible applicants by word of mouth. This may happen, in fact, even before new openings are scheduled to be advertised. Let all of your friends, relatives, and neighborhood contacts know that you are looking for work. They can spread the word, and as soon as they hear of an opening at work, or elsewhere, they can notify you at once.

### **Making Use of Bulletin Boards**

Many times neighborhood bulletin boards can play an important role in job hunting. They can be used both by people advertising job openings and by people searching for jobs. If you are looking for work, simply list on a small index card what types of jobs you are looking for, and be sure to include, along with your name, a phone number or address where you can be reached. If you have any special skills, such as playing percussion, for example, teaching a foreign language or tutoring math, an ad on the bulletin board can also result in a way for you to earn a little extra cash. Bulletin boards can often be found in local supermarkets, laundromats, and community centers, among other places.



# Applying for a Job

# Writing a Cover Letter

There are certain times when it is necessary to write a cover letter when applying for a job. Many classified ads, for example, include a postal box number with a request that you reply by mail. You may also find yourself needing to write to a firm that hasn't advertised. As in responding to a classified ad, you will want here also to write a cover letter requesting an interview, and attach to it a copy of your resume.

The letter should be typed. Be neat and informative, but also to the point. The cover letter is a reflection, along with your resume, of what you are like as a person. It deserves careful consideration.

The body of the letter can be divided into three parts. In the first, you make mention of the job you are applying for, and where you became aware of the opening. In the second part of the letter, you point out those aspects of your background which relate particularly to the job in question, and indicate why you want the position. The third section of the letter should request an interview and include a phone number or e-mail address where you can be reached.

If the letter is to be addressed to a personnel director or head of a department, call and ask the receptionist for the person's full name. A personal letter usually makes a better impression. Otherwise, "To Whom It May Concern" will suffice.

Following are samples of a classified ad and letter of application:

**Truck Drivers & Warehouse Help**  
For plumbing and heating wholesaler. Hours 7-3, M-F  
Top pay incl. company benefits.  
Experience Preferred. Send resume to Jay McDonald, P.O. Box 356, Panson Station, NY 10011.

174-06 Parkside Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 10036  
March 12, 2006

Mr. Jay McDonald  
P.O. Box 356  
Panson Station  
New York, NY 10011

Dear Mr. McDonald:

I am replying to an ad for warehouse help that appeared in the New York Post on March 11, 2006.

Since graduating from High School in 2003, I have gained valuable experience in warehouse work. In one of my jobs, I worked as a warehouse clerk for a large import/export company. In another, I worked at a lumber warehouse in yard work. In addition, the plumbing business is one with which I am already somewhat familiar. My uncle is an experienced plumber, and when I was in high school, I did some work with him informally as an assistant in order to earn some extra cash. I believe my experience would make me a valuable employee.

I would appreciate the opportunity to come in for an interview and to talk with you further about my qualifications. I do not have a telephone, but you can leave a message for me at (718) 330-0911, or at the above address. A copy of my resume is attached.

Sincerely,



Nelson Jimenez



# Filling Out a Job Application

When you apply for a job, you will be asked to fill out a job application. The job application represents you to the employer, and how you fill it out tells the employer a lot about you. It is your chance to make a good impression on paper.

To fill out a job application, you will need to know a lot of information about yourself. It is a good idea to start gathering this information well in advance, so you can have it ready by the time you start looking for a job.

You might want to fill out the fact sheet on page 263, detach it from the book, and carry it with you whenever you go for a job. This way, important names, dates, and addresses will always be at your fingertips and you will save yourself time.

Remember, it is important that your writing be clear and neat in filling out a job application. It might be wise to print, unless you are told specifically “Write; Don’t Print.” And, of course, your signature is always written, never printed.

Look over the entire application before you begin, and think before you write. This way you will not make mistakes and have to cross out words. How neat you are tells the employer how careful you are as a person.

Try to answer all of the questions asked on the job application. If any do not pertain to you, it’s still recommended you put something in the space provided, such as “N.A.” (Not Applicable) or “None.” For example, if you have never served time in the Armed Forces, on the application form you would use “N.A.” in the following manner:

U.S. Military Experience	N.A.
Rank	N.A.

When asked about your criminal record on job applications, remember: It is illegal for an employer to ask you if you have ever been arrested. He or she can only ask you about your convictions.

If you are asked an illegal question, see page 240 (Special Considerations: How to Avoid Being Discriminated Against When Looking for Work). If asked whether you have ever been convicted of a crime, and you have been, answer YES and add WILL EXPLAIN AT INTERVIEW. I CAN BE BONDED. (For more detailed discussion, see *Appendix*, page 250.)

Some employers will interview you right after you fill out a job application. In this case, they will look over the application first, or in your presence, as a basis for the interview. Other employers, if they are interested, will interview you at a later date.

Job applications are usually divided into four major categories:

- Personal Information
- Educational Background
- Work Experience
- References

## Personal Information

For filling out the section on Personal Information, you will need to have available:

- a phone number or address where you can be reached
- your Social Security number
- your date of birth
- the name of someone who can be notified in case of emergency

You are also likely to be asked whether or not you’ve ever been convicted of a crime, if you have any disability which might interfere with your performing the job, whether or not you are a citizen, and what hobbies or pastimes you enjoy.

## Educational Background

To fill out information on your Educational Background, be sure to have with you as complete a record as possible of all the schools you’ve attended, such as grade school, junior and senior high school, and college. You’ll need to know where the schools are located, the years that you attended, and the type of degree or diploma you may have received.

If you received any on-the-job training, took classes in the military, or went to any special type of trade or vocational school, include it. If you've taken college classes, but not received a degree, show the number of credits that you earned.

### Work Experience

Under the category "Work Experience" you will probably be asked to list the jobs you have had, starting with the most recent and going back. For each, be prepared to give the name of your company or employer, its address, the dates when you were employed, the type of work you performed, your title, and, if asked, your supervisor's name, your salary, and the reasons for your leaving.

If you've never had many jobs, perhaps you have had some unpaid work experience where you picked up skills worth noting. Have you ever tutored, for example, helped someone renovate their house, done volunteer work for a community group, or babysat?

For suggestions on how to account in your work history for time incarcerated, see page 202.

### References

References are people familiar with either your work or your character whom the employer may wish to contact. They can include former employers, teachers, parole officers, or the clergy, among others, and you should have a current address and phone number for each. It is a good idea to notify your references in advance that you will be listing them. This prepares them for the possibility that they will be contacted and asked to say or write a few words in your support.

## Application for Employment



### General Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_ S.S. # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

How long at this address? \_\_\_\_\_ Previous address \_\_\_\_\_ How long there? \_\_\_\_\_

Position you are applying for \_\_\_\_\_ Salary/wage desired \_\_\_\_\_

Date available for work? \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have transportation to work?  Yes  No

Are you a United States Citizen or do you have a work visa?  
 Yes  No. If no, type of visa \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to transfer/relocate?  Yes  No

If so, geographic preference? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to travel?  Yes  No

Do you have a relative in the employ of Envenenado's?  Yes  No

If Yes, who? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been employed by Envenenado's before?  Yes  No

If so, when were you last employed? \_\_\_\_\_

Position Held:  Crew  Staff  Management

\*During the past 7 years, have you ever been convicted of a crime, excluding misdemeanors and traffic violations?  Yes  No

If yes, describe in full \_\_\_\_\_

*\*A conviction will not necessarily bar you from employment.*

### U.S. Military

Branch of service \_\_\_\_\_ Date Entered \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Discharge \_\_\_\_\_ Highest Rank Held \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have service-related skills and experience applicable to civilian employment?  Yes  No

If yes, describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a member of an active reserve or national guard unit?  Yes  No  
 If yes, what?  
 What are your obligations and when will they be fulfilled?

**Medical History**

Are you at least 18 years of age?  Yes  No  
 Are you at least 21 years of age?  Yes  No  
 Number of days you have been absent from work in last year due to illness \_\_\_\_\_  
 When did you last see a physician? \_\_\_\_\_  
 For what reason? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Do you have any physical deficiencies which preclude your performing certain kinds of work?  Yes  No  
 If yes, describe such deficiencies and specific work limitations: \_\_\_\_\_

In case of emergency, please notify:

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Education**

School name, City & State	Dates of attendance	Did you graduate? <small>(if yes, Mo./Yr.)</small>	Subjects	Average grades
High School				
College				
Graduate School				
Other				

**Employment Record** (Start with your last position. Show past 5 years.)

From (Mo./Yr.) To (Mo./Yr.)	Job Title	Supervisor's Name	Salary
Company Location	Reason for Leaving		
From (Mo./Yr.) To (Mo./Yr.)	Job Title	Supervisor's Name	Salary
Company Location	Reason for Leaving		
From (Mo./Yr.) To (Mo./Yr.)	Job Title	Supervisor's Name	Salary
Company Location	Reason for Leaving		

**References**

1. List two references other than relatives, persons employed by this company, or those for whom you have worked.

Name	Occupation	Years Known
Address		
<input type="radio"/> Personal <input type="radio"/> Friend <input type="radio"/> Business or <input type="radio"/> Professional Acquaintance		
Name	Occupation	Years Known
Address		
<input type="radio"/> Personal <input type="radio"/> Friend <input type="radio"/> Business or <input type="radio"/> Professional Acquaintance		



**Employment Application**

Name (First)	(Last)	Date
Address (Street and Number)		Social Security #
(City)	(State)	(Zip Code)
Type of Work Desired	When can you start?	

**Employment Background**

List below your three most recent employers, beginning with the current or most recent one. (If you have had fewer than three employers, use the remaining spaces for personal references.) If you were employed under a maiden or other name, please enter that name in the right hand margin.

May we contact your present employer?  Yes  No

(most recent first)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address (include zip code) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Type of work \_\_\_\_\_

Date started Date left Salary or wage

Reason for leaving \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address (include zip code) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Type of work \_\_\_\_\_

Date started Date left Salary or wage

Reason for leaving \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address (include zip code) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Type of work \_\_\_\_\_

Date started Date left Salary or wage

Reason for leaving \_\_\_\_\_

Foreign languages you speak fluently \_\_\_\_\_ Read \_\_\_\_\_

Licenses and Certificates Held \_\_\_\_\_

(Auto Driver, Truck Driver, Pilot, Marine, Radio, etc.)

**Education**

	Name and Address	Major Subject	Degree
High School			
College			
Graduate School			
Other Education			

**Military Experience**

Branch of Service \_\_\_\_\_ From (Mo./Yr.) \_\_\_\_\_ To (Mo./Yr.) \_\_\_\_\_

Active or Reserve \_\_\_\_\_ Rank/Rate \_\_\_\_\_ Specialization \_\_\_\_\_

Discharge Honorable Other (Explain) \_\_\_\_\_

**Citizenship**

Are you a citizen? Yes No

If no, Alien Registration Card No. \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have the legal right to work in this country? Yes No

**Physical**

Any health problems or physical defects which could affect your employment?

Yes No

If any such health problems or physical defects exist, please explain

**Conviction Record**

Have you ever been convicted of any violation of the law?

(Exclude minor Traffic Violations) Yes No

If yes, provide details in space below.

Offense Date	City and State	Dispositions, Suspensions, Probations, Fines, etc.

**Computer Skills****Hobbies & Interests****Character References** (Not relatives)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

To the best of my knowledge the above information is correct. I understand that Action Leather may wish to investigate my character and qualifications for employment by questioning my references and former employers and I have no objection to this. I understand that my employment is subject to a physical examination and a 90-day probation period.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

# Interviewing for a Job

**The Job Interview**

The job interview is probably the single most important step to getting a job. If you make a good impression during the interview, you may get the job — even if you don't have all the qualifications. On the other hand, if you make a bad impression, chances are you will not be offered the position, no matter how good your qualifications.

During the interview, the employer tries to determine how well you are qualified to fulfill the requirements of the job. At the same time, the interview allows you the opportunity to assess whether or not the job is right for you, and to demonstrate how your skills or qualifications can be a positive asset to the employer.

**Preparing for the Job Interview**

The following pointers can be of help to you in preparing for the interview:

- Know Your Qualifications
- Learn About the Company
- Bring the Materials You'll Need
- Go Alone to the Interview. Arrive Early. Be Courteous and Patient
- Dress Right

**KNOW YOUR QUALIFICATIONS**

Be sure that you can explain briefly and clearly what your qualifications are for the job, and how your past experience or training is applicable to your fulfilling the requirements of the position.

Be able to talk, if asked, about what you see as your major strengths and weaknesses. Avoid personal factors that have no relevance to performing the job in question. When discussing a weakness, show not only that you are aware of the problem, but the measures you have taken to help solve it. For example, "I used to find it difficult, being a mother, to get to work on time. So now, what I've done is to arrange with my daughter's babysitter for me to drop my daughter off twenty minutes earlier on my way to work. I am also now in the habit of waking up and leaving

my house earlier to make up for the frequent delays on my subway line.”

Be prepared for any tests you might have to take, such as a typing test, for which you may wish to practice.

#### LEARN ABOUT THE COMPANY

It is very helpful for you to learn something about the company and the job for which you are applying — before the interview. This way you will be better able to explain why you want to work for the particular company, and what it is about the particular job that attracted you. It also shows the employer how interested you are in the position and that you have taken the initiative to do some research. Some information you may wish to learn is: what does the company manufacture, or what services does the employer offer? How long has the company been in business? How well is the company doing? How many employees work there? For help in finding this type of information, start by visiting the public library. A librarian can help you access the company’s website, if they have one, or search for newspaper articles published about the company. Also, many large companies publish annual reports, which are available online and through the mail for no charge. And of course, if you know someone working for the employer, he or she may also be a good informal source of information.

Make a list of all the important questions you would like to have answered at the job interview. They might include: What are the work hours? What are the chances for advancement? What benefits does the company offer? Don’t be afraid to ask questions, but keep them relevant. It reflects interest on your part.

It might also be helpful before the interview to know what wages you can expect to be paid for the type of job for which you are applying. You can get this information at the local office of your state employment service or trade union.

#### BRING THE MATERIALS YOU’LL NEED

When you go for an interview, be sure to bring a pen and pencil, extra copies of your resume, and whatever special documents you may need.

Your resume or fact sheet should include the names and addresses of your past employers, and the dates of your employment. It should include the names of the schools and/or training programs you’ve attended, also with addresses and dates. Be sure to include a list of three references as well. References are people (preferably not related to you) who are familiar with your work or character. It is also important to bring with you to the interview any special documents you think you may need. Depending on the nature of the job, these may include a birth certificate, Social Security card, prison release papers, work permit, military records, etc. And, of course, don’t forget to bring with you the name of the person who will be interviewing you, and his or her title. If you are not sure of the pronunciation of the interviewer’s or company’s name, learn it in advance.

#### GO ALONE TO THE INTERVIEW. ARRIVE EARLY.

#### BE COURTEOUS AND PATIENT

Never bring friends or relatives with you to an interview. Employers are interested in you alone and what you have to offer.

Arrive at an interview five or ten minutes early. To avoid being late, plan out your route the night before. If you are taking public transportation, you may want to call the Transit Authority at 718.330.1234 for information on the best route to take, or for schedules.

When you arrive, tell the receptionist who you are, and whom you are waiting to see. Be polite at all times. Sit quietly and try not to get involved in any lengthy exchanges with either the receptionist or others who may be waiting.

Don’t get angry or annoyed if you are not called in for the interview at the exact time agreed upon. The interviewer might have been delayed at a meeting, or an unexpected piece of business may have come up. Use the time to review and compose your thoughts. This will be your first test of patience and good manners.

Note: It is impossible to tell how long an interview will take, so be sure not to arrange for two on the same day in such a way that you may be late for the second.

**DRESS RIGHT**

When you go for an interview, it is always best to dress appropriately. This is very important in helping you make a good impression. No loud makeup or flashy jewelry. No skintight jeans or slacks, or party dresses. Make sure your hair is clean and combed, your fingernails clean, your shoes shined, and your clothes well pressed.

One helpful piece of advice is to think about what the typical way to dress would be if you were to receive the job for which you are applying. Then, appear at the interview dressed one step “higher,” or more conservatively, than that. For example, a nice pair of slacks, shirt, and sweater would be appropriate dress for a male interviewing for a service station position – where jeans and a shirt would be the typical daily attire. For men, a tie and jacket, or for women, a skirt or dress pants and blouse, are appropriate attire for most office position interviews.

**The Do's & Don'ts of Job Interviewing**

- Be Respectful
- Be Relaxed. Listen Attentively
- Be Clear, Complete, and Brief in What You Say
- Be Positive in Your Approach
- Avoid the Negative
- Ending the Interview and Follow-up

**BE RESPECTFUL**

When you meet the interviewer, smile and be pleasant. For a handshake, it makes no difference who extends his or her hand first. Show the interviewer proper respect. Call him or her by Mr., Mrs., or Ms., and don't try to make small talk. Don't chew gum or smoke cigarettes, even if they are offered. Don't stare at the clock or your watch. Let the employer control the interview and do most of the talking. Never start an argument with the interviewer, even if he or she seems excessively aggressive in his or her approach. Always remain polite and friendly, but businesslike. Don't be afraid to smile.

**BE RELAXED. LISTEN ATTENTIVELY**

During the interview, try to be relaxed and listen carefully to what the interviewer has to say. If you are nervous (and it's perfectly

normal to be nervous during an interview!), refrain from fidgeting in your seat or playing with objects in your hands or on the desk. Body language counts. Sit straight and look the interviewer in the eyes during the conversation. Look interested and alert. And, of course, never go “high” to an interview.

**BE CLEAR, COMPLETE, AND BRIEF IN WHAT YOU SAY**

Speak clearly and distinctly. No street language. Don't answer with just “yes” or “no”; rather, give full information about yourself. Think before answering and be brief in your responses.

**BE POSITIVE IN YOUR APPROACH**

It is important that you stress your qualifications during the interview. Don't exaggerate, however, or try to bluff. Let the interviewer know why you think you would be good for the position, and how your past training and work experience will help you to get ahead on the job. Appear confident but never arrogant. If the interviewer fails to ask you something you feel is important, fill in the gap. If asked to tell about yourself generally, mention only those things which pertain to the job for which you are applying. Use what you have learned about the company to good advantage.

**AVOID THE NEGATIVE**

Keep all personal problems to yourself. Don't talk about your home or financial problems. The interviewer is only interested in finding a dependable and qualified person to fill the position. He or she is not concerned about your need for money. Emphasize what you can do, not what you can't. Don't dwell on your limitations. Don't apologize for lack of education or experience. There are many skills and talents you have developed which you can discuss in an appropriate way — if you learn how.

If you've been fired from a job, or stayed with jobs for only short periods of time, be prepared to explain. If you were fired, admit the mistakes you made, but show how you have learned from them. Never speak negatively about your former employers. If you stayed on jobs for only short periods of time, perhaps you quit to go back to school, or to look for a better-paying job with more responsibilities.

If you quit school, don't give as a reason, "I didn't like school." It is much better to say, if accurate, "I quit school because I needed to get a job and earn money to support my family." Interviewers are interested in hiring employees who are eager to upgrade themselves. Mention any classes or training programs you have attended since leaving school, or any that you may have planned for the near future.

#### ENDING THE INTERVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP

Ask any questions you may have about the job toward the end of the interview. Usually it is not a good idea to ask about such details as pay, lunch hours, or benefits unless the interviewer brings them up, or it is established that you are a strong contender for the job. If you are asked to discuss salary expectations, be prepared, and be realistic.

In most instances, the decision whether or not to hire you will not happen at the interview. If no indication is given when you can expect to hear from the firm, ask when you can call to learn the decision.

If it seems clear that you won't be getting the job, seek the employer's advice about other jobs with the firm which may come up.

At the end of the interview, always indicated by the interviewer, thank the employer for his or her time, give a firm handshake, and leave.

## Special Considerations: Telling the Truth About Your Conviction(s) When Applying for a Job

Counselors who work with inmates advise telling the truth about your conviction(s) when applying for a job. In this way, you will be more convincing as a person to a prospective employer, and not have to live in fear of being found out. Remember, employers have the legal right to inquire about past convictions.

In making your decision, consider the following:

#### **If You Tell the Truth About Your Conviction(s) While Job Hunting:**

You may be discriminated against in being hired, but there are advantages:

- You may be able to challenge an employer's decision by filing a discrimination claim.
- You will be more self-confident in talking about yourself, and more likely to project a positive self-image, as someone who may have had problems in the past, but has now reached self-understanding and is ready for responsibility.
- You will not have to worry about getting entangled in a net of lies.
- You will be more relaxed on the job, without having to worry about the employer learning of your record and firing you for having been dishonest.

#### **If You Hide the Truth About Your Conviction(s) While Job Hunting:**

You may, in some cases, avoid being discriminated against as an formerly incarcerated person, but there are disadvantages:

- You will constantly need to worry about being found out and, most probably, fired for being dishonest. Fingerprinting (sometimes not done until after the applicant is actually hired), a badly planned visit by a parole officer, or a call by a vengeful "friend" or family member may blow your cover at any time — as well as any long-range plans

- you may have requiring steady employment, such as meeting loan payments, paying off a house mortgage, etc.
- You may, where statements on applications are made under oath, or you are applying for certain government jobs, leave yourself open to the risk of criminal prosecution.
  - A person who provides you with a phony reference (for example on your work record) may be legally liable and can be sued if you were to commit another crime.

If you tell the truth, the law and the State are essentially on your side. However, once you lie, you have effectively given up rights protecting you from discrimination or awarding you damages in the event of being discriminated against. Having given your employer a valid pretext for firing you (dishonesty, supplying false information, etc.), you will no longer have the law in your favor.

For excellent advice on completing job applications as an formerly incarcerated person, see the National H.I.R.E. Network's website: [www.hirenetwork.org/employment\\_apps.html](http://www.hirenetwork.org/employment_apps.html)

## Special Considerations: How to Avoid Being Discriminated Against When Looking for Work

### Know Your Rights as an Ex-Inmate

It is important, when looking for work, that you know your rights as a person who has been incarcerated. There are laws that are specifically designed to protect you from discrimination. For example, you cannot be discriminated against because of arrests. Employers can only ask you legally about convictions. However, if you answer, you must be honest if your arrests did lead to convictions.

“Have you ever been arrested?” is an illegal question. You might be asked, and must answer the question, “Have you ever been convicted of a crime?”

Still, convictions cannot be held against you in applying for jobs, unless:

- They are related to the job for which you are applying. You may, for example, with a record of armed robbery, not be eligible for a job as a bank teller, but you may be eligible at the same time to work for the bank as a computer operator.
- You pose a threat to people or property because of your conviction. Here, considerations may focus on how many years ago you committed the crime, how old you were, and/or what rehabilitation you have been involved in since.

*Note: After revealing you are a person who has been incarcerated when applying for a job, and not being hired, you are legally entitled to a written explanation from the employer, within 30 days of your request, as to why you are not qualified or were not hired. Formerly incarcerated people are the only group in New York State that have this right.*

### Restore Your Rights

Apply, as soon as you are eligible, for a Certificate of Relief from Disabilities, or a Certificate of Good Conduct, (see page 191). These documents are an presumption of rehabilitation, and when you have them, the burden of proof is now on the employer to demonstrate that you would be a risk to people or property in being hired, or that your conviction is directly related to the job for which you are applying.

### Clean Up Your Rap Sheet

Review your rap sheet (official arrest record), credit report, and Office of Court Administration report and make certain that it does not list any information that is incomplete or inaccurate (see pages 193-195). Arrests that have not led to conviction, for example, or youthful offender adjudications can be officially sealed from your record. Sometimes, also, a single arrest or conviction is listed many times. Assume that every employer will have access to your rap sheet, and that many will not know how to interpret it correctly.



### **Get a Copy of the Job Application in Advance**

When applying for a job, it may be important for you to examine a copy, in advance, of the job application. You can usually do this by sending ahead, to the employer or hiring office, a friend or relative who can pretend to be interested in the job and bring you back a copy of the application. Once the form is in your hands, you can examine it, collect the necessary information, and plan how you will respond to the various questions.

### **At the Job Interview, Be Prepared to “Sell” Yourself as a Person Who Has Undergone Rehabilitative Change**

You may be asked by a prospective employer to talk about your past record. Be prepared. Take a positive approach. Show the ways you have changed since your last conviction. Have you participated in or helped run a prison pre-release program? Have you been involved in a prison or post-release alcohol or drug rehabilitation program, or spent time on work release? Mention the problem you feel contributed to your being sent to prison — and ways you have since confronted the problem and overcome it. For example, “I had a serious drug problem five years ago, and found I had to commit robberies in order to support my habit. In prison, however, I joined an effective therapy group composed of former addicts and learned to understand the underlying causes of my addiction. After release, I’ve spent 18 months in a drug-free residential program and now am fully confident that drug use is no longer a problem for me.”

*WARNING: Do not dwell needlessly on your past. If not asked details about your crime and conviction, don’t offer them. You are at the interview to persuade a prospective employer that you are suited for the job in question, not to apologize for past behavior or titillate his or her curiosity with stories of prison or criminal activity.*

### **Select Carefully Those References You Wish to Use on Your Resume and Job Application**

In choosing references for your resume and job application, select those individuals who can testify to your present-day character in the most positive light. Have on file letters from counselors, ministers, parole officers, or others that tell of the meaningful ways you have changed.

If you find in job hunting that you have been discriminated against because of your past record, call the Legal Action Center at 212.243.1313, and they can advise you on your rights and how to proceed accordingly.

Important information is contained in the Legal Action Center’s brochure, “Employment Discrimination and What to Do About It: A Guide for New York Counselors of Individuals in Recovery from Alcohol and Drug Dependence and Ex-Offenders,” available on the Internet at [www.hirenetwork.org/publications.html](http://www.hirenetwork.org/publications.html)

## **Special Considerations: Dealing with Alcoholism and Drug Abuse in Your Past**

If you have a history of drug or alcohol abuse, be aware:

- It is illegal for an employer to ask you whether or not you are or have ever been an alcoholic or drug addict. An employer can only ask if you have any current alcohol or drug problems which would prevent you from doing the job.
- It is illegal for an employer to discriminate against you as an ex-addict or ex-alcoholic (or, in certain instances, as a current abuser of alcohol or drugs). If you have been refused employment and believe it was owing to your having a history of drug or alcohol addiction, and/or to your being in an alcohol- or drug-treatment program, including methadone, contact:

The New York State Division of Human Rights at 718.741.8400, or the Legal Action Center at 212.243.1313.

Do not lie about your drug- or alcohol-addiction background. To begin, there are several ways an employer can discover your addiction problem. A careful check into your background, a drug

conviction, or a medical exam (often required as part of the hiring process) would easily uncover the truth, and you would then, in all probability, be fired for having been dishonest. Also, if you withhold the truth and are later found out and fired, you are left with no legal means to challenge what might have been an illegal dismissal. Misrepresentation on a job application is considered a legitimate reason for not hiring an applicant or dismissing an employee once hired. At the same time, it should be noted that federal confidentiality laws prohibit most drug- or alcohol-treatment programs from revealing any information about your treatment without your consent.

Many ex-alcoholics and ex-addicts have criminal histories and poor work records that can be directly related to their addictions. This may serve, strangely enough, to their advantage. Consider: no employer would be eager to hire a person who has three serious problems in his or her past — a spotty work record, a history of addiction, and a criminal record. Now, let us suppose that a job applicant can argue persuasively that (1) his or her poor work record and criminal activity were directly attributable to his or her addiction, and (2) he or she has, through a drug program or counseling, overcome the addiction and the psychological causes underlying it. The three problems have now been reduced to one — addiction, and the applicant has a better chance of convincing the employer that the past is finished, and he or she is now ready to take on the responsibilities of a job.



## After the Interview

## Being Offered a Job

When deciding whether or not to accept a job offer, or if you need to decide between two or more jobs, you may wish to take into consideration the following factors:

### Job Potential

Ask yourself whether the job will offer you some challenge. Is the job dead-end, or will you be given the opportunity to work your way up to positions of more responsibility and higher pay?

It is good, of course, if given the chance, to avoid dead-end jobs — that is, jobs that offer no opportunities for future promotion or job advancement. There are times, however, in our lives when such jobs can serve useful ends. They do help pay the bills, give us work experience, and can hold us over until a better job opportunity presents itself. The important thing in accepting such a job is to realize that it is only temporary. It is a way of surviving and keeping out of trouble, financially or otherwise, until we get that college degree, or finish that evening computer training program, or hear of a better opening. Try never to lose sight of your long-range career goals, or to stop working toward them, when you find yourself “stuck” at a boring job that seems to be leading nowhere.

### Salary

Salary, of course, is a very important factor in considering a job offer. Find out, for example, whether you will be receiving a fixed salary each pay period, or whether your salary is to be dependent on commissions or tips. Also, find out if there will be opportunities for earning extra cash on the job, say, by working overtime.

In choosing between two jobs, a person will not always decide to take the one offering the higher salary. Important considerations, other than salary alone, may include better working conditions or fringe benefits, more opportunities for training or job advancement, and job challenge.

### Fringe Benefits

Fringe benefits are benefits you receive from an employer in addition to your cash wages. They may include the following: medical insurance; paid sick leave; paid holidays and vacation; a profit-sharing plan; uniforms and special equipment needed on the job; or tuition assistance to continue your schooling.

Benefits are like cash in that they pay for things, such as doctors' bills, which otherwise would have to come out of your own pocket. It is important, then, to find out what fringe benefits are offered at the job you are considering.

It may also be important for you to know whether or not the job you are considering is covered by unemployment insurance or worker's compensation laws.

Other factors worth your consideration are:

- Transportation time and costs to and from the job
- Working conditions, such as noise levels, lighting, dust
- Safety factors, such as risks of injury
- Social environment. Does the workplace seem pleasant? How regimented is it? Are the coworkers friendly?

## Helpful Hints in Adjusting to a New Job

To adjust to a new job, a worker often has to develop a new set of work habits. The most obvious are being prompt in getting to work each day, expending the necessary amount of concentration and energy to getting one's work done satisfactorily, and learning to relate well with one's coworkers and supervisor.

The longer you've been away from the outside work world, or the less experience you've had in “playing it straight,” the more discipline and patience all of this is going to require. Responsibility,

after all, is not something you were encouraged to develop while in prison, where most decisions, both large and small, were probably made for you. So don't expect that starting a new job after your release will necessarily be easy. Just know that you can succeed (millions of others have), and that it will require time. The following hints may be of help to you in adjusting to a new job:

### **Be Both Dependable and Responsible**

Don't appear late for work or be absent without having a good reason. If you are going to be late, or can't make it to work, call in. If you offer to do a task, or are asked to do one, make sure it gets done. Don't promise to do more than you can reasonably handle.

### **Be Patient**

Don't expect too much of yourself when you first begin a new job. There is a lot to be learned — even in simple jobs, much more than meets the eye. You may be nervous or scared the first week or two. This is not unusual. Just remember, your employer is as anxious as you are for you to succeed.

### **Learn to Follow Directions**

There are usually valid reasons why you are told to perform tasks the way that you are. Your success as a worker will be judged to a very large extent on your ability to listen and to do as you are told. If you need to understand something better, don't be afraid to ask questions.

### **Get Along Well with Others**

Performing your job assignment is only one aspect of job adjustment. Equally important, in the eyes of the employer, is your ability to get along with your co-workers and/or the public you serve. Control your temper. If a problem occurs at work, see your supervisor or shop steward and talk it out.

### **Learn to Take Criticism**

It is easy for anyone to become hurt or to feel defensive when his or her work is being criticized. Learn not to take criticism personally. When accepted wisely, criticism is an important step to learning.

### **Leave Personal Problems at Home**

Work often offers you the opportunity to socialize with coworkers and, indeed, socializing is an important feature of the total work experience. Still, it is important to remember that your main reason for being at work is to perform your job. Don't let personal problems interfere with work. We all know how hard it is to have to put up with a coworker who arrives at the job everyday frustrated and angry because of a personal situation at home. Likewise, it is unfair to take lots of time rapping with a coworker about your personal affairs when it may well end up jeopardizing both your jobs.

## Leaving a Job

Three common ways of leaving a job are:

- Quitting
- Getting laid off
- Getting fired

If you decide to quit your present job, it is almost always advisable to secure another job first. Here are two good reasons: (a) we are living in a time of high unemployment, when job opportunities in most fields are scarce, and (b) employers generally prefer choosing new job applicants from the ranks of the already employed, not the unemployed.

If you quit a job, be sure to give your current employer at least two weeks' notice. He or she will be more likely to give you a good recommendation for your next job.

When you are thinking about quitting a job, or have just been laid off or fired from one, investigate the following:

- Is your job covered by unemployment insurance? If so, will you be eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits?
- If you were laid off or fired, do you have any recourse? Can you appeal the decision to anyone in the personnel department or union?

- If you were laid off or fired, is there any severance pay that you can collect?
- What will happen when you leave the job in terms of your pension, your health insurance coverage, and your unused vacation and sick time?

The following passages are excerpts from the **Offender Re-Entry Guide**,\* from Offender Employment Services (formerly Corrections Clearinghouse), a project of the Washington State Employment Security Department. The suggestions from the Guide, reprinted here, may be applied to filling out application forms and writing resumes.

### Disclosing a Felony Conviction

It is particularly important for offenders to be truthful in filling out applications. However, the truth must be told in a way for the offender to get screened-in and invited to a face-to-face interview.

#### Question

“Have you ever been convicted of a felony?” Yes No  
If yes, it is recommended that the offender fill out the question as follows:

Have you ever been convicted of a felony?  Yes  No  
If yes, please explain: Will explain at interview. I can be bonded.

*Below are some compelling reasons to answer the question in this way.*

- It allows you to be honest, yet protects your privacy by controlling who knows about the specific conviction.
- Stating that the felony is not job related and that the applicant is bondable may help calm the employer’s fears and perhaps even pique the employer’s curiosity enough to call you in for an interview.
- Many Community Supervision Officers will tell an employer whether you have a felony or not.
- If an employer is going to find out, it is better to hear it from you.
- You control the flow of information — how it’s worded, how it’s presented.
- Once hired, you don’t have to be constantly looking over your shoulder, afraid that someone will find out.

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## Being Unemployed

If, after working at a job, you suddenly find yourself unemployed through no fault of your own, you may be eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. Your former job will have to have been covered by unemployment insurance (most jobs are), and, if eligible to receive benefits, you must declare yourself ready, willing, and able to work if a new, appropriate employment opportunity is found.

For recorded information on unemployment insurance, call 888.209.8124 (Spanish also spoken). You will be asked by the local office to begin by bringing in your Social Security number and one or two other pieces of identification. (A pay stub from your former job would also be helpful.) If you are eligible for benefits, there is a two- or three-week processing period, after which you will receive cash benefits (an amount proportionate to the salary you received and the amount of time you worked) for at least 26 weeks.

While unemployed, you may also be eligible to receive other types of benefits. These can include food stamps or Medicaid (see the chapter on Financial Assistance), or union benefits, if you were a dues-paying member of a union where you last worked. Being unemployed, you may also find yourself eligible for special attention in programs designed to help the unemployed find work or further their education and training.

- Most employers do background checks.
- In the interview, you can talk about how productive you were in prison.

**Below is a list of other options for answering this question and probable consequences.**

Check “YES” and write the conviction.

The candidate would likely be screened out and would lose any privacy because anyone in the office who saw the application would know about the conviction.

Leave the question blank and/or put N/A.

The application would appear incomplete and it would appear that the applicant is hiding something. When disclosing the felony at the interview, it would be awkward to explain why the questions are not filled in truthfully.

Check “NO” and lie.

This appears to be the easiest route for many offenders and may help you get a job for the short term, but the longer-term **consequences include:**

- Not being hired because the lie was found out.
- Being fired as soon as the background check comes back.
- Carrying around emotional baggage wondering when you will be found out.
- Reinforcing stereotypes.
- Prosecution — especially if you applied for a federal job.

Most employers do background checks before employees are promoted. So if an offender lied on the application, stayed with the company for a few years, became eligible for promotion, and the lie was exposed, the offender could:

- Lose a good job.
- Lose a good reference.
- Lose financial stability.
- Lose self-esteem.

**Question:**

What should I write if the question about conviction asks me to “explain”? Always write “will explain at interview.” This will keep everyone who may view your application from knowing your personal business.

**Question:**

How do I cover time in prison on the “Work Experience” portion of the application? List only 2 or 3 of the jobs that may be in line with your future employment goals. If you did any work during your incarceration (i.e., janitor, cook, clerk, and/or firefighter) submit the jobs in which you gained significant hands-on experience. Describe jobs that reflect skills gained, abilities developed, and accomplishments earned.

Example: If you worked both in the kitchen and as a janitor while incarcerated, you would indicate both jobs for your incarceration period and list only the year for dates of employment even though you may have moved from facility to facility and from job to job.

**Question:**

How do I complete the “business name”?  
Use the abbreviated name of jail or correctional facility.

Example: If you worked as a janitor, cook, painter, etc., you worked for the abbreviation of the Jail or Correctional Facility.  
Chelan County Regional Justice Center=Chelan Co. RJC;  
Washington Corrections Center=Washington CC.

**Question:**

How about completing the “salary” portion of Job Experience? You should complete wage or salary by stating “stipend” on your application.

Example: Salary Stipend hourly N/A. See the example that follows. At the time of your interview you will be prepared to discuss your incarceration.



# Fact Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_

## Schooling

EDUCATION	NAME & ADDRESS OF SCHOOL	YEARS ATTENDED	MAIN COURSE OF STUDY	DEGREE RECEIVED
-----------	--------------------------	----------------	----------------------	-----------------

Grade School \_\_\_\_\_

Senior H.S. \_\_\_\_\_

Vocational \_\_\_\_\_

College \_\_\_\_\_

Business/Corres. \_\_\_\_\_

Other Training \_\_\_\_\_

## Experience

EMPLOYER'S NAME & ADDRESS	NAME OF SUPERVISOR	FROM/TO	SALARY	REASON FOR LEAVING
---------------------------	--------------------	---------	--------	--------------------

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## References

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE NUMBER
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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Other Information

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Question:

What about completing the "address" portion of Job History? Do not use P.O. Boxes. Use only the city and state as the address, or only the street address of the institution. The reason is that some people associate "P.O. Boxes" with prison in certain towns.

### Question:

How to complete the "reason for leaving" portion of Work Experience? Correct responses can be "Relocated," "Contract ended," "Transferred," or "Pursued other opportunities."

What follows is an example of a Work Experience response. Please note the reason for completing the "Work Experience" portion this way is to get your application past whoever may be screening applications for interviews. It is vital that your "Work Experience" is complete, yet, don't advertise your incarceration. That information is only between you and the interviewer, not anyone who may see your application.

Example: WORK EXPERIENCE SECTION

Name: Twin River CC or County RJC

Address: Monroe, Washington

Supervisor: N/A

Dates: From June 1, 1988 to June 30, 1989

Position: Cook

Rate of Pay: Stipend per N/A

Reason for Leaving: Relocated

# Interviewing for a Job

## To Prepare:

Know your qualifications

Learn about the company

Bring the materials you'll need

Go Alone. Arrive early. Be courteous and patient

Dress right

## At the Interview:

Be respectful. Be relaxed. Listen attentively

Be clear, complete, and brief in what you say

Be positive in your approach

Avoid the negative

Good Luck!



## Personal Skills Worksheet

### Skills I Learned on Jobs or in Job-Training Programs:

### Skills I Learned Off the Job, or in Volunteer Work (house repair, automotive, child care, etc.)

### Skills I Learned While in Prison:

### Language Skills (I speak Spanish, for example):

### Licenses I Hold (driver's licenses, trade licenses, etc.):

### Personal Strengths

- Am I reliable?
- Can I follow directions?
- Do I work well with others?
- Can I be depended upon to complete tasks given me?
- Am I punctual?
- Do I work well under stress?



# Record of Job Contacts Made

**Name of Agency**

**Address**

**Phone Number**

**Name of Contact Person**

**Date & Time of Appointment**

**Travel Directions**

**Comments**

**Name of Agency**

**Address**

**Phone Number**

**Name of Contact Person**

**Date & Time of Appointment**

**Travel Directions**

**Comments**

**Name of Agency**

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**Travel Directions**

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**Comments**

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**Name of Agency**

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**Address**

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**Phone Number**

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**Name of Contact Person**

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**Date & Time of Appointment**

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**Travel Directions**

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**Comments**

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**Name of Agency**

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**Address**

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**Phone Number**

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**Name of Contact Person**

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**Date & Time of Appointment**

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**Travel Directions**

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**Comments**

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**Notes**

**Notes**