

QUICK

JOB SEARCH GUIDE FOR EX-OFFENDERS

Seven Steps to Finding a Job Fast

Second Edition

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INSTRUCTOR'S RESOURCE



St. Paul

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Most professionals agree that employment is a key to reducing recidivism. Studies show that the majority of offenders who violate probation or parole are unemployed at the time. Steady employment provides much more than a paycheck. It bolsters ex-offenders' work experience and teaches much-needed skills. By building up their training and work history and earning the respect and recommendations of their employers, ex-offenders stand the best chance of successfully reintegrating into society, moving up the career ladder, and living a satisfying and crime-free life.

The job search can be especially difficult for ex-offenders. In addition to financial barriers, transportation issues, and mental and physical health concerns, ex-offenders face the stigma of their records and employers who often see them as too risky to hire. According to one study, only 12.5% of employers say they would accept an applicant with a criminal record. Ex-offenders have to work extra hard to convince employers that they are dependable and committed and eager to learn on the job. To do so, ex-offenders need coaching on job search techniques specific to their circumstances.

Designed specifically to meet the needs of job seekers who are ex-offenders, the *Quick Job Search for Ex-Offenders* provides advice to help them overcome their barriers to employment so they can find jobs faster, thereby increasing their chances of successful reintegration. It also provides job search strategies and advice that is directly applicable to the concerns faced by ex-offenders. The booklet introduces job seekers to resources that are available to assist ex-offenders in their job searches. In its hands-on approach, the booklet reinforces the importance for ex-offenders to take responsibility for the decisions and actions they take.

Topics Covered

While there are more comprehensive job search resources available, the time that a counselor, instructor, or case manager can give to an ex-offender is often limited. If you have only a short time to work with someone, some points are more important to explain than others, and those points are included in *Quick Job Search Guide for Ex-Offenders*.

The *Quick Job Search Guide for Ex-Offenders* contains practical advice that helps job seekers do the following:

- Develop positive attitudes and self images.
- Build support networks and tap into community resources to assist in the job search.
- Identify their key skills.
- Identify and research realistic job targets.
- Effectively fill out applications and create resumes, cover letters, and other job search tools.

- Learn and use the most effective job search methods.
- Create and follow job search plans.
- Improve their interviewing skills and learn to follow up.
- Address their incarceration histories in all phases of the job search.

Using the Booklet

The *Quick Job Search Guide for Ex-Offenders* booklet can be used in multiple ways:

- **As a giveaway to offenders preparing for release or to ex-offenders in a post-release program.** The booklet is inexpensive enough to give to each person who needs its information. In addition, it can be a valuable resource to ex-offenders throughout their lives, not just during their initial reintegration efforts. How you distribute it and other, related material will vary by your program and resources.
- **As the basis for a workshop or class.** The booklet can be used as the primary text in a pre-release or post-release program. The most important topics can be covered in as little as an hour, but it is easy to use it to structure a longer workshop or a series of class or group sessions. The content is flexible, so it can be used to fit whatever program format you have. For example, some worksheets can be completed at home and reviewed in the session or be assigned for completion after the workshop.
- **As homework to support individual counseling or case management.** If you do not have the advantage of providing group instruction, you can use the *Quick Job Search Guide for Ex-Offenders* to assist in individual job coaching. This is easily done by assigning sections to be completed at home, and then reviewing the material one on one. Depending on the particular barriers and circumstances facing your clients, you may wish to emphasize some steps over others. (For example, focusing on “Step 6: Improve Your Interview Skills” the day before a job interview.)

Using the Booklet in a Group Setting

While the *Quick Job Search Guide for Ex-Offenders* is an effective resource for individual ex-offenders in counseling or case management settings it can be just as effective in a workshop or other group setting. Here are some tips for using this resource in a structured group setting:

- Consider starting with “Step 2: Identify Your Skills.” Step 1 addresses basic needs that may vary widely with each individual and often require a more focused intervention. Step 2 begins to address the specifics of the job search. Have participants fill out the worksheets so that they can use their skills knowledge throughout the session(s).

- If you have access to a library and/or the Internet, consider using them when working through “Step 3: Identify Job Targets.” Help offenders use career exploration resources to find information about industries and employers they might be interested in. In addition, access to computers with word processing programs or resume writing software can be useful when preparing the job search documents discussed in “Step 4: Get Your Documents in Order.”
- Using the sample documents from Step 4, organize a writing workshop where participants compose and critique their own resumes and JIST Cards.
- Use the “Top 10 Problem Interview Questions” on page 47 as the basis of role-play exercises. You can also use role-play to help participants practice addressing their incarceration histories in an interview setting.

Additional Instructional Resources

JIST Publishing has outstanding resources for instructors and other professionals on job search topics. Call for a catalog (800-328-1452) or visit <http://JIST.com> for details. The following materials will be particularly helpful for use with the *Quick Job Search Guide for Ex-Offenders*:

- **Videos and video series.** JIST Publishing offers videos specifically developed to help ex-offenders overcome their barriers and engage in successful job searches. Videos can provide a change of pace to supplement or replace lectures. The *Countdown to Freedom* video series takes offenders step-by-step through the transition from incarceration to community integration and is available in editions for both men and women. Also, the *Expert Job Search Strategies for the Ex-Offender Video Series* teaches viewers how to create career plans, develop resumes that impresses employers, and succeed in interviews.
- **Pocket Book of Job Search Data & Tips.** This small booklet fits in a pocket or purse. It collects and organizes details needed during a job search, such as addresses and phone numbers, lists of key skills and experiences, detailed work history, and tips for interviewing and job seeking. The booklet is a handy reference to have when filling out applications or preparing for an interview.
- **Assessments.** Assessments are useful for establishing career interests, evaluating job search knowledge and attitudes, tracking ex-offender progress, and helping clients overcome their barriers to employment. The *Offender Reintegration Scale* is a simple, 60-item inventory that helps offenders and ex-offenders assess their personal barriers and concerns regarding reentry. It can be used as a screening or tracking tool or simply as a means of generating self-reflection and discussion.

- **Career reference books.** Career reference materials can be useful when researching jobs and industries. Job seekers can use the job descriptions in these books to find probable salary ranges, assess job growth, and pinpoint skills to emphasize in the interview. The most popular career reference books include the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and the *O*NET Dictionary of Occupational Titles*.

In Closing

Remember to find ways to engage your clients and participants in taking active roles in their job search processes. The more control they feel they have over their reentry, the better their chances for success.