

Road to Reentry Video Series

Finding Employment

Instructor's Guide

Overview

Formerly incarcerated individuals need to find work. A steady paycheck won't solve every problem, but it is often the key to making a successful transition and staying out of prison. Finding the right job requires time and energy, perseverance, the right attitude, and a desired skill set. Competition can be stiff and employers can afford to be picky when it comes to choosing whom to hire. Because employers are permitted to ask if applicants if they've ever been convicted of a crime, and because applicants are expected to answer honestly, formerly incarcerated individuals have a more difficult time finding work.

This video outlines specific strategies individuals can use to help them get a job after release. It identifies the most effective ways to find job leads, provides tips for the application process, including writing resumes and cover letters, and explains how to handle one's criminal history during the interview.

Note that the job-search process is stressful for most people. The formerly incarcerated especially feel the financial pressure of needing to find a job quickly, combined with a fear of discrimination. If they have been at the job search for a while, they may feel helpless or angry. The key is to empower these individuals by providing them with practical tools and strategies that can make the job search process easier and lead to greater success.

Presentation Suggestions

Ask participants to think about the difficulties they've faced already when it comes to finding employment. What is the hardest part of the process? Is it writing a resume? Finding job leads? Is it addressing their criminal history on an application or discussing it in an interview? Try to get a sense of where participants are in the job search process and what aspects of it seem to challenge them the most. Consider making a list of all of the barriers faced by participants when it comes to finding a job, then assure participants that there are strategies they can use to overcome each barrier.

When you feel participants have a sense of what they are up against, give them the **Anticipation Quiz** to complete prior to watching the video. If you wish, allow the participants to state their answers and discuss them as a group.

Show the video. Encourage participants to make changes to the answers they put down for the Anticipation Quiz while watching the video. If you wish, allow time for participants to do update their answers after each section. At the conclusion of the video, ask participants to discuss any changes they made to the answers on the Anticipation Quiz as a result of

information in the video. Follow up the discussion with the **Activities**.

Use the **Discussion Questions** to request oral or written responses from participants, or assign the questions as homework essays.

Give the **Quick Quiz** at the conclusion of class and correct the quizzes as a group.

Assign the **Homework Option**, if desired.

Anticipation Quiz

Directions: Answer the following questions as completely as possible. You may revise your answers as you watch the video.

1. True or false: Some employers can legally refuse to hire formerly incarcerated individuals for safety or security reasons.
2. What are some things you should consider when choosing the kinds of jobs you'd like to apply for?
3. What are the most effective ways to find job openings?
4. What is a cover letter and why do you need one?
5. What can you do to make a positive first impression during an interview?

Answer Key

1. True
2. (Answers may vary.) Before deciding to apply, ask yourself: Do I have the required skills? Does my record exclude me from being able to work at this type of job? Do I meet the education requirements? Can I physically and mentally handle the work?
3. (Answers may vary.) Find available jobs, by networking, using social media sites, using job search engines online, and taking advantage of non-profit organizations' resources.
4. Cover letters emphasize your most applicable skills and work experience while avoiding any mention of your conviction. They also show off your writing ability. Cover letters specifically target the employers and their needs.
5. (Answers may vary.) To make a positive first impression, be sure to dress and groom professionally, show up on time, be courteous, smile and shake hands, maintain eye contact, stand or sit up straight, speak clearly, and have a positive attitude.

Activities

Activity #1

Title: Mad Skills

Format: Individual/Small Group

Time: 20-30 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper

Procedure:

1. The first step toward finding employment is identifying the kinds of jobs you are qualified for. That means honestly assessing the skills, experience, and character traits you have that make you a good match for a particular line of work.

To begin, have each participant divide a sheet of paper into three columns and label them as follows: **Specific Job-related Skills** (such as the ability to operate special equipment), **Transferable Skills** (such as being a good communicator), **Personal Attributes** (such as being reliable). Discuss the difference between each, providing specific examples, then have participants brainstorm the skills and attributes they bring to the table, leaving some space at the bottom of the page.

2. When participants have finished with their lists, break them into groups of three or four and have them read their lists to each other. After each participant reads his or her list, the other members of the group should help that person brainstorm the kinds of jobs that would match that participant's skillset. Each participant should list these job possibilities at the bottom of the page.
3. Come back together as a class and discuss how this list of skills can be useful in all aspects of the job search process, including writing a resume, filling out applications, and answering interview questions.

Activity #2

Title: Mock Interview: *The Question*

Format: Pairs

Time: 40 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper

Procedure:

1. The best way to effectively prepare for an interview is to practice answering the kinds of questions you will most likely be asked—especially those questions that you are most nervous about answering. Have participants write down three or four questions that they've been asked in an interview before, with special emphasis on questions that have given them difficulty. Then have participants write down one more question if they haven't already: "I see you answered yes to the question about a felony

conviction on your application, saying you'd prefer to discuss it in person. Now's your chance."

2. Split participants into pairs and have them engage in mock interviews with each other using the questions they've written down. Be sure they each have a chance to practice being the interviewer and interviewee. After twenty minutes or so, come back together as a group and discuss which questions seemed the most difficult and what answers seemed most effective. If you'd like, you can provide sample answers that you consider effective as well, especially to the question of past conviction. Also be sure to emphasize the non-verbal aspects of interviewing: posture, mannerisms, facial expressions, etc. Consider ending the activity with one of your participants mock-interviewing you.

Discussion Questions

1. Finding a job is difficult for most people, but it can be harder on individuals who have served time. What specific barriers do formerly incarcerated individuals face that others don't when it comes to finding a job? Which aspects of the job search seem more difficult as a result of having been incarcerated? What stigmas and stereotypes do formerly incarcerated individuals need to overcome in order to be successful in finding a job?
2. As a person who with a conviction, you will have the often difficult task of convincing people—especially employers—that you've changed, that you've learned from your mistakes and are a responsible and upstanding individual. How do you go about convincing those around you that you are ready to reenter society? What will you say to employers who ask you what your experience in prison has taught you? What aspects of your personality or personal growth can you highlight that will convince them to take a chance on hiring you despite your past?

Quick Quiz

Note: You may read these questions out loud, allowing time for participants to respond, or copy and hand this out as a written exercise. If you read the quiz, write or project responses for the group to see.

Directions: Indicate whether each statement is true or false, according to the video.

1. Networking is *not* an effective strategy for finding job openings.
2. Job assignments and work details while incarcerated can help fill in the gaps in your work history and emphasize your transferable skills.
3. Social networking sites, such as Facebook or LinkedIn can sometimes lead to job opportunities.

4. Functional resumes focus more on work history than skills.
5. The interview is the usually the worst time to discuss your conviction.
6. A high school diploma or equivalent level of education is a basic requirement for most jobs.
7. Volunteering is a good way to get your foot in the door of an industry that you'd like to work in.
8. Becoming involved in your community can lead to networking opportunities and job leads.
9. It is best to write "negotiable" on job applications when asked by salary or wage requirements.
10. It is often best to lie about your conviction on an application so that you can get an interview.

Answer Key

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|----------|-----------|
| 1. False | 6. True |
| 2. True | 7. True |
| 3. True | 8. True |
| 4. False | 9. True |
| 5. False | 10. False |

Homework Option

Much of the work of finding a job will have to be done on an individual's own time. Finding job leads can be an especially time-consuming process. Using some of the strategies discussed in the video (networking, searching online), have participants identify three to five potential job leads before your next meeting. Have them research the companies that are hiring and bring in all the information they need to start the application process. Then you can spend class time discussing how best to approach the employer to set up an interview.