

Returning Citizens Guide to Employment

The following guide is intended to help you receive a job offer, overcoming some of the obstacles encountered by returning citizens.

Let's start with who you are

Getting started it is important to know your personal profile; this includes what you are good at doing, as well as the areas you may not be equipped to take on. So, the first thing you should do is take a personal inventory. What goes into this inventory?

Skills – These are things you know you're good at, people tell you so. Maybe you have electrical systems or computer skills, and/or maybe you're the best worker you know when it comes to manual work or assembly work.

Competencies – Are you a team player, resourceful, critical thinker, analytical, socially gifted, a good communicator, hard worker, loyal, etc.? Think about the things you know to be true about your abilities, things you've demonstrated in school or jobs

Experience – Employers look to the jobs you've done in the past so that experience is an indicator of the things you can do and how you will contribute to the prospective employer's work needs.

Desire – sure some of us might want to be the head of a company, but let's take one step at a time. What do you like to do; work with your hands, your mind, engage with people, calculate figures, computer programming, etc.?

Now take a look at your inventory – the best job fit is likely to be where skills, competencies, and experience intersect with things you like doing. From this, put together a statement on who you are and your job mission – it will be useful to you as you determine the jobs you want to apply for, and the ones you will have the best chance to get and succeed in.

The Basics

You want to get out into the market and be chosen for a good job. Well, let's get ready for it.

In GetFive, a job seeker's employment site, they urge you to act like a consultant when seeking employment at a company. I interpret this in two ways.

First, study the company – get to know who they are, their mission, what their reputation is, their goals, see what people say about them on Glassdoor, LinkedIn or other employer feedback sites.

Second, using what you found out about yourself match the company and job with you – the values you share, how you can help them achieve their mission (no matter how small a part). Use this compatibility in your cover letter and interview. As a consultant you are thinking about the value you can add and how you can contribute to the team and company.

Let's get to the interview:

The first interview is often over the phone – get prepared and have your notes with you. Be ready with the statement of who you are, how you fit the job, what you know about the company, why you want the job – AND listen – if you concentrate too much on what you want to say you may miss valuable clues to what is important to the interviewer, and their true needs. Speak clearly and without slang terms.

If your interview is in person, you will want to use all of the above, but also add the appearance factor. Dress well – clean and professional. What you've heard about the first impression is true – it may not be fair but if you look good, speak clearly, act engaged (posture and interaction) and are punctual you have a much better chance of landing the job.

Tip – be positive and present your case. If you feel you could do the job when experience on your resume doesn't match, make your case and talk about life experiences that offer you particular insight on the duties. State how you'd go about learning those duties. But, also know, not every job is a fit and there's no advantage in trying to say "you can do it all" if there are duties foreign to your skills.

Discussing the break in employment

So what about the tough question? When do you discuss your record? You should do it when you feel it is right for you, but the answer on timing is it depends. Why is that? We prefer to discuss this topic naturally, in the course of the employer's process. Here's what I mean.

Early in the process - Is the question on the application? While many employers have stopped asking about a felony offense on their applications it may still be there. Answer the question or check the box honestly, and if possible on the application make a point noting you look forward to discussing the issue with the employer upon interview. No more, no less.

Within the interview process – this is perhaps the best time to discuss your history, because there is a natural time to review the gap in employment or the location noted on your application for your work history in prison. When you and the employer are discussing your chronology the timing is natural to cover your prison term and circumstance. I'll cover how to discuss momentarily.

Late in the process – perhaps you've gotten through the interview and your record never came up. Do you volunteer it then? This is a mixed bag; let's say you feel the interview process has gone well and you, perhaps rightfully, believe it has nothing to do with the job. That's fair. But, if there's a background investigation for the job you'll want to comment now before the investigation is conducted.

How do I discuss my record?

Simply stated – be concise and honest. Practice this moment and be ready. You should briefly recount the offense, take accountability for your part, and honestly note what you learned from this life event (how have you changed personally, and what you do differently now as a result). The interviewer may want to probe further – answer directly and clearly, but be aware, over-explaining and going into too much detail can be a distraction.

In a document of this length we can't detail all the important factors of seeking employment but hopefully this guide will aid you in your job search.

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