[First Things First: The Mindset](https://exoffenders.net/finding-jobs-felony/)

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Finding a job with a felony is going to be difficult, so you’re going to have to prepare yourself for a struggle. For me, prison was easy compared to my re-entry process when I got out. Companies that are “felon friendly” are starting to dwindle, and it’s becoming increasingly harder for felons to find jobs. But you don’t have to tell an ex-offender that, he or she is already dealing with the discrimination on a daily basis.

You have to prepare yourself for a fight. Go into it with a positive outlook, but understand that you’re going to encounter a lot of negativity. A lot of HR departments and hiring managers will throw your application out if they see you’ve checked the “Have you ever been convicted” box. They might not publicly say that they do this, but you and I both know better. There is some more information on how to handle that question box, as well as other resources for finding a job with a felony, on [Exoffenders.net](https://exoffenders.net/).

**Understand that it’s going to be a struggle.** Personally, when I was released from prison, I applied to over 80 different companies in my area. I received call-backs from 4 or 5, and none of them were what I would consider a “career.” But I did land a job which worked for the time being. I figured it is better to work at a bad job making crap money than not working at all.  Sometimes you just have to grin and bear it, muscle through until to you get to the light at the end of the tunnel. Sometimes a crappy job is just a springboard when you’re trying to find a job with a felony.

**Avoid the defeatist attitude!** This is an extremely common pitfall for ex-offenders, and I see it all the time in the comments on Exoffenders.net *(site won’t open).* You’re going to get denied employment. It is absolutely going to happen, barring some incredible stroke of luck. You cannot, under any circumstances, talk yourself into quitting this job hunt. It’s happened to me, I’ll admit, and it really held me back for my first year or so after I was released. It’s so easy to revert back to what we know, which usually in an ex-offenders case, is illegal activities that landed them in trouble in the first place. I believe it’s the main reason why the rate of recidivism in this country is so high. Always try to stay as positive as you possibly can, even when you feel incredibly overwhelmed and hopeless.

**Get into the groove of having a job before you actually have one.** I found that waking up at 7 AM and starting my job search was actually really helpful for my overall mood. It, at the very least, made me feel productive and gave me a sense of accomplishment. I felt that I was moving forward. That was key to dealing with my re-entry.

**Maintain a clean appearance and good hygiene.** Not only will you feel better about yourself, but you never know when an opportunity might come up. The last thing you want when you’re finding a job with a felony is being called into an interview and you look like you crawled out from under a rock. I’ve detailed this a little bit more in a later section as well.

**Don’t beat yourself up about your past, because it is your past.** Fact of the matter is, when you’re finding a job with a felony, people will do this for you. You’re more than likely going to have people holding it against you when you reintegrate yourself into society. So you really don’t need to be doing it as well. It’s your past, leave it there. It’s time to move forward into your future.[line]

The Job Hunt

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To be perfectly blunt, the job hunt is going to make or break you. Finding a job is difficult nowadays anyway. But when you’re finding a job with a felony, it’s much harder. This could be one of the most depressing times in your life. You’re going to have to deal with a lot of negativity and rejection. Just remember to keep a positive mindset as best you can.

One thing I did when I was finding a job with a felony was to just apply everywhere and anywhere. When I was released, I did research on the internet of companies that were in my area. Also, if I was ever out of the house, I’d always keep a notepad and pen with me to write down any business that was in my general area. I’d be sure to make a note of (roughly) how far of a walk it would be for me to get there. When I first got out, I didn’t have a car, so the time it would take to walk to a job was a factor. I then applied to every company that had an online application on their website. I usually tried to do this at night. During the day I tried to be out and about as much as I could, applying at companies that didn’t have online applications. Finding a job with a felony was actually really good exercise. Now, this was back in 2008. There were still a decent amount of companies that you could fill out a paper application and turn it in at a store. Now, in 2014, it seems more and more companies are using online applications. In my experience with online applications, it’s a bad thing when you’re finding a job with a felony.

From experience, as well as a interviewing people in a wide variety of industries, it seems like an online application usually works like this:

**1)** You submit the application  
**2)** Corporate HR evaluates it. Sometimes it is given a score.  
**3)** In some cases, a background check is done on the individual. (Usually only for larger companies.)  
**4)** If it meets or exceeds a certain score, it is forwarded to a store.  
**5)** At the discretion of the hiring manager of the store, you are called in for an interview.

So why is this bad for ex-offenders? Well, a one of the things you can do when finding a job with a felony to increase your chances of getting hired is selling yourself in an interview. With application screening like this, your application might never make it to the actual store and you will never get a face-to-face interview. Please note that not all companies use a procedure like this. It is just information I’ve found to be recurrent through research and interviews with hiring managers.

If I was currently trying to find a job, I would apply everywhere I could. Just to see what happens. The worst thing someone can do is tell you no or not call you back, right? It’s worth a shot in my opinion to just apply to everywhere you can think of. If you’re not having any luck with larger companies when you’re finding a job with a felony, switch it up. Try to find some smaller businesses. They are usually more lax with doing background checks and hiring ex-offenders. A lot of the work I found, after my initial job at Wendy’s when I got out of prison, was with small businesses. If you can wow them at the interview they might be willing to look past your record and give you a shot. There are also online opportunities where you can make money from your home. When I was finding a job with a felony, money I made online helped me make ends meet. I’d really suggest doing some research on this type of work for legitimate work from home jobs before you venture into this. The amount of misinformation, scams, schemes, etc. for work at home opportunities is astounding. If you don’t know what you’re doing, you could quickly get sucked into one.

Be persistent, and don’t be lazy about this. Your chances of finding a job with a felony if you’re only filling out an application or two a day, passively looking for work, and not giving it your all is astronomically lower than someone who is giving it a true effort.[line]

Your First Interview

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Bring your “A” game and come correct. That was the advice given to me when I started job training at a re-entry program I was in in New Jersey. What I interpreted it to mean was come prepared, be ready for anything, and look the part. You want to walk out of that interview feeling like you aced it. You need to sell yourself, your skills, and how you could be perfect for the job opportunity.

Appearance is incredibly important when interviewing for a job. Before you even say a word, the potential employer will already have an opinion about you based on your appearance. It’s just human nature, we initially judge based on looks and appearance.

**For men – be freshly shaved**; facial hair should be kept to a minimal length, tight, and professional looking. The exception to this is if the facial hair is for religious purposes, in which case there is no need to worry about your facial hair.  
**Have a recent haircut** – you don’t want to your first impression of you to be that you are disheveled or scraggly looking.  
**Do not neglect your hygiene** – Shower the morning before the interview, brush your teeth, flossing is never a bad idea, slap on some cologne/perfume, use deodorant.

Once you’re a picture perfect image of a stellar candidate, let’s work on your clothes. Ideally, you’d like to look like a million bucks with a tailored suit, but let’s face it, a lot of us don’t have the money for that. We have to work with what we have, or can afford. The following is what I do in regards to an outfit when I go into an interview. This mainly applies to men, as I am one, but can be helpful to women as well.

**Proper Fit** – While I wear loose fitting, baggy jeans and shirts in my daily life, this isn’t the appearance I want to present to an employer. Make sure your outfit fits properly, not too big but definitely not too small. You don’t want to walk into an interview with pants that are too short and it looks like you’re getting ready for a flood. The exception to this is, of course, religious reasons. If you should not wear pants below the ankles for religious purposes, disregard that.

**Accessorize** – For me, I prefer simple yet noticeable things to compliment my outfit. I’ll usually wear a titanium or stainless steel watch, as that usually matches better with the outfit colors I wear. I know watches aren’t very widespread anymore since most people just use their phone to tell time, but I feel it really compliments an appearance. In addition, I may sometimes put a handkerchief in my suit pocket that matches. I feel it’s a nice, professional added touch that stands out without being too gaudy. Avoid over accessorizing, meaning don’t wear earrings that are gaudy or very large, stay away from cheap, flashy bracelets, and things of that nature.

**Ironing and Cleaning** – Make sure that you’re wrinkle-free before walking out your residence. Iron your clothes either night before or that morning, inspect for small spots and stains, minor tears, and other things that may draw the attention of an employer. If there is no other option and you must wear something like this, try to cover it up as best you can. Your shoes should be as clean as you get them. One of the first things I notice about a person is their shoes and anything on their hand and wrist (rings, watches, bracelets.)

This is a crucial moment for you, as you have to sell yourself to the employer. Everyone has to do this, not just ex-offenders. Be ready for any questions they may have regarding your experience, willingness to learn, career & life goals, and yes, even your criminal record. Always try to maintain eye contact when during your interview. If you are asked a question, and your eyes wander off to somewhere else in the room while answering, this can be interpreted as being dishonest. The last thing you want is any inclination that you are a dishonest person when you’re looking for a job with a felony.

One of the more frequent questions I get is how to explain a felony if asked about it at an interview. While there is no one answer to this question, I’ll try to explain how I personally have handled this question in hopes that you can relate it to yourself. First, I always admit that what I did was wrong. In a circumstance where you were wrongly convicted, there may be other ways you want to answer this. I actually have a charge that I honestly didn’t commit, a friend of mine did. But I knew I was going to prison so I “took the weight.” I don’t bring this up. I just admit that I messed up in my past and have moved forward from it.

You’ll want to vocalize your skills, talk about what you can bring to the company. Discuss what you do well and how that relates to the position you are applying for. If you don’t have that many skills, and the felony question comes up, try to talk about what you learned while incarcerated. For example, say you were a cook in prison, say that you can work extremely well under pressure, work quickly, and deliver results. Try to talk about where you want to go in your life, if you feel you can fit that in without sounding too long-winded. Below I’ll give an example of how I have handled the question during an interview.

“I made mistakes when I was younger and had a substance abuse problem, and my history is a direct result of that. I’ve since gone through a long-term rehabilitation program and have been clean for over 8 years. I and am looking to build a better life for myself. Since I have been clean, I have worked as a freelance web developer, and feel that my skills I’ve honed through that would be beneficial to this company.”

Something of that nature personalized for you should work. Keep in mind, employers want to hear different answers to that question, so there is no completely right answer on what to say. Try to get an idea of what type of person the employer is, and try to figure out how they would like to hear that question answered. Do not lie to the employer just to tell them what you think they want to hear, this could end terribly in a multitude of different ways.

Don’t Give Up!

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You’re going to be rejected. You’re going to have a lot of places that won’t call you back. You can’t give up even if your situation looks hopeless. Persistence will pay off in the end. If you do have an interview, send them an email thanking them for interviewing you. It shows that you really do care about a job. You will find employment, it might just take some time. Be patient, be persistent, and always look forward.

I wish you the best of luck in your journey, and hope that this article helped you. If it did, please like it and share it with people you feel may benefit from it. Thank you for reading.

Comments 125

1. John dellobuono

[JANUARY 15, 2019 AT 12:20 PM](https://exoffenders.net/finding-jobs-felony/comment-page-13/#comment-142264)

Thanks, I’m feeling the struggle, I feel like quitting a lot.

1. Belinda

[SEPTEMBER 24, 2018 AT 2:56 PM](https://exoffenders.net/finding-jobs-felony/comment-page-13/#comment-139301)

Thank you for sharing this I have forwarded this to my new phew who is struggling with this. I feel this will be positive motivation to keep trying especially a story from someone that knows what he is going through. Thank you again.

1. Ryan

[JULY 11, 2018 AT 6:25 AM](https://exoffenders.net/finding-jobs-felony/comment-page-13/#comment-137130)

This helped me a lot with getting a perspective on what to expect. I knew getting a job with a felony record would be difficult. I got arrested for my charge when I was 16 and I’ve only been free 18 months since then. I’m 27 now and finally finished all my legal obligations, but it sends like that was a piece of cake compared to job hunting these days.

1. Kati

[FEBRUARY 22, 2018 AT 10:37 AM](https://exoffenders.net/finding-jobs-felony/comment-page-13/#comment-133472)

Thank you for this helpful article. I have a felony on my record, one is from 20 years ago and the other is from over 10 years ago. I just recently got the job of a lifetime offer and the last step is the background check tomorrow. I have worked so hard to get this job and they picked me. So anyways I’m scared to death to explain my felony record tomorrow as I just believe no matter that I am a good person and had a hard time back then, that they will not give me a chance based only on my record when they see it. I am completely sad and a nervous wreck, being so worried about the inevitable rejection. But would they really just throw all they liked about me out the window, from me having a record? It says they are a “felony friendly “job and that’s one of the reasons I went with them. It pays so great and everything is perfect about it, I can’t help feeling defeated and I haven’t even gotten to it yet.

1. GABY

[January 24, 2018 at 11:35 am](https://exoffenders.net/finding-jobs-felony/comment-page-13/#comment-132877)

This is so very helpful. I’m helping my family member and had no idea all that he could face, with getting back into society even before getting a job. it’s a process all your information is helpful. Thanks

**Google search: ex-offenders employment programs**

[**A recent employment drive by BUSY Ability had an aim of placing 1000 (Australian) people with lived experience of the justice system into work before Christmas. The target was smashed and resulted in 1128 people now in employment and looking forward to a happy Christmas and new year ahead, for themselves and for their families**.](https://busyability.org.au/busy-ability-support-ex-offenders/)

# [**RESETTLEMENT & REINTEGRATION**](https://www.csi.nsw.gov.au/Pages/reintegration/reintegration.aspx) **- NSW Communities and Justice -**Corrective Services Industries CSI exposes inmates to workplaces that are real, relevant and closely matched to the sort of workplace they'd find in the community.