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U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

Okay, you're out. You did your time, made parole, or you're doing probation, community service, or some other form of supervision. So now what: Are you going to be able to stay straight?

You probably intend to, but it will be much tougher than you think. Counselors who work with offenders find that most expect too much, too quickly from life after incarceration. Prisoners dream a lot. In these dreams, they leave the institution, get a good job, and live happily ever after. That may be the experience of a lucky few, but most ex-offenders face frustration, disappointment, and a lot of hard work. It's tough on the outside, even without a record. Many employers don't trust workers who have been in trouble with the law. Some will not hire ex-offenders for any reason. You will have to deal with your record in one way or another for the rest of your life.

Your record will make finding a job tough, but the lack of education or job skills can make finding a job even tougher. More and more, people with education and job skills have the advantage over those without skills. In the end, education or job skills will do a lot to overcome your record.

NCJRS

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At least 7 of every 10 inmates have not completed high school. If you did not graduate from high school, it is very important that you begin working toward your diploma. This is important because it will show employers that you are motivated and that you have mastered basic reading, writing, and math skills. You might earn a General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.). This is just like getting a high school diploma except you don't go to a regular school. Your case worker or job counselor will put you on the road to getting your diploma.

Many ex-offenders fail to stay straight, often because they have not found a steady job. History shows that ex-offenders who don't have steady work are much more likely to get into trouble. **Why is a job so important?** Sure it puts cash in your pockets, but it is more than that. A job is a way to become part of the community.

Preparations You Can Make Now

If you are still inside the walls, there are things you can do to make your return to society much easier. **If you don't have your high school diploma, start working toward your G.E.D. now!** A high school diploma can really improve your chances of getting a job, and a diploma will qualify you for more jobs.

You also need to start collecting the records you will need after your release. Some of these are:

Social Security card—You must have a Social Security number before you can be legally employed. Write to the local office of the Social Security Administration to ask for your first card or to replace a lost card. Look in the Federal Government listings of the telephone book under Health and Human Services. Staff at your institution may have the necessary forms, and they can help you with the request. Remember that Social Security cards and other forms of identification cannot be sent to inmates; have them sent to your case worker.

Work experience records—Contact a local Social Security Administration office for your employment records. You will have to give your Social Security number in order to get your

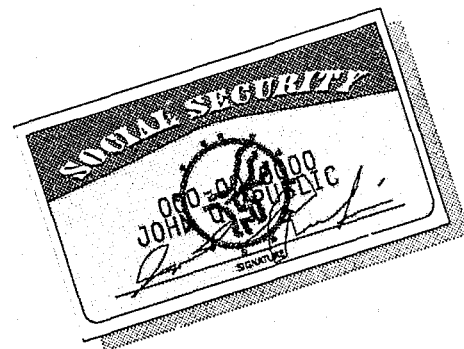
Working requires discipline, getting up early and going to work instead of hanging out. You won't keep a job for very long if you are doing drugs or alcohol or are acting out in other ways.

Doing a job well and working toward a goal will make you feel good about yourself and give you a sense of purpose. Also, a job is often a condition of release. You may need a job to get probation, parole, or into a special treatment or work release program. So getting and keeping a job should be your most important goal if you are going to change your life.

Turning your life around won't be easy. It will take a lot of hard work. **When you get discouraged, just remember that hundreds of thousands of ex-offenders have found jobs, stayed out of trouble, and gotten on with their lives. You can too!**



records. You may want to write to previous employers and ask if you can use them as references.



Birth certificate—Contact the Bureau of Vital Statistics in the town or city where you were born if you have lost the original. Look in the Government section of the telephone book under Health Department or Human Services Department.

Driver's license—Plan to get a regular license as soon as you are released. You also may want to consider studying for a commercial license because many jobs require some type of commercial permit. Study booklets may be available through your pre-release program or facility's library; if not, request one directly from the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA). If your license has been suspended or revoked, you may need a copy of your driving record. If you don't drive, you may want to get a State ID card instead of a driver's license. This and other information is available from the MVA in your home town. Look under the State Government listings in the telephone book.

Military discharge papers—Contact the Military Personnel Records Center, 9700 Page Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri 63132; (314) 263-3901. These papers can help show an important part of your work history to an employer.

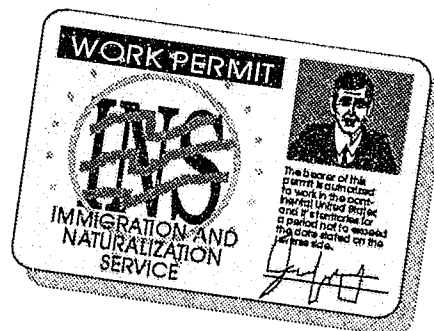
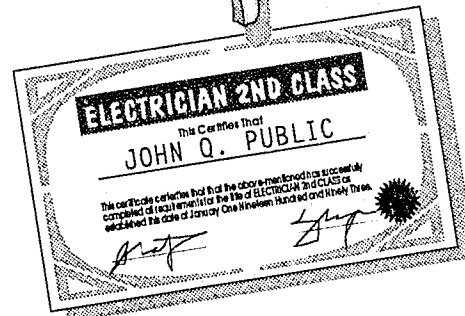
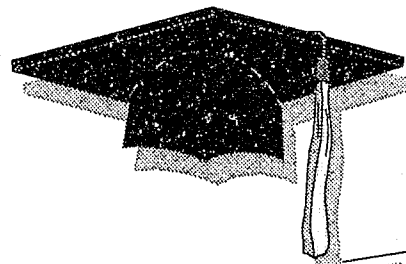
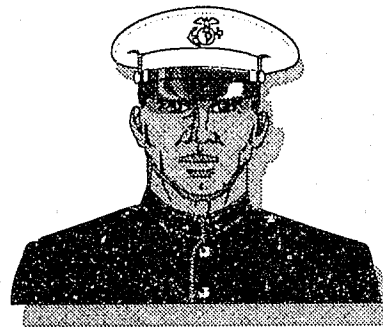
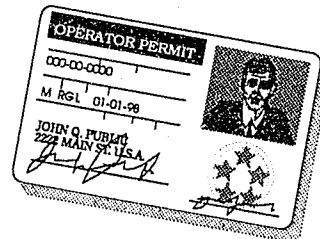
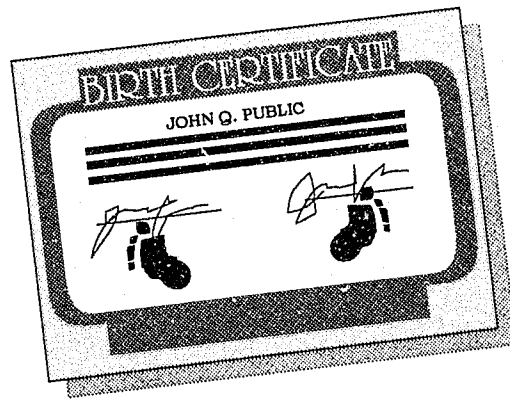
Proof of education—Contact schools you have attended for records of vocational, technical, or college courses, apprenticeship certificates, or training certificates.

Occupational or professional license—Request it from the local government agency that first issued it to you. Make sure it is still valid.

Alien registration card—If you are not a U.S. citizen and you have misplaced your green card, contact your local Immigration and Naturalization Service office. Look under the Federal Government listings in the telephone book.

If you are close to getting out and your facility has a pre-release program, sign up for it. This program will tell you about different jobs and where to look for them, tell you where to go for help on the outside, and give other helpful hints for your job search.

When you are released, arrange to see your rap sheet to make sure it is accurate. Wrong information could cost you a job. The same thing applies to consumer credit reports. Ask your parole officer or job counselor how to get a copy of these reports.



Looking at Your Skills, Experience, and Education



To help your job search or to decide on a particular training program, you need to learn more about what kind of work you would like and what kind of jobs you may be best at. Counselors at job service offices or community social service agencies can help you identify your strengths, weaknesses, and preferences.

You may have a lot more experience to offer an employer than you think. As part of the skills assessment, you should break down your prison jobs and any other jobs you have held into the separate tasks you performed. This will help you see your work experience more fully. If you worked in food preparation, you had to follow recipes and other instructions, meet deadlines,

diagnose problems, and meet quality standards.

If you just got out, don't have much education, and need a job right away, don't be afraid to start at the bottom. You can move up from wherever you start, as long as you work hard and try to improve your skills and get more education. With more training beyond your high school diploma, you will become more valuable to any employer. If your family or friends can support you for a while, you may even be able to go to school full time for a few months before looking for work. Some options are government sponsored programs, apprenticeships, community college programs, and vocational or technical schools. More information on these options is given later.

Starting Your Job Search



Looking for a job makes most people nervous. Going it alone can be scary, like getting off a bus in a crowded city where you don't know anyone. Yes, it can be confusing and stressful, but there are many organizations that can help you. Government agencies, community service organizations, religious groups, and business associations have programs to help ex-offenders.

Different cities and towns have different resources, so there is no general rule on where you will find the most help. Don't rely only on the leads you got while inside. Programs and staff

may change from year to year. Check things out for yourself.

It is important not only to find the right organization, but also **the right person**—someone who will believe in you and help you through this difficult time. Many ex-offenders who have made it in the straight world give a lot of credit to this helpful person, the person they formed a special friendship with, who believed in them, took a special interest in them, helped them find job leads, set up interviews, and provided general support and guidance. You may find that person



in one of the organizations described below or possibly among your family, neighbors, or friends. If you keep searching, you, too, can find such a person to help you.



Parole or probation office. You will be reporting to your case officer regularly. Parole and probation officers are responsible for many offenders so your case officer probably will not be able to help you with your job search. However, he or she may be able to refer you to various local resources where you can get help.

In some States, the parole board can restore to you certain legal rights. If you have only one felony conviction and complete parole without another felony conviction, the parole board can issue you the **Certificate of Relief from Disability**. Those with more than one felony conviction can get the **Certificate of Good Conduct** if they stay out of trouble for a specified time. This, however, depends on how severe the crime was. Contact your parole officer for details.

Getting one of these certificates will show employers that you are serious about changing your life. These certificates may also make it easier to get some jobs or occupational licenses. They will not help with all jobs, however.



Public employment service. A good place to begin your search is at the local public employment service office.

The names of these offices vary from State to State. They may be called the Employment Service, Job Service, Employment and Training, Human Resources, or Employment Security Commission. Look in the telephone book under State Government for the title used in your State. This is the same agency where workers apply for unemployment benefits.

The public employment service was established to help unemployed workers find jobs. They offer a lot of services, including job counseling and guidance, job-search training, help with preparing a resume or job application, and evaluation of workers' job skills. They generally do not have specific programs for ex-offenders but serve all unemployed or underemployed persons. Some, however, do have special programs for ex-offenders, so ask.

Job service counselors will help you identify your skills and match them with job openings. If you need medical, social, or financial help, they may be able to tell you where you can get it. Counselors also can give you information about two Federal programs that could encourage employers to hire you. The **Targeted Jobs Tax Credit** gives employers of ex-offenders a break on their Federal taxes for 1 year. The **Federal Bonding Program** provides insurance (coverage that protects the employer from employee theft or destruction) for people whom the employer's bonding company will not insure. Be sure to discuss these programs with your counselor.

The type of services offered vary from State to State. Some job service offices offer much more counseling, training, and job placement than others. Regardless of the services they provide, all of these offices track labor market trends in the local community and in the rest of the State. They also keep lists of job openings that they get from employers. Because employers do not have to provide these lists, this should not be your only source of job information. The local employment service office can refer you to local jobs or connect you with employment service offices in other communities.



JTPA Programs. State and local governments and businesses work together to provide free job training and retraining programs under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). To qualify, you must have a low income, so apply as soon as you get out. This program may provide job counseling, classroom and on-the-job training, literacy and basic skills training, and help with job searches.

Ask your case worker or job counselor for information about JTPA programs, or look in the telephone book in the white pages for Private Industry Council or under the city or county government listings for Employment and Training or Human Resources. You can also call your Mayor's office or the national office of the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor, (202) 219-6874.



Community social service agencies. Many public and private agencies help ex-offenders find jobs and get their lives together. Some agencies are

funded by State or local government. Others are supported by religious or charitable organizations or by business groups. For the most part, different local agencies exist in different communities under a variety of names; look for them in the *Yellow Pages* under social services, community services, human services, vocational training and job placement, or crisis intervention. There are a few national agencies that have offices in almost every city and town. These could be a good place to start.

The Salvation Army offers immediate help with temporary lodging and food as well as referrals to other social service agencies in the area. Also, many Salvation Army community centers have programs designed to help ex-offenders. You should contact the nearest Salvation Army center well before your release date so they can

direct you to the program that will best serve your needs. If you are already out and need help, call or visit the nearest community center. If you have a problem with alcohol or drugs, you can get immediate help and support by contacting Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. These organizations are listed in the white pages of the phone book.

Many community organizations are staffed by ex-offenders who are dedicated to helping those having the same problems they did. Counselors convince employers to hire ex-offenders, match jobseekers with employers, and set up interviews. They can also help you find the program you need—for job training, to improve your reading and writing skills, to help you prepare for the G.E.D. exam, or for drug abuse counseling.

Labor Market Information

The following table lists jobs with many workers who have no more than 12 years of education. This list also shows the places where most of these workers are employed. Many of these workers have not completed high school. Different employers require a different amount of education and training, so there is no guarantee that employers in your area won't require more training. But at least you can be sure that these occupations offer possible employment for people without education beyond high school. Job counselors can tell you about the requirements of employers in your area.

You may also need a license or certificate to be hired for certain jobs. These requirements vary by State. Job counselors can also tell you about any job requirements where you live.

Be sure to check on restrictions before entering a training program. Ex-offenders are generally barred from many health jobs because of the easy access to drugs. As a result, the following table does not list these jobs. Ex-offenders may also be barred from jobs closely related to their crime. Someone convicted of stealing cash, for example, will not be able to work as a bank teller.



Occupation

Type of employer

Billing clerks

Office Jobs
All kinds of businesses. Most work in insurance companies, warehouses, stores, factories, trucking companies, railroads, airlines, buslines, radio and television stations, and telephone, gas, and electric companies.

Bookkeeping clerks

All kinds of businesses. Most work in warehouses, stores, and schools.

File clerks

All kinds of businesses. Most work in insurance companies, real estate agencies, and temporary employment firms.

General office clerks

All kinds of businesses and organizations.

Shipping and receiving clerks

Warehouses, stores, and factories.

Stock clerks

Department stores, grocery stores, warehouses, factories, airlines, and government agencies.

Typists and word processors

All kinds of organizations. Most work in schools, law offices, temporary employment firms, word processing services, and government.



Occupation**Type of employer**

Cashiers

Sales Jobs
All kinds of businesses. Most work in grocery stores, department stores, gas stations, and drug stores.

Retail sales workers

Department stores, clothing and accessories stores, grocery stores, car dealers, direct sales companies, and mail-order houses.

Auto body repairers

Mechanics and Repairers
Body repair and painting shops, car and truck dealers, trucking companies, car rental companies, and motor vehicle factories.

Auto mechanics

Car dealers, auto repair shops, gas stations, taxicab companies, car rental firms, and motor vehicle factories. Auto repair shops in department, automotive, and home supply stores.

Building maintenance mechanics

Schools, nursing homes, hotels, factories, office and apartment buildings, warehouses, gas and electric companies, and stores.

Diesel mechanics

Vehicle dealers and rental companies, construction and farm equipment dealers and rental companies, auto repair shops, trucking companies, buslines, schools, and factories.

Industrial machinery repairers

Factories—mostly food processing, transportation equipment, textiles, and metal products; gas and electric companies; and mining.

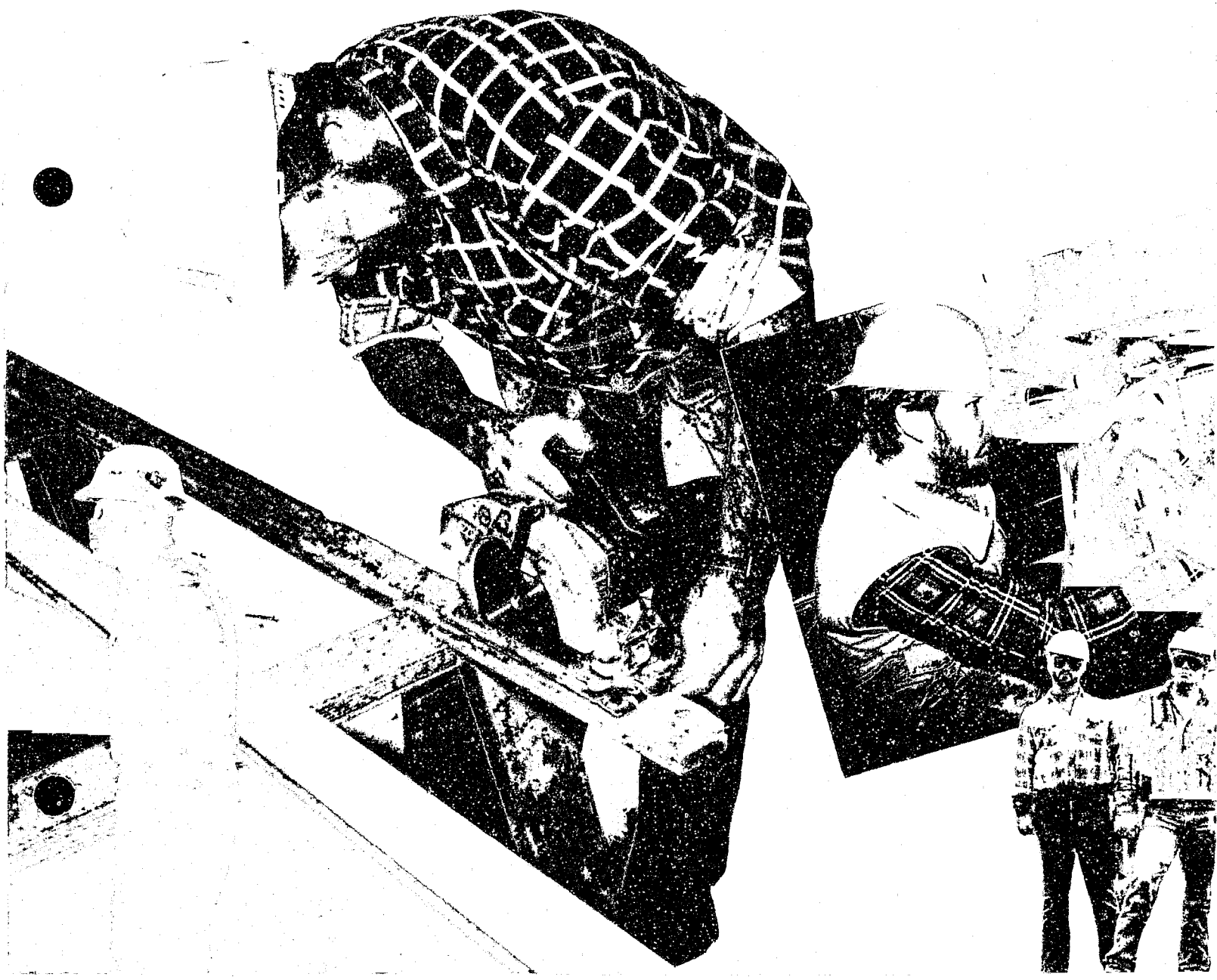


Occupation

Type of employer

Construction Jobs

| | |
|---|---|
| Carpenters | Construction companies, factories, and stores. Many are self-employed. |
| Construction laborers | Construction companies, factories, State and city public works and highway departments. |
| Electricians | Construction companies. |
| Ironworkers | Structural steel erection contractors and other construction contractors. |
| Painters and paperhangers | Construction companies, hotels, offices, apartment complexes, schools, and factories. Many are self-employed. |
| Plumbers | Mechanical and plumbing contractors, petroleum and chemical plants, and factories. |
| Sheet-metal workers and duct installers | Plumbing, heating, and air-conditioning contractors, roofing and sheet-metal contractors, and factories. |



Occupation

Type of employer

Factory Jobs

Freight, stock,
and material handlers

Factories, construction companies, warehouses,
grocery stores, trucking companies, and docks.

Hand packers

Factories, warehouses, and stores.

Machinists

Small machining shops and factories that make met-
alworking and industrial machinery, aircraft, or mo-
tor vehicles.

Metal and plastics-
working machine operators

Factories that make metal and plastic parts that are
used to make products ranging from the plastic
switch on a toaster to a gear box on a plane.

Precision assemblers

Factories that make electronic and electrical equip-
ment such as electrical switches, welding equipment,
electric motors, household appliances, radios and
televisions. Factories that make engines, farm and
construction equipment, office machines, airplanes
and motor vehicles.

Sewing machine operators

Clothing and textile factories, laundry and dryclean-
ing stores, and clothing stores.

Welders

Repair shops, factories that make boilers, construc-
tion equipment, motor vehicles, machinery, ships,
appliances, and other metal products, and firms that
build bridges, large buildings, and pipelines.

Woodworking jobs

Sawmills, planing mills, lumber yards, furniture
stores, reupholstery and furniture repair shops, con-
struction companies, and factories that make furni-
ture, millwork, plywood, sporting goods, and wood
parts.



Occupation

Type of employer

Busdrivers

Transportation Jobs

Schools, tour bus companies, and buslines.

Driver-sales workers
or route drivers

Warehouses, lumber yards, food and grocery distributors, drycleaners, private delivery and pick-up services, and auto parts stores.

Gas station attendants

Gas stations.

Industrial forklift
and tractor operators

Factories, construction companies, trucking companies, warehouses, and mining companies.

Truckdrivers

Trucking companies, warehouses, oil companies, lumber yards, food and grocery distributors, and auto parts stores.

Food-related Jobs

Bartenders

Restaurants, hotels, clubs, lounges, and bars.

Butchers and meatcutters

Meatpacking and poultry and fish processing factories, grocery stores, meat and fish markets, restaurants, hotels, and warehouses.

Chefs and cooks

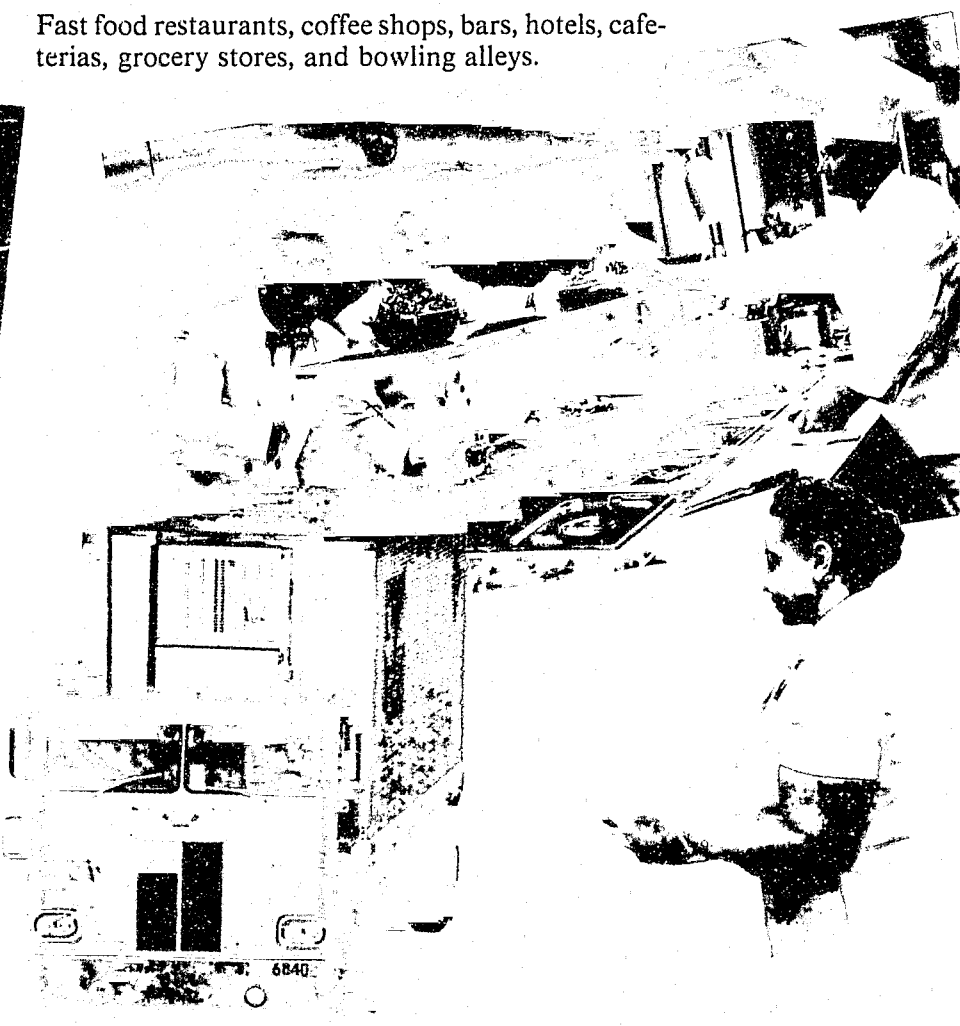
Restaurants, schools, nursing homes, hotels, cafeterias, and country clubs.

Dining room and cafeteria
attendants and busers

Restaurants, coffee shops, bars, hotels, cafeterias, bowling alleys, casinos, and country clubs.

Food counter clerks

Fast food restaurants, coffee shops, bars, hotels, cafeterias, grocery stores, and bowling alleys.



Occupation

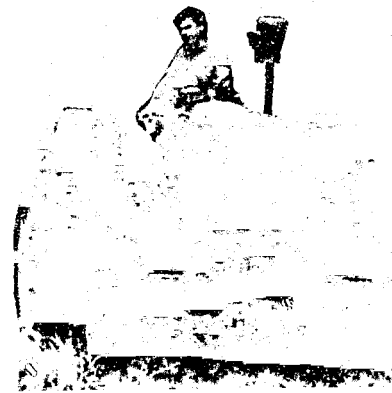
Type of employer

Food-related Jobs-Continued

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Food preparation workers | Restaurants, schools, nursing homes, hotels, cafeterias, grocery stores, and country clubs. |
| Institution or cafeteria cooks | Schools, nursing homes, and factory cafeterias. |
| Restaurant cooks | Restaurants, hotels, bars, and country clubs. |
| Short order and fast food cooks | Fast food restaurants and coffee shops. |
| Waiters and waitresses | Restaurants, coffee shops, bars, and hotels. |

Personal Service and Cleaning Jobs

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Barbers and cosmetologists | Beauty salons, barber shops, department stores, hospitals, and hotels. |
| Farm workers | Farms. |
| Gardeners and groundskeepers | Lawn and garden services, private homes, parks, golf courses, race tracks, amusement parks, schools, cemeteries, hotels, nurseries, and garden stores. |
| Janitors and cleaners | Schools, building maintenance services, hotels, restaurants, apartment and office building operators, churches, and factories. |
| Private household workers | Private homes. |



Finding Job Openings



Once you have decided which jobs you like, you need to find employers who are looking for workers in those jobs. Job placement counselors can help match your skills with the needs of employers. But there are other resources you should also know about. Here are just a few.

Your personal network. You probably know people who have said they found a job through someone they knew. You should try to do the same through "networking." A network is a group of people—friends, neighbors, former coworkers, and just about anyone else who may know something about jobs. Develop a network of your own. Tell people about your skills, experience, and the type of work you are looking for. Ask them about possible job openings where they work or if they have heard about jobs in other places. Ask for the names of other people who may have more information or suggestions. This is how your network grows. The larger your network, the more helpful it becomes. Not everyone will have suggestions, but they may know someone who does.

Contacting potential employers directly. Because most job openings are not advertised, it is a good idea to find employers that may have job openings that interest you. One way is to telephone the company and ask the person who is in charge of hiring if there are any job openings. Another way is to send a cover letter and resume (see next section). After a week or so, call the employer to make sure he or she received the letter and resume. This way, even if a job is not available now, the employer will have your resume on file and can refer to it when an opening comes up. Also ask about other companies that might be hiring.

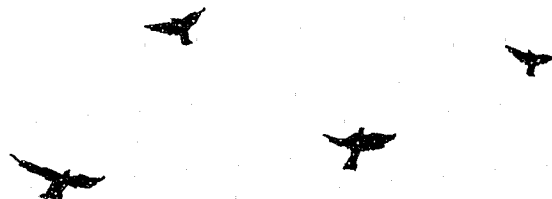
Newspapers. Want ads in the local newspaper are a good place to look for jobs. Keep in mind, however, that employers don't place all vacancies in the paper, and some employers don't use them at all. Read the ad carefully because different employers often use different job titles for the same job. You may notice that a company has advertised several jobs vacancies, but none of them interests you. That same company, however, may have other job openings that are not advertised.

Also, newspapers often carry articles about companies that are moving into your area. That company may be hiring for some jobs that will interest you. So, if the company looks promising, contact them directly for a job.

Other publications. There are many different kinds of materials that can help you get back to work. Most are not aimed at ex-offenders but can still have good information. The U.S. Department of Labor has publications that are helpful. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published every 2 years by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, presents information about the nature of the work, working conditions, employment, training requirements, job outlook, earnings, and places to find more information. This information is for the nation as a whole, but it can help you learn about different jobs. The Employment and Training Administration has produced *Tips For Finding the Right Job* that may make your job search easier. These books are available in most public libraries.

Also, there are books, pamphlets, magazine articles, and newsletters that have been written for ex-offenders. These materials present information about jobs, how to start your own business, where to get financial advice and assistance, how to write resumes and cover letters, tips on how to interview and discuss your record, how to find training opportunities, and other topics. Some of these were written by ex-offenders and can be very helpful because the author knows what you are going through.

You may find helpful publications free of charge in public libraries. Speak with the librarians; they have a lot of information and can save you time by directing you to all available information. Employment service offices also may have some of these materials. Some social service agencies and pre-release programs will have them too.



Contact one of the organizations listed below for a free catalogue of publications for sale that may interest you:

Offender Preparation and Education Network, Inc. (OPEN INC.)
Post Office Box 566025
Dallas, Texas 75356-6025
214-271-1971

Hazelden Educational Materials
P.O. Box 176
Center City, MN 55012-0011
1-800-328-9000

American Corrections Association
8025 Laurel Lakes Court
Laurel, MD 20707
301-206-5075 or 1-800-888-8784

The Safer Foundation (serves Illinois and Iowa)
571 West Jackson Street
Chicago, Illinois 60661
312-922-2200

Herald Press
616 Walnut Avenue
Scottdale, PA 15683
412-887-8500

Getting Hired

Finding a job opening is only the first step in getting a job. The second and more important step is getting the employer to see you and to give you a chance to describe your skills, experience, education, and employment goals. To get an employer's attention and an interview, you may have to send the employer a letter describing your education and job background—a resume—or an application form. Application forms are also often filled out on the spot in the employer's personnel office. So it is very important to be prepared for this and have all the necessary information ready when going for an interview. Take along your resume. It should give a good summary of the information that is needed in most applications.

Employers use resumes and applications to choose which people to interview. They don't have the time to see everyone who applies. They only select and call those for an interview whose resume or application shows that they can do the job. It is very important for you to do the best job you can in preparing these papers. In fact, it is a good idea to get some help. If you are still inside, ask your caseworker or pre-release counselor for

help. If you are out, get help at your local Job Service Office or at a social service agency.

Resumes. A resume is a written fact sheet of your work experience, education, and other things that qualify you for a job. It also states your career goals. It should also stress the skills and experience needed for the job you are applying for. This means that you may have to prepare several different resumes. If you don't have a specific job in mind, you may want to prepare a simple, general resume describing your work and educational experience for the last 5 or 10 years. Although some jobs may not require a resume, it always makes a good impression to have one.

There are many ways of organizing a resume. One good way is to organize it by work or skills experience. This is a good format for people who have changed jobs often or had breaks in their work history. Instead of giving dates and names of employers, it is a good idea to show years of experience in each job and state that names and addresses of employers will be provided on request. (See sample resume that follows.)



John Smith
101 Main Street
Middletown, Virginia 20814
(703)-476-5215

EMPLOYMENT GOAL: Short Order Cook

EXPERIENCE:

Short Order Cook (1 year)

Prepared and cooked to order hamburgers, eggs, bacon, toast, sandwiches, and salads. Used, cleaned, and kept in good working order grills, deep fryers, slicing machines, coffee-makers, teapots, milk shake and soft-serve ice cream machines, and other food preparation equipment.

Lunchroom and cafeteria counter attendant (2 years)

Served food and drink to customers seated at counter. Serviced steam tables. Added up checks and received payment. Used cash register. Scrubbed and polished counters, steam tables, and other equipment.

Bus person (1 year)

Carried dirty dishes from dining room to kitchen. Cleaned and set tables. Served water, coffee, and tea to customers. Replenished service bar with supplies.

Dishwasher (1 year)

Scraped food from dishes and put them in the dishwasher. Washed pots, pans, and trays by hand. Unloaded dishwasher and put away dishes.

EDUCATION:

High School Diploma
Cooking classes - Middletown High School.

REFERENCES:

References and places of employment available upon request.

Include the following items in your resume.

Identification. Put your name, address, and a telephone number where you can be reached at the top of the page.

Objective or employment goal. State the specific job or the type of work that you are looking for. If it is a general resume, say what different types of work you are seeking.

Work history or skills. List each job that you held, starting with your most recent one and working backwards. Be sure to list those jobs that relate to the job you are applying for. Briefly describe your duties in each of these jobs. Include any equipment that you operated. Mention special skills like "get along with all kinds of people" or a job-related skill such as experience as a meatcutter.

Education. List your education, including high school, technical school, community college, and any courses or training that you may have taken. You may decide not to list dates of attendance if there were too many breaks in your education history. If you have received a G.E.D. while you were inside, indicate 12 years completed.

Military experience. Write about your military experience only if it is recent or your military duties prepared you for the job you are applying for. If related, mention the duties. Otherwise, just list your branch and dates of service.

References. Indicate that references are "available upon request." Don't list names of your references on the resume because you may want to use different references for different jobs. However, make a list of references of people who are familiar with your work as well as personal references such as your friends and neighbors. Keep

the list with you in case you are asked for references during your interview. Make sure you have your references' full names, job titles, addresses, and phone numbers. **Always ask your references for permission to use their names.**

Other tips. Keep your resume short. Try to limit it to one page, certainly no more than two.

Be honest, but don't include anything negative on a resume. Be ready to explain any negative information if it comes up during an interview. For example, be ready to talk about your background as an ex-offender. You need to be able to say sincerely that you are sorry for what you did and the pain you must have caused, you have learned from your mistakes, and you want to put it behind you and go on with your life.

Don't list pay or salary requirements on your resume. This should be discussed at an interview. Don't give personal information such as your age, weight, height, or marital status.

Make sure your resume is written in good grammar. Ask someone to check it for spelling, punctuation, and good English. It should be typed. If you don't have a typewriter, see if the public library has one that you can use. Perhaps a friend could type it for you, or if you can afford it, a secretarial service will do it for a fee. Save the original so you can make as many copies as you'll need for your job search.

Application forms. When filling out an application remember that, just like a resume, an employer's first impression of you will be based on what he or she sees on the application. It is important to prepare it carefully and completely. Be sure to have all your information and papers ready when filling out the application. Have a list of all your documents, your current address and phone number as well as names, addresses, and phone numbers of your former employers and references. If you do not have a phone, give the phone number of a friend or relative who has agreed to take messages for you.

Before you start to fill out an application form, be sure to read it through first to understand all questions. Remember that most of the information it asks for is in your resume, so it will help to have the resume handy when filling out the application.

Be sure to follow instructions and answer all questions as well as you can. If there is a question about your criminal record, place a dash (—) in the space and be ready to discuss your record in the interview.

If you are going to fill out the application at home, ask for an extra one or make a copy of it so that you have a spare. This way, you can practice filling out one form. When you have it just the way you want it, you can copy it to an original. This will give the application a clean and neat appearance. Type the form if possible. If not, print neatly in blue or black ink. Be sure to complete all questions. If the information does not apply to you, put (NA) in the answer space to show that you did not overlook that question. Use a dash if you do not know the information. Check all spelling. Sign and date the application.

Cover letters. After you have completed your resume and found some openings in the Help Wanted ads or through some leads from friends, what should you do next? You should prepare a cover letter to introduce yourself to the employer and to ask him or her for an interview.

The cover letter should be simple, short, and to the point. Address the letter to a specific person. Use the person's name and title—for example, Mr. Pat Ward, Manager. If you don't know the person's name, call the company and ask who the letter should be sent to, or ask for the name of the head of the department that interests you or the staff person in the personnel department. If you are answering an ad, you should mention it. If someone referred you to a job or told you to speak with a certain person, mention the name of the person that referred you in the letter.

Describe your most important qualifications and skills for the job you are applying for. Stress those skills and abilities from your resume that best fit the job you are applying for. Finally, close the letter by asking for an interview. Make sure that your phone number, including area code, is included in the letter.

Do not use photocopies of your cover letter for other job openings. You should prepare a new letter for each job that you are applying for. Remember, the cover letter is the first thing the employer will see, and it is your chance to make a good impression.

John Smith
 101 Main Street
 Middletown, VA 20814
 January 22, 1992

Mr. Pat Ward
 Manager
 The Corner Cafe
 700 Elm Street
 Middletown, VA 20810

Dear Mr. Ward:

I am answering your ad for a short order cook in today's *Middletown News*. Because of my work experience, I believe I can do the job well.

I have worked as a short order cook in a cafeteria and have handled the cash register. I also have other kitchen experience. I like to cook and enjoy working with people both in the kitchen and at the food counter. I am hard-working and reliable.

Enclosed is my resume. I am eager to meet with you to discuss my qualifications further. I will contact you shortly to ensure that you have received my application. I can be reached at (703) 476-5215.

Sincerely,

John Smith

Job interviews. Job interviews let you show an employer your qualifications and give you the chance to sell yourself. To do this, you need to present yourself in the best possible light. This means being on time and being ready. Have your resume or completed application form with you. Be sure to bring all your papers, such as your Social Security card or green card, proof of education or training, and all work-related information mentioned above. An interview is easier if you know what to expect. Find out as much as you can about the company and how your experience fits the job. Knowing about the job and the company shows the employer that you are seriously interested in getting the job.

Be ready to spend about 20 or 30 minutes with the employer talking about your education, work experience, goals, and interests. Now is the time for you and the employer to learn about each other. You can find out if this job is right for you, and the employer can see if you are the right person for the job. Tell him or her why you are the right person for the job.

Each interview is different. However, here are some questions employers may ask:

How did you hear about this job?

What kind of training or work experience have you had?

(When you answer, explain the training and experience most closely related to the job you are applying for).

Why do you feel this is the right job for you?

Why have you had so many jobs?

Why did you leave your last job?

(This probably will be the right time to explain your criminal conviction).

Do you get along with others?

What have you learned from your mistakes?

Are you willing to undergo periodic drug tests?

Why should I hire you?

After you have answered the employer's questions, feel free to ask your own questions. Prepare a list of questions before the interview so you don't forget to ask everything you want to know. Some of these questions may be:

What is the daily routine of the job?

What is the work schedule? Is overtime required?

Are there any opportunities for advancement?

Are there any training opportunities?

These are just some questions you can ask to help you decide if you want the job. Other lists of questions can be found in books at libraries or in job counselors' offices.

Controlling your fears is the most important part of a successful interview. It is normal to be nervous before an interview. To overcome your fears, do the following:

Put yourself in the employer's shoes. **Think about what you might ask a worker who wanted a job in your company.** Practice answering questions with a friend, relative, or counselor. The more you practice, the easier the actual interview will be.

Make sure you are well-groomed. Cleanliness is more important than the clothes you wear. If you can't afford new clothes, you may want to shop in a used clothing store or borrow an outfit from a friend. The neater you look, the better the impression you will make. But don't overdress! Wear clothing that is appropriate for the job.

Be prepared to deal with your criminal record. You must decide before the interview how you are going to handle questions about it.

Tell yourself that you are going to do the best you can during the interview but that getting this job is not a matter of life or death. Your future does not depend on this one interview. If you don't get the job you were interviewed for, think of it as good practice for the next interview.

At the end of the interview, ask for the job if you want it. If the employer is not ready to offer the job to you, ask when you can expect to hear from him or her. Say thanks and then follow up with a thank-you letter.

Thank-you letters. After you have had your interview, it is important to write a simple thank-you letter to the person who interviewed you. This will help your chances of getting the job. You may either type it or write a note by hand thanking the interviewer for his or her time. You should remind the employer of your skills and experience. In closing, repeat your interest in working for the company and your wish to be seriously considered for this job or any other job you are qualified for.

Getting that job was just the beginning. No matter where on the ladder you start, you now have a chance to get experience and to develop a good work history. This is done by developing good work habits. Do quality work. Do whatever needs to be done when it needs to be done, not later. Be on time for work; don't leave early; and stick to the time allowed for meals and other breaks. **A useful guide is to work as hard as you would want others to work if you were paying their wages.** This may not come naturally at first but, if you keep at it, after a while it will become second nature.

Be eager to learn. Look for ways to make yourself more valuable to your employer. One way is to show how dependable you are. Convince the boss that he or she can count on you. Be courteous to customers and pleasant and cooperative to co-workers. A lot of hard work can be undone if you have a bad attitude or if you have a chip on your shoulder. You may have to do some very unpleasant work in the beginning. Try not to let this bother you. Try to stay positive and focused on improving your skills. Think of solutions to problems that come up on the job, or ideas about how to do things better, and tell your boss. In short, do more than is expected of you.

On-the-job experience can be very important to your success on the job. Many employers will give you the chance to learn. You just need to show that you can be even more valuable to your boss if you had more training and more responsibility. One way to do this is to ask your boss what you can learn on your own that would make you more valuable. Is there something you can study or work on at home? Does the company have any training programs that you could attend? Bosses like employees who are loyal, and most would rather fill openings by promoting from within than by hiring someone from outside the company.

Okay, let's say you're doing pretty well on your job. What can you look forward to? As you get more skills and experience, you may be able to get promotions. The more education and quality work experience you have, the easier it is to advance. For example, workers with a high school diploma are twice as likely to move up within a company as high school dropouts. **So, if you don't have your diploma, start working toward your G.E.D. today.**

John Smith
 101 Main Street
 Middletown, VA 20814
 (703) 476-5215
 January 24, 1992

Mr. Pat Ward
 Manager
 The Corner Cafe
 700 Elm Street
 Middletown, VA 20810

Dear Mr. Ward:

Thank you for seeing me last Wednesday. I enjoyed meeting you and appreciated the opportunity to discuss my qualifications for the short order cook job.

I hope that I answered all of your questions. Please feel free to call me if you need more information. I am very interested in working for you and hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

John Smith

Working as an auto mechanic can lead to a job as a shop supervisor; working in a factory can lead to a job as a production supervisor or inspector; or working as a dish-washer in a restaurant can lead to a career as a restaurant manager or owner. By improving your skills you become more valuable not only to the boss you have right now, but also to any future employers.

Another option to keep in mind is the apprenticeships that some companies use to train their employees. Apprenticeships last 1 year or longer. Training is usually part on-the-job and part classroom. Apprentices work under experienced workers called journey workers. Keep your eyes and ears open to any possible openings in apprenticeship programs. If nothing is available where you work now, maybe friends or relatives will know of job openings where they work.

About 100,000 new apprentices are registered each year. Many are electricians, carpenters, plumbers, sheet-metal workers, ironworkers, painters, and welders. Others work in production occupations, such as machinists. Occupations such as cooks, maintenance mechanics, auto mechanics, and diesel mechanics also have apprenticeships available.

Apprenticeship graduates have an advantage

over other workers. Employers prefer them for most jobs because they generally receive more complete training than workers who don't go through apprenticeships. Because of their training, apprenticeship graduates are less likely to be laid off, and they are more likely to become supervisors.

Before picking an apprenticeship program, consider what the job will be like, how your skills match up to those required, and the market for jobs in the area in which you would do an apprenticeship. Mechanical and mental abilities needed to master the techniques and technology of a trade are also important. Apprenticeship committees will also look at your age (usually at least 18), education (most require a high school diploma), aptitude (reading, writing, and math skills), and physical condition. Labor unions, employer associations, and job counselors can tell you more about apprenticeships.

Besides apprenticeships, another way to get more training or education is to ask your boss or counselor about vocational or technical school training and sources of financial aid. Many schools have financial aid offices that can help you. Some private associations may help pay for school—check your local library. Formal education can only increase your value to the company.

Staying on Track

If you sincerely want to change and become a success in life, the way is clearly marked. When you are ready to start your job search, look for that special person to help you and guide you. Don't despair if you don't find a job right away. Keep trying. The harder you try, the faster you'll find work. Think of each interview as a good chance to practice your interview skills and to improve your self-confidence. The more self-confident you are, the better your chances of getting a job.

Once you have a job, work hard and get additional training. Hard work and more training will lead to promotions and better-paying jobs. Many well-paying jobs that rely on physical effort have disappeared and have been replaced by jobs that require vocational and technical skills. You don't have to go to college to get these skills, but you will have to look for chances to develop them. If you can get more education and training while inside, get it; otherwise prepare to do it when you get out. Keep in mind that education and training are probably the two most important factors that will help you get a job and keep it. And keeping a job is the most important thing to staying out of trouble. Through job training, experience, and hard work you not only increase your value to employers, but also contribute to society, and feel really good about yourself. Good luck!

