

The background of the slide features a city skyline at sunset. The sky is a warm orange color, and several bright sun rays radiate from the top center, creating a starburst effect. The city buildings are silhouetted against the bright sky.

IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR EX-OFFENDERS WITH DISABILITIES

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Part 2: Focus on Employers and Job Placement



Training Overview

- **Revisiting the Criminal Conviction Question**
- **Job Development and Employer Engagement**
- **Job Placement**
- **Job Retention**

The conviction question: Applications

- Goal is to get into interview and explain history in person.
- Give least amount of information without lying!
- Answer the question as it is written:
 - If it only asks about convictions, don't talk about arrests.
 - If it only asks for the last five years, don't go back further than that!
- Collect applications from different employers to see how they ask about criminal records
- Attach a letter?

The conviction question: Interviews

1. Acknowledge/own the conviction

- Plan ahead how to describe the offense in a truthful, but softened way)
- Take responsibility (start with “I...”)

2. Talk about positive changes in life since offense

- If substance abuse was involved with the offense, talk about how you have been through treatment and are now committed to sobriety (again, if this is true)
- Talk about how you took advantage of other programs or opportunities to work while incarcerated

3. Share what you have learned

- Highlight your readiness to work as a team player without conflict

4. Talk about your goals for a new life

- Why is this time going to be different? What is your motivation?

Resumé suggestions

- Be creative, but honest. (e.g., A drug dealer is not a merchandiser)
- Describing work while incarcerated
 - Reference information
 - Wage
 - Employer of record
- Use a functional resume to hide gaps

Job Development and Employer Engagement

- A word on “felon friendly” lists
- Industries and sectors to target
- Tips for finding willing employers
- Employer engagement strategies

“Felon friendly” lists

- Most employers don't want to advertise this
 - Attracts ex-offenders to apply
 - Not always good PR
- “We don't have a policy; we decide on a case-by-case basis”
- Can reflect poorly on your agency or organization if the list gets out

Start with the right industries¹

Industry	% of recently incarcerated VR clients hired in 2006
Service	31.3
Structural work*	23.6
Miscellaneous	15.4
Clerical and sales	8.5
Machine trades	6.7
Processing	5.5
Benchwork	4.4
Professional, technical and managerial	2.6
Agricultural, fishery, forestry and related	2.1

*Fabricating, erecting, installing, painting, and repairing structures or structural parts.

More industry suggestions

- Stadium work
- Assembly
- Merchandising
- Catering tents
- Moving company
- State/county fair
- Auto service/repair
- Custom food manufacturing and packaging
- Meat processing
- Laundry
- Telemarketing
- Car sales
- Kitchen/food prep

Types of employers to target

- Small/medium size businesses who do not have HR departments
- Minority-owned companies
- Businesses with high turnover
- “Undesirable” jobs may be a way to get foot in the door, but beware of exploitation

Other ways to find employers

- Talk to parole or probation officer
- Who contracts with Department of Corrections?
- Clients' previous employers (same client or others)
- Church/faith group

Employer Engagement Strategies

- Educational event on bonding and tax credits
- Employer recognition
- Union recruiters
- “Second Chance” Business Advisory Council
- Ex-offender job fairs?

Always focus on business case!

Job Placement

- Why some employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders
- Strategies for addressing those fears
- Strengths to emphasize when “selling” an ex-offender client to an employer
- Hiring incentives
- Focus on sex offenders

Employer fears and strategies to address them

Generalizations about ex-offenders	How to address them
They have low level of education and very little work experience.	Work adjustment/transitional employment; GED classes
They have problems with substance abuse that will result in missed work	Proof of treatment completion, drug testing, NA/AA groups
They are unreliable; they arrive late or not at all.	Reference from work adjustment program; counselor can also be a reference if you have personal relationship with employer
They may not be motivated to work	Plan clear, concise and compelling statement for interview about motivation to work/change
They may feel alienated or distrustful of other coworkers, so they may have a hard time “fitting in”.	Give examples in interview of team work experience; demonstrate good hygiene, dress, and conversation skills.
They may steal something (particularly for property crimes).	Offense was likely not committed at work, and may not have been theft related; bonding
They may have an anger problem (particularly for person crimes) and get violent with customers or coworkers.	Anger management classes or completion certificate.

Other tips for overcoming employer fears

- Screening/matching
- Send best candidates first—get some wins!
- Work on personal relationship
- Commit to providing retention services
- Bonding
- Employer testimonials
- Success stories of other clients

Client strengths to emphasize

- Prison training programs/industry—e.g. Wyoming's Aquaculture tilapia farms
- Under supervision: required to work, drug tested (are other applicants under such close scrutiny?)
- Treatment/Sobriety/Anger management classes
- Grateful for opportunity, loyal
- Was it a first time offense?
- Was the client's offense committed at work? (probably not)

Fidelity Bonding

- Insurance to protect employer against employee dishonesty when regular insurance policy won't cover an individual due to history
 - Covers any type of stealing: theft, forgery, larceny, and embezzlement)
 - Does not cover liability due to poor workmanship, job injuries, work accidents, etc.
- Any job, any employer, any where in the U.S.
- No deductible, 100% coverage up to \$5,000
- Employer doesn't do any paperwork to start or end policy, and bonds can be issued instantly
- Coverage lasts 6 months, then employer can purchase regular coverage for the employee from Travelers

99% of the 40,000 bonded since 1966 have been honest employees!

Tax Credits

- Work Opportunity Tax Credit
 - All VR referrals are eligible
 - Up to \$2,400 tax credit for each new hire (veterans with disabilities now \$4,800 per hire)
 - 25% of qualified first-year wages (capped at \$6,000) for those employed at least 120 hours but fewer than 400 hours and 40% for those employed 400 hours or more.
 - No limit to number of new hires
 - Paperwork is minimal, but employers can still be reluctant to take advantage
- Some states, cities and neighborhoods have additional tax credits (e.g. Empowerment Zones)

Sex Offenders

- Parole/probation conditions
- Work with things, not people
- More companies will hire than you think, but it may take some time to find them (they definitely won't be advertising it!)
- Self employment/work from home

Job Retention

- Make a good match
- Two customers for retention services
- Provide ongoing support to client
- Parole/Probation officer relationship
- Substance abuse support groups
- Pro-social activities/relationships:
mentors, athletics, volunteering with
children, community service, etc.

Make a good match

- Signs of a good match:
 - Is the work interesting to the client?
 - Does client have realistic expectations of work environment?
 - Can the client do the work?
 - Is the client's transportation reliable? If not, can you help?
 - What is the workplace culture? Will the client fit in?
- If any or all of the answers to these questions are no, intensive retention services are even more important.

Two customers for retention services

When you make a placement, you are now serving not only the client, but also the employer!

- Visit worksite (if client consents)
- Be available to employer to help resolve personnel matters with client
- Offer to assist with training/job coaching
- If the client doesn't work out, have another ready to take his/her place!

Ongoing support to client

- Help understand/accept work culture
- Someone to vent frustrations to
- Encourage smart use of pay check
- Help navigate child support
- Remind of motivation for success
- Help negotiate promotions/raises
- Keep focused on big picture/long term goals
- If it is a “get-by” job, keep looking for something better!

Relationship with parole/probation officer

- A way to locate client quickly if employer calls to ask where he/she is
- You may be able to advocate for client if he/she slips up
- If PO knows client is doing well, restrictions may be lifted
- PO may know that client is making bad decisions that could lead to losing his or her job. If the PO will share, this could give you some lead time to save employer relationship.

Pro-social activities/relationships

- Support Groups
 - Substance abuse support groups (NA/AA/CA)
 - Sex offender groups
 - Men's groups
- Pro-social relationships:
 - Mentors
 - Reconnect with children (in an intentional and supported way)
- Pro-social activities for free time ("Idle hands...")
 - Sports teams/Gym Membership
 - Faith Community
 - Volunteering/Community Service
 - Writing/Art
 - Music

Resources

- HIRE Network <http://www.hirenetwork.org>
- Illinois Department of Employment Security Re-Entry Service Employment Program
<http://www.ides.state.il.us/exoffenders/tools.asp>
- Alameda County Educational event on bonding and tax credits <http://www.acreentry.org/?p=813>
- Federal Bonding program <http://bonds4jobs.com/>
- Work Opportunity Tax Credit
<http://www.doleta.gov/business/Incentives/opptax/>
 - Colorado: <http://www.coworkforce.com/emp/taxcredits.asp>
 - Montana: <http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/wotc/wotc.asp>
 - North Dakota:
<http://www.jobsnd.com/jsnd/jobsnd/wotc.html>
 - South Dakota: <http://dol.sd.gov/wotc/default.aspx>
 - Utah: <http://jobs.utah.gov/employer/business/wotc.asp>
 - Wyoming: <http://www.wyomingworkforce.org/es/wotc.aspx>

Questions?



References

1. Whitfield, Harold W. 2009. Occupations at Case Closure for Vocational Rehabilitation Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 53(1) 56–58.

A city skyline is visible at the bottom of the image, silhouetted against a bright orange and yellow sunset sky. Numerous rays of light radiate upwards from the horizon, creating a dramatic, sunburst effect. The overall mood is warm and celebratory.

Thank you!