



"THE 3 R'S": RESPONSIBILITY, REGRET AND REDEMPTION

The first knock-out question most ex-offenders face often appears on an application or in the job interview: "Have you ever been convicted of a felony? If yes, give details."

If you have been convicted, how should you best respond to this question on an application? **You basically have four choices:**

1. Lie by saying "no."
2. Not responding; just leaving it blank and going on to another question.
3. Being truthful by saying "yes" and giving the details.
4. Being truthful by saying "yes" and then following up by saying "details provided at the interview."

Do not lie. Lying will just delay the inevitable; the employer will most likely find out about your conviction during a background check. **Your best course of action would be #4 - inform the employer that you will provide details at the interview.** You want to do this because *you* need to be in control of the story relating to your conviction. This part of your story may take three to five minutes. But again, don't talk too much—just enough to let the employer know you are a new and potentially very productive person.

Once you get to the interview, the interviewer may ask about your conviction. **This is the time to follow "The 3 R's": Responsibility, Regret and Redemption.**

- 1. Responsibility:** Take responsibility for your actions. Give a very brief overview of what happened to you—the crime, the conviction, the outcome. You should be able to do this in less than a minute.
- 2. Regret:** Honestly express being sorry about what you did. But then quickly move to the third "R".
- 3. Redemption:** Focus on how you have changed your life for the better because of this experience and why you're a better employee for it now. Remember, the employer wants to hire your *future*, not your past.

Employers are like many other people: sympathetic to those who have made mistakes but who are willing to take responsibility and make sincere efforts to change their lives. It's part of our culture of forgiveness, redemption, and self-transformation.

“THE 3 R’S”: RESPONSIBILITY, REGRET AND REDEMPTION *continued...*

Whatever you do, make sure you stress your future rather than dwell on your past.

But let's also acknowledge that some criminal activities are difficult to deal with in the job market. For example, if you have been convicted of assault, murder, or a sex crime, your red flag is bigger than most red flags of ex-offenders. These are frightening crimes for many employers, who do not want the liability of such individuals working next to other employees. If you've done time for such crimes, you'll need to put together a rehabilitation portfolio as well as seek jobs with employers who are known to work with such ex-offenders. And don't forget a 4th R: Return! Be sure to return it to the main topic: what a good job you will do for the employer!

Here is an example of how the conversation can go during a job interview:

Employer: I've noticed that you've marked "yes" in the area regarding if you have ever been convicted of a felony; can you please explain?

Ex-offender: Last year I became involved with a new group of friends. Even though my friends were negative influences, the choices I made were my own fault and I don't blame anyone but myself. As a result, I was convicted of burglary and vandalism. I am now under supervision by the court, but that supervision has saved my life by getting me back on track, including passing in school and benefiting from other services given to me. I worked hard this year to understand the poor choices I made and to learn new ways to prevent making those kinds of choices again. I caught up in school by taking on extra work through a school program. I deeply regret the harm that I have caused, but I've learned a valuable lesson. I'm a hard worker, learn new things very quickly, and from what I know about your company, I believe I could be an asset to your business. You won't find anyone who will work harder than me to deserve your trust.

Now your turn:

Employer: I've noticed that you've marked "yes" in the area regarding if you have ever been convicted of a felony; can you please explain?

Your response: "In _____, I was convicted of _____.
(year) (crime(s) that you were convicted of)

I have _____ as a result of my poor decisions. As a result, I have
(supervision, etc.)

the opportunity to improve my life by focusing my attention on _____
(work, programs, etc.)

_____. I deeply regret the harm I have caused, but have learned a valuable lesson. I'm _____
(state specific skills and abilities)

_____, and from what I know about your company, I believe I would be an asset to your business."

Interviewing/Discussing Your Conviction Record

Be aware that the law prohibits felons from holding some types of jobs. However, there are many jobs available for offenders. Remember it is most important to tell the truth.

For many just out of prison and applying for a job, the most difficult part is facing the question on the application, "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" Let's say the employer needs someone with your energy and skills. He or she says "I see that you checked 'yes' on the felony question. Can you please tell me about that?" What will you say?

Three Choices for Discussing Your Record

1. Tell the truth—always the best choice.
2. Lie about it—and get disqualified or fined.
3. Avoid the subject—refusing to discuss it will "kill" the interview.

Steps to Discussing your Conviction Record

Step 1: Own it. Take responsibility for your actions

Show them you are owning up to your behavior. Statements should begin with "I." Placing blame on someone or something else (it wasn't my fault or I didn't know) is the worst thing you can do. Suggested openers could be: In the past...

- I made some bad choices.
- I made bad judgments.
- I made a bad decision.
- I did something I shouldn't have.

Step 2: State the positive changes you have made since the conviction:

- Completed GED.
- Completed a Critical Thinking Skills course.
- Paid restitution.
- Participated in counseling or treatment. Maintained aftercare.

Step 3: Tell them what you have learned or realized:

- Express your regret and speak about the lessons you have learned
- I'm not proud of what I've done; I'm sorry it ever happened.
- I wanted fast money and now I see it was wrong.
- I wish I had realized sooner just how immature and irresponsible I was being.

I lost sight of what was really important; my priorities were really mixed up.

Step 4: Talk about the new goals you have and how that part of your life is over.

I now have new goals in life. I'm very focused on establishing a successful career. I'm moving forward and am willing to work hard to make it happen. I can't un-do the past, but I did learn from it and will not repeat the same mistake.

Right to Know: The employer has a right to know about your incarceration. He is the one paying your wages and taking a chance on you.

Sincere: Be sincere. The employer wants to know that you have taken responsibility for your actions and that you are sorry for what you did. This shows him that you are on the path to rehabilitation.

Learn: What have you learned from your experience? List the positive things you have done and the changes you have made in your thinking and life.

Action -What actions are you taking now in your life?

HOW CAN I EXPLAIN MY OFFENSE?

Pick a suggestion from the following or come up with your own from each category.

A.

- * *In the past*
- * *One time*
- * *When I was young and stupid*
- * *Twenty years ago*
- * (_____)

B.

- * I made some poor choices
- * I made a bad decision
- * I did something I should not of
- * (_____)

C.

Tell them what you have learned or realized.
Some suggestions include..... CAN YOU PICK ONE

I'm not proud of what I've done; I'm sorry it ever happened.

I wanted fast money and now I see it was wrong.

I wish I had realized sooner just how immature and irresponsible I was being

I lost sight of what was important; my priorities were really mixed up.

D.

How can I explain my offense? CAN YOU PICK YOURS

Which sounds better to you???? I am a thief...? Or.....

THEFT - I took something that didn't belong to me.

SEX OFFENSE - I did something inappropriate with someone who was not yet of age.

PROSTITUTION - I used my body as a way to support myself.

POSSESSION - I had some ____ (*marijuana usually ok to mention but cocaine is NOT*)

SALES - I was looking for some fast, easy money.

TERRORIST THREAT - I got angry and said some things I should not have said.

DUI - I drove my car when I shouldn't have.

MENTAL HEALTH - I was struggling at the time.

VIOLENT - I was involved in a situation that got out of hand and someone ended up getting hurt, and I am sorry for what happened..

You might volunteer **GANG ACTIVITY** by saying, "I got involved in a group of people that I never should have been".

Or pick a "lighter" version of the offense.

E. State the positive changes you have made since the conviction.

Since then I have completed:

Completed my GED Completed a critical Thinking Skills Course

Paid restitution

Participated in counseling or treatment

Maintained aftercare

MANY OTHER POSITIVE THINGS YOU HAVE ACCOMPLISHED

F. Talk about goals you have and how that part of your life is over.

Suggestions.....

I now have new goals in my life. I am very focused on establishing a successful career. I am moving forward and am willing to work hard to make it happen. I can't un-do my past, but I did learn from it and will not repeat the same mistake.

EXAMPLE OF FULL FELONY SPEECH:

In the past, I made some poor choices. I am not proud of what I've done and see it was wrong. I drove my car when I shouldn't have. Since then I have paid restitution and completed my GED in hopes to better my position and grow as a person. Now my goal is to do a good job at work and be the person that I need to be for my family and myself.

Practice Writing Your “Incarceration Speech”
