

Interview Tips for Justice for All Job Seekers

Interviews are high-pressure situations for many job seekers. Prepare for tough questions about your past. Pay attention to your body language.

Job seekers with less-than-perfect work histories or criminal records may have a hard time answering some interview questions. Here are a few tips to increase your chance of getting hired:

- Never lie to an interviewer or put false information on your resume or application. This will disqualify you when the employer does a background check or checks your references.
- Don't give too much information or too many details about your past. Instead, answer questions directly. Address any concerns an employer might have about your past. Then steer the interview back to your skills and the positive traits that you bring to the job. For example:
 - "I can see why that gap in my work history might concern you. But that was several years ago and since then, I have maintained a solid work record. I come to work on time and don't call in sick. I am a very hard worker and quick learner."
- Avoid talking about negative issues at the very beginning or the end of an interview. Employers are more likely to remember their first and last impression. If possible, try to address your criminal history in the middle of the interview. Then end with a summary of your qualifications.
- If asked to give information about your past (convictions, incarceration, drug and/or alcohol abuse), say something like:
 - "I understand that you have questions about my background. I assure you that I have learned from my mistakes and have corrected past problems. I have spent the past few years training for this career path because I am more mature now and have a solid plan for my future. If given the chance, I will give your company 100 percent effort. I will be at work early, and even stay late if necessary. I know you will not be disappointed if you hire me."
- Use every opportunity to talk about your current activities and future plans. Emphasize the education and job training, community work, and other activities you have done since your release. Talk about your career goals, how you chose them, and how the job you are applying for fits those goals.

Your Body Language

Even when you are not speaking, you are sending a message. How you walk, your posture, eye contact, and how you dress all say something about how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

Sometimes your body language can give off the wrong signals. People may think negatively about you because of it. This can be a problem during job interviews if you seem too nervous, uninterested in the job, or like you are hiding something or not telling the truth.

When you practice how to answer interview questions, pay attention to your posture and eye contact.

- Have good eye contact. Not looking a person in the eye when talking can be a sign that you are lying or hiding something.
- Stand and sit tall. Slouching or sitting casually can look like you are not taking the interview seriously. Sit up straight, but relaxed. This lets the employer know that you are excited to be there and are interested in the job.
- Smile. A genuine smile shows that you are a friendly person and someone the interviewer would want working at the company.
- Shake hands firmly. Shake hands only after the interviewer extends his or her hand first. If you are not able to shake hands because of health or cultural reasons, politely tell the interviewer, "I don't shake hands with people, but I am very pleased to meet you."
- Show interest in your face. Many people look serious when they are nervous. An employer can mistake that as being bored or dull. As the interviewer is talking, show that you are interested in what the person is saying. Nod your head and smile when appropriate.

Acting natural in a stressful situation like a job interview can be hard. The more you practice your interview skills, the easier it will be for you to answer questions and give positive cues with your body language.