

Employment

GETTING STARTED



7

This is Booklet 7 in the Getting Started Series.

**Getting Started is a guide
for people leaving prison.**

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Getting a Job: Post-prison employment

Getting a job after prison is a hard task for most people. If you had a job before you went in you may not be able to go back to it. You might not want to go back to it. Your criminal record might also mean you won't be able to work in the same industry.

At times finding work can be easy. Sometimes it is about asking the right person at the right time. Your family or friends may be able to help. An old employer may have a vacancy.

Normally, it takes time and persistence to find a job. You may get knockbacks along the way but the important thing is to keep trying.

If you have a job it is easier to get a house, meet new people and settle back in. So getting a job is worth the effort and former prisoners do find work.

Everyone can increase their chances of getting work. Get as much advice as you can, prepare in advance and practice.

Benefits of working

As well as the money there are other benefits to working:

- Staying busy – routines and regularity can help you to stay settled and can reduce anxiety or depression
- Giving meaning to your life
- Giving you something to talk about
- Allowing you to focus on the present instead of the past
- Meeting new people
- Learning new skills
- Being able to look after your family

Expectations

Getting your foot in the door is the hardest part of finding a job. Don't stress if the first job you find is not your ideal job. See it as a stepping stone.

After not working for a while you may need to prove yourself to employers – even if you have the right skills and qualifications.

Starting with casual or part-time work might be a good option. These types of jobs can be

easier to get and may fit better around Parole conditions.

Most bosses employ people that are already in a job, so your next job will be easier to get than your first.

If you have more than 20 hours of paid employment per week then you will not have to do community work. You will have to prove this with documentation.

What can I do before I get out?

Any education or training you do in prison can be useful. You can prove what courses you have completed. These Certificates will be from the TAFE or University and they won't mention the prison where you studied.

Ask the Education Centre for all your Certificates and Statements of Attainment before you leave prison. You can get copies later but it won't be easy.

Prison work is a form of work experience but you may not want to put it down on a resume. You can talk about the skills you picked up though.

Think about what you've done and the skills you've learned through prison work. These can be listed on a job application.

Some prisons run courses to help you to write resumes and cover letters. Ask the prison or education staff if there is a resume-writing course that you can do.

What do I need to get a job?

You will need the following when applying for a job:

- A resume or curriculum vitae (CV)
- 2 referees the employer can contact
- Copies of any certificates
- Copies of any qualifications
- Identification (see ID booklet)

You may also need to attend an interview.

How can I find a job?

There are many ways to find work:

- Networks (people you know)
- Formal Application
- Vacancy Notices
- Cold Calling
- Traineeships
- Work experience and volunteering

Don't rule out any options – you never know what will work for you.

Networks

People often find work through people they know. This is called 'networking'.

Ask people you know or people you used to work with about jobs. They may have something or know someone who does.

People are more likely to give someone a job or help them out if they know them.

Formal Applications

Lots of jobs are advertised in the newspaper or on the internet. There are thousands of jobs advertising everything from pizza delivery drivers to CEOs of big corporations. Even volunteer jobs get advertised.

Different employers will want different information when you apply. The only way to know what people want is to ask them. If you think you can do the job, give them a call for details.

You can ask questions such as:

- I am interested in the job you advertised, can you tell me a little bit more about it?
- How do I apply for the job?
- What sort of experience or qualifications are you looking for?
- What skills are you looking for?

This will help you put your application together. It will also help you decide if it is the right job for you.

The Internet

Most jobs are advertised on the internet. The biggest job websites are:

www.jobsearch.gov.au

www.seek.com.au

www.mycareer.com.au

www.careerone.com.au

These websites also have advice on writing resumes and finding work.

There are other specialist sites. To find them on the internet do a search for the industry and place, e.g. “construction jobs Victoria.”

The Newspaper

The Saturday papers generally have the biggest listing of ads and will divide up the jobs by type.

All ads listed in newspapers will also be online.

Vacancy Notices

Some jobs are advertised in shop windows. This is common in retail and hospitality. If you see something you're interested in, go in and ask about it. You can return with more information or send your resume after speaking to them.

You might also want to carry a copy of your resume in case you see a job ad. When you are asking employers about possible jobs, it also helps to wear clean clothing.

Cold Calling

Some people find work just by asking. People move jobs a lot and need to be replaced quickly. Ask the right person at the right time and you might get something.

If you try this, be prepared to get a lot of knockbacks. Don't rely on it, but you could be lucky.

Work Experience and Volunteering

Sometimes it's hard to find work without experience. A volunteer or work experience position can help get your foot in the door.

It will give you experience, a reference and a chance to get to know more people in your industry.

Volunteer work can also meet Centrelink obligations.

Formal Job Applications

To formally apply for a job, you usually need to send a resume and a cover letter.

Sometimes companies have their own application forms that they want people to fill out. You can take these away and get help filling them out if you need to.

You may also be called for an interview before a job is offered.

At every stage, try to sound as polite, competent and reliable as possible. Lying

about qualifications or experience is risky. Many employers will ask for proof.

Resumes (CVs)

A resume is a document that describes your skills, training and work experience. It is very important and usually the first thing that employers look at.

There are many ways to write a resume. Look for examples from other people and copy the style.

Job websites give advice and samples of resume writing. There are also resume templates on computer programs.

All resumes should include some basic information such as: your name, address, phone number and email address. Make sure they're up to date. If employers can't contact you easily they may give up.

Key Strengths or Skill Summary: a list of all your skills that could help in the job. You may need to change this for different jobs.

Employment history: a list of the jobs that you have done, including the year, employer and your main duties.

Your email address should be based on your real name so it sounds professional. You may need a new account for job applications.

What are my skills?

Think about all the skills that you will need for the job. Don't just write down the ones the employer is asking for. Include all skills that might be useful without writing too much.

There are some skills that all employers want. These are known as transferable or employability skills. Transferable skills include:

Communication skills – Can you speak clearly?
Can you listen and understand what people say?
Can you follow directions or instructions?

Teamwork skills – Do you know how to work on your own and with a team? Have you worked with other people of different ages, genders or cultures?

Problem solving – Are you good at solving problems? Can you stay calm and think through all the options?

Initiative – Can you work without instructions? Are you good at making decisions?

Planning and organising – Can you plan ahead and stay on track?

Learning – Are you willing to learn new skills and be open to new ideas?

You may not have learned these skills in the workplace. They may be skills gained through family life, volunteering, or hobbies.

For each skill you write in your resume, try to think of an example of a time that you used that skill. They may ask you to explain any skill you have listed in an interview.

Cover Letters

When you apply for a job you may need to include a cover letter.

A cover letter is a chance to say why you want the job and why you would be good at it.

Keep the cover letter short and to the point. Remember to thank the potential employer for taking the time to read your application.

Application Forms

Some work places have their own application forms. This might be the only thing the employer wants or they might also want a resume and cover letter.

Some job application forms may ask you if you have a criminal record.

In this situation the best options are:

- Answer the question honestly and include a sheet giving brief details of your offence, the circumstances leading to the offence and your achievements since. Mark this sheet 'private and confidential'
- Leave the question blank and write "to be discussed at interview"
- Leave the question blank and be prepared to be asked if you get an interview

It can be risky to lie about your record. A lot of employers ask for a criminal record check before or after you start work.

Employers may also search online for information about you. If they find out you have lied about your record, they are unlikely to give you the job. If they find out after giving you the job they may sack you.

Job Interviews

If you want to make a good impression at a job interview, you should prepare.

Find out as much information about the job and the business as possible.

To prepare for questions you might be asked in a job interview, think about the skills listed in your resume and examples of how you have used them in the past.

Wear the right clothes – if you're unsure, it's better to over-dress than under-dress.

Make sure you arrive early – you won't make a good impression by arriving late.

Practice a 'mock-interview' with someone beforehand.

Many interviewers will ask standard questions like:

- Tell me about yourself?
- Why do you want to work in this area?
- Why would you be good in this job?
- What has been your best achievement?
- Can you give us an example of how you've dealt with a stressful situation?
- Do you prefer to work in a team or on your own?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?

Examples of strengths are: being a hard worker, getting on well with work mates, being on time or being a good listener.

If you are asked about weaknesses, have something prepared. Think of something that sounds minor and is easy to work on. You can also pick a weakness that they have already

realised from reading your resume. Finish the answer by turning it back into a positive.

For example you might say: “I’m a bit shy. It can take me time to get to know people but when I do I usually work really well with them.” Another example could be “I don’t have much experience in the area, but I learn quickly.”

If you’ve thought of a response to these questions you are half way there. If they ask you something you haven’t thought of it is ok to take a moment to think.

Remember to ask questions at the job interview. This shows that you are interested and that you have thought about the job. Make a list of questions before you go in to the interview. Don’t interrupt the interviewer though – pick the best time to ask your questions and save some for the end.

Types of Employment

Formal Employment

Formal employment gives you more protection. When you are paid “on the books” you will have to pay tax but you will have more rights than if you are paid ‘off the books’. You will get holiday pay and sick leave. If you’re injured on the job you can get work cover. Your employer will also have to pay you award wages or higher.

There are different types of employment with different contract arrangements and conditions. The industry’s union can give you more information about your rights at work. Call **ACTU Worker Connect** on **1300 362 223** to find out which union you should belong to.

Casual work

As a casual worker you may not have regular shifts or guaranteed hours. This makes it harder to claim for unfair dismissal but it is the easiest work to get. As a casual worker you get a higher hourly rate but you don’t get sick leave or holiday pay.

Apprenticeships and traineeships

You are a trainee or apprentice if you are doing recognised training connected to your work. An employee cannot be classed or paid as a trainee just because they are new to the job.

Independent contractor

Independent contractors are also called sub-contractors, subbies or consultants. If you are an independent contractor, you are self employed and contracted for a specific job or length of time. You are responsible for paying your own tax and superannuation. You will also need to pay for insurance and other expenses or risk getting into debt if something goes wrong.

Commission

Many jobs, particularly sales jobs offer commission. This can be ok if there is a reasonable base salary and the commission is only a bonus. If most of your wage is from commission you might end up earning very little.

Consignment

Consignment means selling items you buy or are loaned by a wholesaler. If you break or lose anything you will have to pay for it. The work is normally very hard and pays very little.

Trials

Most people do unpaid trials thinking that it will lead to paid work. Often it doesn't.

A short unpaid trial is OK but if the trial is for more than a shift you should be paid.

If you are unsure, get advice from a lawyer or your union.

If you have questions or concerns about any practice at your workplace, have a look at the

Fair Work Online Website at <http://www.fairwork.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>.

Here you'll find information and advice about:

- How much you should be paid
- What you can do if you've lost your job
- The minimum conditions you are entitled to

- How to deal with a problem with your employer
- What legislation you are covered by
- If you have a complaint, there are links from this site to the Fairwork Ombudsman.

Job Watch

Job Watch is an employment rights legal centre. They give information and advice to Victorian workers about their rights at work.

Metro callers: **(03) 9662 1933** or

Regional callers: **1800 331 617**

Working & Centrelink

If you are doing any paid employment tell Centrelink how much you are earning. Centrelink will adjust your payments if they need to. Some types of Centrelink benefits allow you to earn a certain amount before they reduce your pay.

To avoid a debt, make sure you tell Centrelink as soon as you start work.

Job Capacity Assessments (JCAs)

Before you leave prison or shortly after, Centrelink may refer you to do a Job Capacity Assessment. This is an assessment by Centrelink or the CRS to find out how ready for work you are. The JCA will decide what Centrelink stream you should go in. This will determine what you have to do to find work and when you have to do it.

Job Service Australia Providers

Centrelink will also send you to a Job Service Australia (JSA) provider. The JSA can help you with resumes and finding interviews. They can also help with further training and skill updates.

There are two JSAs with special programs for ex-prisoners. They will have more understanding of the issues faced by ex-offenders.

You can request to go to these providers or any other provider that you have worked with previously. JSAs will only take you if they have a vacancy.

Wise Employment Richmond (03) 9421 8999

**[http://www.wiseemployment.com.au/
JSA-Ex-Offender.htm](http://www.wiseemployment.com.au/JSA-Ex-Offender.htm)**

Work Solution Gippsland 1300 974 669

<http://www.wsgipps.com.au/>

Talking about Your Record

It is not sensible to lie but you don't always need to share everything with an employer. When you talk to a potential employer about your past, put it in the most positive way.

You can't always control who finds out about your criminal record but you may be able to control how and when people find out.

If you have had long breaks between jobs you can hide this a bit by not putting dates on your resume.

Telling a potential boss about prison time isn't easy. Think about the benefits and problems of telling them early. Pick your words carefully and practice them.

Advantages of disclosing before getting a job

- You don't have to worry about it coming out in the future
- You will find out early if it is a problem or not
- You appear honest, and employers may respect this.

Disadvantages of disclosing before getting a job

- The employer may decide not to employ you before they get to know you
- If you decide not to talk about your past, prepare a response to questions about the gap in your work experience. You may want to say something like: "I had to take some time out of work for personal reasons"
- Some employers will require their staff to undergo a police record check. It doesn't mean you won't get the job but you will have to talk about your record

If asked about your criminal record:

- Tell the truth if asked directly
- Don't spend too much time talking about your offences. Turn the discussion back to your suitability for the job
- Keep the talk about your record brief and focus on how you have learnt from your mistakes. Don't make excuses for your offence, explain how you've changed
- Present your achievements since the conviction (including education, training or work experience)
- Convince your employer that it is not a risk to employ you
- You can choose to disclose your record directly to the manager and will not have to tell all the other employees


Ask your manager to respect your need for confidentiality.

Keeping your Job

If you have a job it is easier to get your next job. If you haven't found your ideal position, stick it out until you find your next job.

Be prepared for the demands of working. You will need to be on time, work a full shift and get a certain amount of work done each day.

Your boss will expect you to follow instructions. Your boss might watch you closely to see that you are doing things right. It is not personal and will drop off over time. Ask your boss for feedback and take it on board. As with everything, once you build up trust, it will get easier.



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