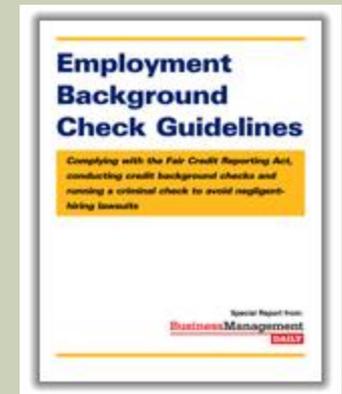


CRIMINAL BACKGROUND 101

WHAT IS A BACKGROUND CHECK?

- Employers can look at 4 things during a background check:
 - Driving record
 - Criminal record
 - Credit history
 - Employment history
- The employer must ask your permission to conduct an official background check.
 - HOWEVER, employers can gain a great deal of “unofficial” information from online sources (social media) without your permission.



WHY CONDUCT A BACKGROUND CHECK?

- Some employers are required by law to conduct them
- Some are required to do so by their customers
- Legal liability
 - Background checks are used for housing reasons due to the liability faced by apartments/realtors/landlords.
- Protection of customers, employees, or property



CRIMINAL HISTORY AND EMPLOYMENT

- A private employer can choose to disqualify a job applicant due to a criminal record.
 - Still, very few employers have blanket rules about disqualifying all applicants with criminal records.
- Criminal convictions can be problematic for licensure in certain professions, depending on the nature of the crime and the position you are applying for.

TOOLS FOR MANAGING YOUR CRIMINAL HISTORY

- **Honesty is key. Do not over-share, but do not hide the information, either.**
- **A Functional or a Combination Resume will help to highlight your skills and minimize gaps in employment.**
- **A Letter of Explanation is an important component of your portfolio.**

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- Read the application before filling it out
 - Make sure that you know what questions are being asked about criminal backgrounds
 - Arrest? Convictions? Felonies? Misdemeanors? Years?
- DO carry a pocket application
 - Have an easy reference for jobs, convictions, etc.
- Fill in every blank
 - Highlight volunteer/community experience inside and outside the prison to fill gaps in employment
 - Informal economy is okay, but be careful to avoid assumptions of criminal activity.
- Be honest!

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND

- Don't give more information than necessary
 - If they only ask for the past 5 years, **ONLY** give this info.
 - However, in the spirit of honesty, you might want to indicate the date of your conviction(s) in the margins. This is not necessary, but it will look better if an in-depth background check turns up this information.
- Be direct and honest about your background and emphasize your skills – this is the best way to overcome this obstacle

WHY WRITE A LETTER OF EXPLANATION?

- Helps you prepare for the interview process
- Makes you more comfortable speaking about your criminal history
- Allows you to practice explaining your criminal past.
- When you use your own words to describe your transformation, it creates a genuine connection for an employer.
- Allows the opportunity for employers to know that you are not letting your criminal background to define you.

FUNCTIONAL/COMBO RESUME

- Unlike chronological resumes, the functional resume starts by listing your skills rather than your employment history.
 - Use bullet points to highlight transferable, hard, and soft skills
- If you have an employment history with very few (and very short) gaps, you can do a Combination resume.
 - Employment history is the second section, with dates in this case.
 - If you have long gaps, and many “red flags”, you can still use your employment history, but without the dates.
 - You can use specific jobs that help highlight your skills

EMPLOYER INCENTIVES

- **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)**
 - Offers monetary incentives to private, for-profit business of \$1,200-\$9,000 per qualifying employee.
 - Contact Texas Workforce Commission at 512-463-2222
- **Fidelity Bonding**
 - Average coverage of \$5,000 – free to employer for first 6 months.
 - Either the applicant or the employer can request bonding through any Workforce Solutions Office.
 - Email: fidelity.bonding@twc.state.tx.us