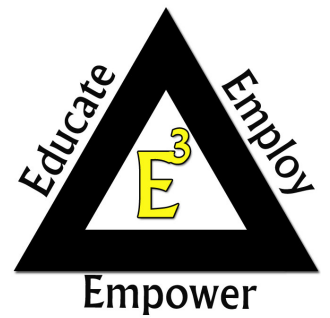




“Represent”

I’m Out... Now What?



Educating, empowering, and employing without discrimination or judgment



An 8 hour community onboarding program for the justice involved seeking professional advancement as well as personal confidence and success

"Never forget the look on my kid's faces, a boy and a girl ages 10 and 8, when I saw them for prison visitation. When they saw me the first look on their small faces of pain and my daughter's eyes filled with tears. It broke my heart to see their expressions, and I too choked up. I vowed in my heart once out I would do what it took to stay out and be productive."

Stick

If nothing changes, **NOTHING** changes.
Change takes action.
Change is something **you** do.

Sometimes, no matter what, life can throw you a curve, placing a barrier between you and where you want to be.

Right now, you are not where you want to be. Truth: it's too late for "**what if's.**" Today is about "**what is,**" and the first step forward is to **see your situation as it is, evaluate how you got here, and make a commitment for freedom, no matter the cost.**

Many of our contributors know firsthand the struggles, the loneliness, the uncertainties, and the constant doubts you face. Many also know NOW is not the time to game, NOW is the time to stand up, stare that demon in the eyes and refuse to fall.

Courage begins by delving into your situation, representing yourself honestly and **without excuses.**

In addition to developing tools to best represent and improve your transition into the community, we will spend a good deal of time with the following:

- how to create a letter of explanation
- the reasons behind them
- what to do with your letter of explanation, and
- why they are important to the potential employer.

Another truth, how you **REPRESENT** yourself today determines tomorrow. Yeah, you are out, what happens next is all up to you... and what happens next is under your control.

For those getting out of the game, congratulations, the first step toward success just happened.

Danny Huffman, MA, CEIP, CPRW, CPCC

Editing, Writing, and Consulting Contributors:

Stick, ex-felon, served two state contracts inside Texas walls for over 11 years

Duck, ex-felon, served 13 years on a 40, released on mandatory supervision



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Doing time: *A tall raw-boned red headed man sat next to me in the holding cell. He said his name was Red. We talked a little and he told me he was in for stabbing his girlfriend with a pitchfork. She didn't die.*

"But," he said, "She won't be looking at any other men now!"

I asked, "Why's that?"

Red said, "I stuck the pitchfork in her face and the prongs went into her eyes, so now she can't see."

A cold chill went up my spine as I looked at this pasty faced man, I didn't comment, but moved a few inches away.

Stick



Been told what to do for the past 13 years, what to wear, how to walk, when to go to store, when to take a dump, and when to keep shut. These months out is out of control; not used to making choices, prison took all that away.

Duck

Journal insight: What life and everyday choices are given up by going to prison?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



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Peer Introduction

Throughout our journey, you'll come to know three individuals who have gone through (or currently going through) an arrest and its consequences: From their words, experiences, and challenges, you may even see bits of yourself, your struggles, your triumphs, and your story.



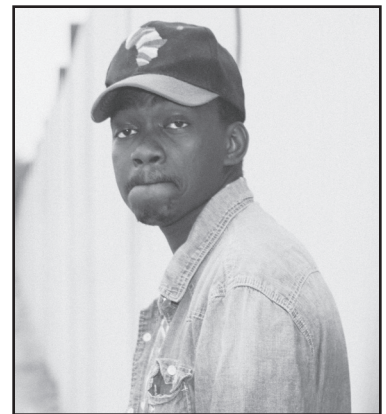
I'm Hannah. I know what I did was wrong. Honestly, I knew it when I got behind the wheel. There's something about being in that moment and not seeing the consequences until they're right on you. So here I am with a DUI and adjudicated probation, and everything that comes with it.

I have learned so much, I've changed so much, and still I feel like it won't be good enough to start a new life. I don't want to be looked at as a drunk, because I'm not. I'll do anything to prove that I'm worth hiring. I just don't think anyone is going to give me the chance. Can I blame them? Now I sit, feeling sorry for myself and looking to get out of this funk. Still I know people will always look at me as not worthy of a chance.

Journal insight: Do you agree with Hannah when she said "people will always look at me as not worthy of a chance." Explain why.

- I agree/do not agree because: _____
- _____
- _____

Hey, I'm Daryl. I work in construction, or at least I did before doing time. Enjoyed work at the tag plant while inside too... nothing like four strip searches to make the day go by. Released a few months ago and got a job at a construction site. Boss fired me two days after I saw my PO. He said the company wasn't doing well but truth is, think it was because I am on paper.



Served eight years without problems but that don't matter. Now, I can't find a job no matter how hard I try. I'm 42 years old and all I've ever done is construction. Companies don't want to hire somebody doing time and nothing I can do about that. After these months, might be time for me to accept this is the way it is, nothing gonna change. Don't want to be in the system but I am ready to give up.

Journal insight: Sounds like Daryl has accepted defeat. What advice would you share with Daryl if he was in the classroom right now? Have you ever accepted defeat?

- My advice to Daryl would be: _____
- _____
- Here's what happened when I accepted defeat: _____
- _____





Used to get around fine, hitting the block and doing enough to get things done. Got into some trouble and needed cash in a hurry. The guy I was delivering to was not who he was supposed to be.

Same old story, got busted and found a way out by going inside. Did a few months in county, not much time but enough to know I got the rest of my life with this on my back.

After getting released, not many places are going to give me a chance to do right. I want to do right, but that's not enough. Don't know if I am going to make it but hoping this program can help get me on the track and stay out of jail. Truth is, without a job, don't look like it's going to happen.

Oh yeah, name's Felix, 19 years old, and I got out a couple weeks ago.

Journal insight: In what ways can you identify with Felix?

- _____
- _____
- _____



We'll get to know Daryl, Hannah, and Felix as our journey unfolds. For now, let's get to you...

In your opinion: What do you think the top two barriers to personal success these three face?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Looking forward: What do you believe will be the top two barriers to YOUR personal success?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____





On the flip side, it's about attitude: consider barriers or obstacles as opportunities for growth.

Visualization: Beside your current sidetrack, explain where you want to be and the barrier(s) standing in the way. Explain how you will actively overcome each one.

- Here's where I want to be:

- _____
- Two barriers standing in the way are:

- _____
- I WILL overcome barrier #1 by:

- _____
- I WILL overcome barrier #2 by:

- _____



Journal insight: Now is the time to share your story. Which path will you choose, personal growth and freedom or stagnation and captivity AND how will you represent the choice?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Facts: Nothing But

"Don't remember the emotions when I got out. Do remember the numb; nothing else."

- Stick

Hard truth: If the value you offer a company doesn't outweigh the risk of your particular issue, you're not getting the job.

Okay, so you have a barrier to employment. As a great American sage put it, ***"That means you're human... Of course, some people are more human than others."***

Let's get one thing clear from the start: **Overcoming challenges WILL take work on YOUR part and a little empathy for employers who don't want to put their companies at risk.** Sometimes that seems unfair; after all, you paid your debt to society. Unfortunately for much of society, your debt will never go away, so stop the bitching and playing the victim.



Daryl:

- *"Can't look at people in the eyes. Maybe it's me but I know everyone knows I've been inside."*

Discrimination and unfairness are part of the *"new"* you... it defines you, now and forever. How we look at other people also will never be the same. If you're looking for sympathy from me or a sugar-coated book, don't look here.

Looking glass: Why do you think employers are hesitant about hiring workers with a conviction?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Hannah:

- *"I never went to prison; just jail until probation was set. Problem is, I know everyone knows I'm a loser. It's not fair; I'm still the same person I was before the DUI. Nothing's really changed but everything."*

In order to get a common foundation, let's begin with a hard truth and move on from there...

Hard Truth: Finding a job is one of the greatest challenges those with criminal convictions face. To be clear, people with felony convictions are twice as likely to be denied employment as those with no felony record.



Ever ask yourself why so many people just say they are for giving second chances but those people are not easily found when it comes to your situation? Probably never thought of it through the eyes of a hiring manager. Right?

Mirror, mirror: What risk or hesitation do you think an employer “could” have about hiring you?

- _____
- _____

Looking glass: What value do you think YOU offer an employer?

- _____

To overcome obstacles and yourself, the reality of your situation must be understood. This also means you MUST want to become less of a risk and more of a value... all in how you **represent!**

Hard truth: Staying out requires more than just wanting to. Two key factors guiding success after incarceration comes in the form of **dedication** and **single-mindedness**.

Daryl:

- *“First time I got out, game handled my PO. A few weeks later, she came by with an unexpected. Game or not, piss don’t lie.”*

Hannah:

- *“I will never see the inside of a jail again, period.”*

Are you dedicated to do whatever it takes to stay out and become successful? Are you able to focus on freedom and not stray from the path? By the way, don’t try to convince me, it’s you you have to convince.

In your opinion: What actions represent “*dedication*” and “*single-mindedness*?”

- _____
- _____

The reason why dedication and single-mindedness is important is because those around you will be judging EVERYTHING you do, write, and say, as well as how you look. If you do not represent yourself as dedicated and focused to others, you are not.

Daryl:

- *“What’s the use of trying? After 8 years in prison, I can’t change the stripes on my back.”*

Hard truth: For many, you are seen as a risk. For many, you are seen as one who has a problem making the right choices. For many, you are seen as one who cannot be trusted to make the right judgement call.



Judgment Issues

Risk is layered, never meaning the same thing to different people. For the convicted, fair or not, your actions will be under the microscope. Just keeping it real.

In your opinion: What judgement issues do a felony conviction say to a potential employer?

- _____
- _____

To a hiring manager, felony convictions say a lot more than whether you might steal from a company or cause trouble. It says something about character. Rightly or wrongly, it implies you are willing to take the easy way and raises issues of trust, safety, and even legal scrutiny.

Employers typically ask themselves whether it's worth the risk, resources, and time to take the chance on someone with a blemished background. True or not; ***the perception is real and must be overcome.***



Some bridges, once burned, will never be crossed again. All the more reason to look for jobs that ARE open to you. With this in mind, we need to explore what employers want and if you got what it takes.

When it comes to judgment issues, hiring managers want **proof of change.**

Felix:

- *"I made a mistake. I get it. Word is bond. That's what I got, my word."*

Looking glass: Detail two ways you plan on showing an employer proof of change.

- _____
- _____

Judgment is not just about making the right decision. Judgement is the way you act. Judgement is about getting the job done the right way.

Judgement demands poise, maturity, a positive attitude, team spirit, problem-solving capabilities, and a willingness and commitment to do whatever is required to get the job done.

Employers need workers who got their head on straight and:

- Solve problems
- With skills/interest match
- Demonstrate punctuality and dependability
- Get along with others and work well on teams
- Are dependable and possess a positive attitude
- Possess a positive attitude and willingness to learn



Doing time: *"I'll be the first to say I haven't always made the smartest decisions. I made mistakes, but I did time for a possession and with good time got out early on a dime. Yeah, shit happens. Violated on a bust-ass technical after four months. Bitch was looking to put me back. Been out two months on a revocation and now PO shaking me down pretty hard. To stay out, I need a job, any job."*

Stick

Why Are You Here?

Though we have different reasons for being in a not-so great situation, we all have one common goal: finding respect, acceptance, and success (we're not so different than anyone else).

Felix:

- *"Success is day to day. If I make today without going back, that's what I'm talking about."*

Hannah:

- *"Easy, success is about feeling good with my life. I'm looking to find a decent job where I'm treated with respect, and to take things slow. Also want my mom to be proud of me. To me, that's success."*

Mirror, mirror: To make sure we're on the right path, what two things do you need to **feel** successful?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Hard Truth: Success is NOT a guarantee. Success is not given. **Success is earned.**

For some, getting out of jail, prison, or off parole/probation is considered success in and of itself. Yeah, you are right as getting out is a good thing and staying out is even better, but that's just the beginning.

Getting out makes life harder by throwing choices at you by the second. Remember staying in the block for hours just to go to the commissary and then standing in another line for hours to purchase a pint of ice cream, two cans of spam, and a loaf of day-old bread?

Daryl:

- *"On commissary day I'd stand in line for hours just for a chance to get in the commissary line. It was bullshit most the time, hurry to stop. But it sure was a good feeling once back in the dorm."*



Rules have changed. Hurry up and wait no longer defines your life now... Getting out means life never will be the same... but you know this already.

Let's get one reality out from the start: **Overcoming challenges WILL take work on YOUR part.**

Here's another reality, in case you thought otherwise, **society doesn't owe you a new chance.** Matter of fact, right or wrong, society is not looking too kindly at you right now; accept it.

Discrimination and unfairness are part of the "new" you... it defines you, now and forever.

How we look at other people AND how other people look at you also will never be the same, especially when it comes to finding a job.

As mentioned, proof of change (in the eyes of an employer) comes in many forms and is shown by:

- Accepting responsibility
- The way you act and present yourself
- Offering an explanation about your situation

Good news is, you control the above bullets.

By way of gaining control before venturing too far, let's tackle two issues which will cause a great deal of anxiety... but not if you are prepared.

You will be required to complete a job application. Because of this, the natural place to start would be a quick job application review so let's turn our attention to the **Employment Application** and then **explanation letter fundamentals.**

The Employment Application

The employment application is a part of the interview. You walk in the door at the appointed time and an application form is thrust into your hands.

Prepare for the employment application by learning your résumé word for word and always keep a copy with you as you complete the application so mixed signals are not given.



Looking glass: Two reasons your résumé should be at your side while completing an application are:

- _____
- _____

Doing time: *"The old convicts working in the fields had built immunity to mosquito bites by eating garlic smuggled from the prison's kitchen commissary. It kept the blood suckers away. New-boot prisoners would leave the work field at the end of the day with whelps on their swollen faces and foreheads the size of golf-balls, swearing they wouldn't be back. But they always were. The State had ways of making sure their prisoners worked."*

Stick



Warning: A small mistake on your application will work against you.

Looking glass: Why would a small mistake make such a big deal?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Do not make the mistake of supplying information not supported by your résumé; dates, responsibilities, accomplishments, and company names must be exact. When inconsistencies occur, doubts are raised and could result in your credibility being questioned. Given your credibility may all ready be questioned due to an arrest or conviction, you don't need to appear sloppy or lazy.



Hannah:

- *"I now bring two résumé copies so I can fill the application without problems. First few times I felt stupid for not having one. Then the interviewer asked for a copy. Feeling really stupid at this point."*

The more familiar you are with your employment history, as shown on your résumé, the smoother the application phase of the interview will be.

The formal job application is a legal document forming the foundation of your employee file.

Do not fall into a trap by being dishonest in your application.

By a strictly legal definition, manipulating an application is cause for automatic termination (even if you are hired and the error is not caught for an extended time, even years).

Employers take particular interest in mistakes on the application and assess the character presented in your writing, including poor penmanship. Employers do pay attention to your education, work history, length of previous employment, responsibilities, accomplishments, and the reason(s) you left.

trust yourself



The reason(s) you leave an employer plays a big part in how you are perceived by the interviewer. ***Never speak negatively about previous employers on the application or during the interview—even if the people or the company deserve it!***

Doing time: *“After six weeks in county, I found myself on the list to Huntsville. Chained arms, legs, and mid-section, I was linked to another 30 inmates for a 20-hour tour across Texas. What do you think we talked about on the ride? Everyone was a victim, everyone had excuses.”*

Duck

The employment application is a tool the interviewer uses to gain insight to your work ability, character, and even how well you get along with peers and supervisors. Take your time and realize completing a solid application is not simply a matter of throwing words together (oftentimes what is not stated is more important than what is actually stated). An effective application creates openings for the interview.



Set yourself up with the most advantageous position by following these guidelines when completing your application:

- NEVER begin writing until you have read and reviewed all directions on all pages
- Use a black pen (pencils are not accepted and are considered an automatic disqualifier)
- Take your time with each question, each word, and each letter (scratching, scribbling, or crossed-out words are to be avoided)
- Print (type if possible) unless otherwise stated
- Have your résumé in hand; use it as a guide (do not become lazy or rude by stating “refer to résumé”)
- Respond to each question positively (remember you are selling your attitude as well as your skills)
- Make sure all words are spelled correctly
- Answer all questions and write N/A (not applicable) if a question does not apply
- Sign the application; most applications require your signature and will not be considered if your signature is not present. Remember, this is a legal document

Application ABC's

Before opening the front door of a prospective employer, be prepared to provide:

Personal Information

- Name, not your nickname but your full legal name, typically last name first
- Current address including Street, City, State, and Zip code
- Phone number where you can be reached during regular business hours (*if your voice message is not professional, change it*)

Looking glass: How do you think a potential employer would react (and why) if your phone message was not professional?

- Reaction: _____

- _____

- Why: _____

- _____

- Social Security Number
- Salary expectation
- Eligibility to work in the United States
- Arrest and/or felony conviction information, usually within a set time-frame (for example, any convictions during the past five years, etc.)

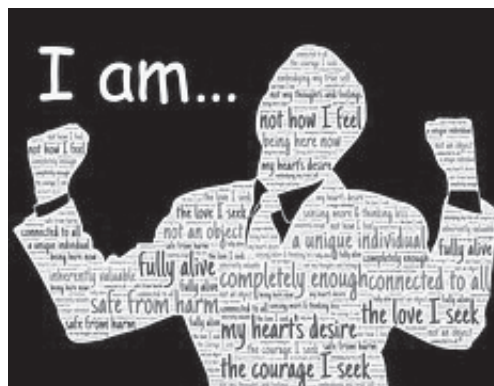
Open Position and Availability

- Specific job title you are applying for (do not put “any” as this does not create a positive attitude unless “desperate” is what you want to be recognized as)

Looking glass: If you were an employer, what messages would you receive if an applicant put “any” for job title?

- _____

- _____



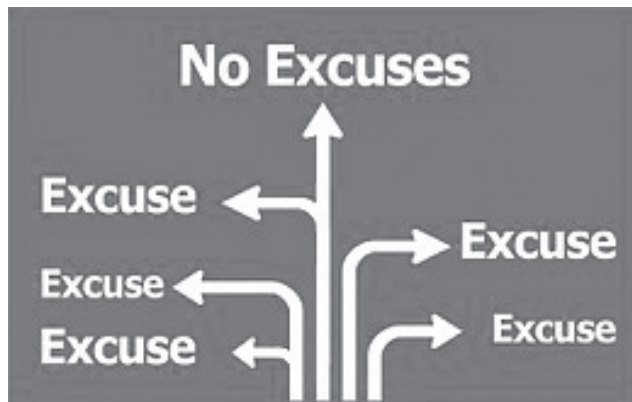
- Date available: Professional courtesy dictates you give a two-week notice if currently employed (by not giving a proper notice, you may be placing your present employer in a bad situation, sending a negative message to your new employer). If you are not employed, be honest regarding availability

Education and Certifications

- High School or GED, many applications request information about your pre-college education
- College or post-high school education, include even if not completed
- Professional development courses or training

Looking glass: It's never easy to discuss (or write) about an arrest and/or conviction. The feelings range from anger to disappointment to sadness to who knows what. In your situation, how does it make you feel when you are asked to discuss your arrest and the circumstances around it?

- I feel: _____
- _____
- This is why I feel this way: _____
- _____



Career Progression

- Current or previous employer contact information, including company name and phone number
- Supervisor's name and if available for comment
- Dates of employment: Typically requests month and year
- Summary of duties: Be detailed and use keywords/phrases supporting the open position, if applicable
- Ending salary (this question is not always asked)
- Reason for leaving: Be positive (never speak badly about a previous employer or manager) and always be honest

References

- Be prepared by having three professional references; include name, title, and contact information

As mentioned a few moments ago, you may be asked about your criminal conviction on the initial application. When asked, what are the options and what is best for you?



Ban the Box

Though there has been a push to eliminate the “*Have you ever been arrested or convicted*” question on applications, most applications ask the question. Problem is, once you check the box stating you have been arrested or convicted, discrimination often results... but not always.

Looking glass: Detail two potential stereotypes hiring managers may have once the box is checked.

- _____
- _____

How you respond to the job application question dealing with arrest and/or conviction is critical to what happens next. As the application is a legal document, dishonesty could (most likely will) result in instant termination. Honesty on the application and throughout all processes are insisted.

Doing time: “*I don’t check the arrest box. I ignore the question. At least I’m not lying by saying no.*”

Duck

Looking glass: What advice would you give Legend? Is he making the right choice by leaving the arrest question blank? What message do you think leaving the question blank gives the hiring manager? Why?

- Advice: _____
- Right choice? _____
- Message: _____
- Why: _____

Get ready because being asked is going to happen. ***What is the proper response when asked to respond to the felony question on the job application (or in person)?***

Looking glass: From an employer’s point of view, what “*attitude*” do you think the hiring manager is searching for when it comes to the felony question before and during the interview process?

- _____
- _____

