HOW TO ANSWER THE CONVICTION QUESTION

This may seem like the most important and difficult question you will face in an interview. For this reason you should be as prepared as possible to answer it with confidence. Here is a general outline for answering the conviction question. Please modify it in any way you see fit and make the words your own.

1. **Give the date of your conviction.** “In 1993 I was convicted of . . . .”

   By beginning with a specific number you increase your confidence and show the employer that you have nothing to hide. Although you may feel the need to soften the blow with words like “I made a little mistake,” this only creates doubt in the employer’s mind and suggests that you’re trying to minimize the significance of being incarcerated.

2. **Tell the employer what you were convicted of.**

   It’s been our experiences that telling the employer your conviction in a **statement of fact** manner will help the employer see that what you have done (or not done) has already been taken care of by a court of law. **Do not simply say,** “Sale.” The employer will not necessarily know what this means and will likely begin asking unnecessary and uncomfortable questions. Remember: you have already been tried and convicted; there is not reason to be on trial again.

3. **Tell the employer how much time you did, what you did while you were in jail, and what you learned from the experience.**

   This is your turn to re-educate the employer on the positive side of incarceration. Since most employers think of prison as they see it on TV, you can educate them by describing how you have changed and grown since your conviction. **Maximize your accomplishments and what you have learned.**

4. **Describe your current situation to the employer.**

   This may be done in a number of ways depending on what you are comfortable with. **Do not** volunteer information like, “I am currently on parole and I am willing to give you the number of my Parole Officer to verify what I have said.” Others make a sales pitch or describe the various employers they have recently interviewed with. Whatever you decide, make sure you are comfortable with what you’re going to say.

   **Example:**

   “In 1991, I was convicted of Sale of a Controlled Substance. I was sentenced to 5 years, and released in 3 years on good behavior, (if applicable). I realized right away that I had made some terrible decisions and decided to enroll myself into some self-help groups while pursuing my education. I’m proud to say I was able to get my GED. Not only that, but I learned how to work with and understand others at work. I’m looking for employment now and motivated to begin here with your company because of my skill set. I believe I’m the candidate for this position.”

   **Clearly, this is just an example. But it gives you an idea of how to explain the predicament. Not everyone will hear what you have to say, but those who do will be impressed with the command you have over a difficult situation.**