

training program. Because my training is recent, I am open to new ideas and am used to working hard and learning quickly.”

In the previous example (about being a perfectionist), a good skills statement might be

“I’ve been working on this problem. I have learned to communicate better with others so that I can work more effectively as part of a team rather than doing everything by myself.”

Whatever your situation, it’s essential to communicate your skills during an interview. The three-step process can help you answer problem questions and dramatically improve your responses.

Addressing Your Record

You may be asked about your criminal record in an interview. Employers are worried that old habits will resurface and affect the quality of your work or that you will be a liability to the company or its customers. When this question arises, you should be prepared to address it.

The following tips can help you answer this important question:

- Be honest about your past. Make sure you take responsibility for your actions. Whenever possible, keep your explanation in legal terms. For example, say “I committed a felony four,” rather than saying “I was convicted of domestic violence.”
- Express remorse for your crime, but do not dwell on the past. You want to concentrate on the positives, not the negatives.
- Discuss what you did while incarcerated to make you a better worker—for example, completed your GED, completed a construction apprenticeship program, learned skills through a work release program, and so on.
- Emphasize your desire to make a new start. By keeping a positive attitude you show the employer that you are eager to move forward. Share your goals, both short-term and long-term, for becoming successful. Stress any education and training you hope to get. Most importantly, specify the changes you have made in your life that have made you a reliable and dependable worker.

The following example shows many of these strategies at work.

Jonathan was sentenced to and served three years for drug trafficking. During an interview after his release, the employer asked, “Is there anything in your personal history that I should be aware of before doing a background check?” Here is Jonathan’s response:

“I don’t think that there is anything that will prevent me from being an outstanding employee for your company. However, I would like to share with you that I was convicted of a felony four. I grew up in a bad neighborhood and made some poor choices. While I was incarcerated, however, I made a decision to turn my life around and completed my GED. I am also working toward completing a welding certification program. I feel like I have the skills I need to be successful, and I am eager to learn on the job. Most importantly, I am willing to work as hard as I need to in order to convince you that I am an honest, dependable, and motivated worker.”

As you can see, Jonathan accepted responsibility for his past but then quickly addressed his future. He made sure to tell the employer about his accomplishments (evidence of rehabilitation) while incarcerated.

Also be sure to address the things you have done to establish a firm foundation for your reentry. For example, you can address the issue of reliable transportation by mentioning the car that you own or the fact that you live near the bus line. If family is a concern, go out of your way to convince the employer that you have reliable child care.

The most important thing is to convince the employer that your criminal record or personal situation will not interfere with your work life. Convince the employer that you should be hired on the basis of your skills and your attitude, not your past.

Quip

The more serious your crime, the more difficult it will be to convince employers that they should hire you. This is why it is so important for you to clearly identify organizations in your job search plan that will be willing to hire someone with your specific history.

Closing the Interview

Use the following tips for bringing a close to the interview:

Summarize at the end. As an interview is about to close, take a few minutes to point out why you are a good fit for the job. If any problems or weaknesses came up in the interview, state why they will not prevent you from doing the job well.