

Too Much or Too Little: What to Reveal about Your Background in an Interview

The interviewing process can be an overwhelming experience no matter what type of skills and qualifications you may bring to the table. But if you have a misdemeanor or felony in your background, it can sometimes be a treacherous terrain to maneuver through during the interviewing process.

For the most part, applications ask candidates about their felony conviction records but not their misdemeanors. Always read the application carefully and only provide the **exact** information that the question is asking for. Do not provide “additional” information thinking it will help you further if you explain yourself. This holds true for the interview as well.

There is a fine line between being honest and saying too much that may sabotage your interview. **Be honest**, but also make it a point to talk about your **strengths**. After fielding questions about your conviction record, let the interviewer know how you have grown since that time and emphasize how you have improved your life. State anything positive that has been a result of your conviction, and if you are unable to do so, be brief with your answer and move on.

To prepare yourself for interviewing, practice talking about your conviction record in a mock interview before the real thing. Cynthia Brackett, senior director of vocational services at the Center for Employment Opportunities, suggests using the following template when interviewing and asked about your conviction record during an interview: *“I served [X] years of time at a correctional facility [X] years ago. Here’s what I learned from it [list two to three learning lessons]. ... Here’s how I changed my life [point to two to three tangible examples/proof of change]... Here’s how I’ll bring value to your company [mention two to three ways you’ll contribute].”*

Remember, your conviction record should not be the main focus of your interview. Once you have disclosed your background, refocus the interview back to your skills and experiences, and why **you** are the best candidate for the position. Highlight your strengths and what you can bring to the job. Discuss your education and the training you have had along the way. Allow the employer to see you have a plan for the future and that you can make a difference in the job you will do **now** if they hire you.

We are here to help you at the NorthCentral Region FSET office. Let us answer your questions and support you in your job search.

Sources:

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