

I Have a Criminal Background, Will This Company Hire Me?

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After facilitating a community workshop on job searching and professional development, an attendee pulled me to the side and asked, “Does XYZ company hire candidates who possess a criminal record?” I responded, “this company has hired candidates who possess a criminal record in the past, but that does not mean this company will hire you.”

Most companies will consider candidates who possess a criminal record on a case-by-case basis. When using a case-by-case basis, companies will consider what the conviction was, how long ago it occurred, and what the applicant has done before and after the conviction(s) (i.e. education, training, experience, etc).

A financial services agency hired a candidate I provided career guidance to who possessed criminal convictions for aggravated battery and domestic battery, both felonies. The candidate was qualified for the position, had completed college course work and had 5+ years of experience in a similar role at a similar company. The candidate’s last criminal conviction was about 12 years old at the time of hire. Despite the conviction, the candidate had the confidence to apply, correctly listed all of his criminal convictions on the application, interviewed well and therefore was selected by the hiring manager.

Another candidate I provided career counseling to applied for the same position at the same company. The first candidate did not have a college degree. The second candidate had better credentials: a 4-year Bachelor degree, 15+ years of experience at the same company in a similar role and active community involvement. The second candidate did not receive a job offer but rather a message saying, “we selected a candidate who better matched the position”.

Both candidates met the qualifications for the position. The candidate who possessed a criminal record and had less experience was selected over other candidates, including a candidate with more education, experience, community involvement and without a criminal record. The reason why is simple. In this competitive market, many candidates meet the qualifications for a job. Hiring managers hire the best candidates that they like and who have demonstrated confidence and competency during the interview process, including meeting the education and experience requirements for the positions.

Possession of a criminal record is a self-inflicted barrier that can be easily overcome with dedication, ambition and conviction. Regardless of a criminal record or not, a candidate must meet the qualifications for the positions, interview well, and be selected by the hiring manager. Companies, unless barred by law or a company hiring policies, can hire whomever they want regardless of a candidate’s criminal status.