

Urban Myth: I Cannot Get A Job Because I Have A Felony

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On September 4th, 2011, I created a Facebook fan page- “Christopher Watts Presents: The Chicagoland Job Board”. I created the page to leverage social media to connect directly with job seekers daily with current job leads and job search tips. I currently have 10,500+ fans. I regularly get questions such as, “Are there any jobs for felons?” and, “I cannot get a job because of my criminal background, do you know of any companies that do not conduct background checks?” My general response is:

Time and time again I hear people say “XYZ Company” does not hire “convicted felons” or “ex-offenders”. I also hear people say you cannot obtain certain licenses, such as a PERC card to do unarmed security or a license to sell life insurance, if you possess a criminal record. THE AFOREMENTIONED ARE 100% MYTHS.

There is no such thing as an “ex-offender friendly” job or “jobs for felons”. How many job announcements do you see that state possession of a criminal record is preferred or required? A job seeker with a criminal record should apply to any job that he/she meets the requirements for and has interest in. Possession of a criminal record or not, a candidate must meet the stated requirements (experience, education, skills, etc.) for the job, interview well and be selected by the hiring manager.

I work one-on-one with job seekers who eventually secure employment at the companies that allegedly “do not hire convicted felons or ex-offenders.” I assist people with completing the application to acquire the licenses that convicted felons and ex-offenders allegedly cannot obtain.

Sometimes a company will notify candidates that they failed the background check. A background check includes all of the following: employment verification, education verification, references check, credit check, criminal records check, proper work authorization verification, drug test, health physical and social media/internet check (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.). Many candidates fail a background check for reasons other than the existence of a criminal record, such as false employment information (false employment dates, job title, pay, etc.), bad credit, false education information and bad references.

A company is required to mail a candidate a copy of their criminal records report and credit report. A company is not required to notify a candidate of what was discovered from the rest of a background check. Therefore the candidate may have been rejected due to something discovered through an employment verification, education verification, references check, drug test or internet/social media check. Just because a candidate was denied employment for “failing a background check” and the company mailed the job seeker a copy of the criminal records report and credit report does not mean a candidate failed the background check because of an item on either of these reports.

Job seekers who possess a criminal record should apply to any position of interest that meets their employment or educational background. Be honest about your criminal record and list all convictions, not just the most recent, on an application. Most importantly, be positive and believe in yourself. If you do not think you can get a job with your criminal record then you probably will not get it.