

Prison Experience Does Not Belong on a Resume

*By: Christopher Watts, MBA
Community & Career Builder*

While distributing job information and community resources, a gentleman asked to leave his resume with me and requested I call him if I knew of any companies hiring. I looked at his resume and the first thing I noticed was his 4 years of recent experience as a Janitor at Sheridan Industries. I asked, "Why did you leave Sheridan Industries and where is it located?" He informed me that Sheridan Industries was really Sheridan Correctional Center in Sheridan, IL and he worked as a Janitor while incarcerated. Flabbergasted, I wondered why he thought duties performed in prison disguised as a job for a company would increase rather than decrease his chances of obtaining employment.

With the current economic climate, this is an employer's market. Many employers want candidates with **recent and verifiable experience**. Duties performed while incarcerated cannot be verified and will cause a candidate to fail the employment verification part of a background check. Department of Corrections will not provide an employment reference for individuals who were incarcerated.

Listing prison experience on a resume will not increase a previously incarcerated candidate's chances of employment. Think of it this way: do you think an employer will focus on previously incarcerated candidates rehabilitation and acquired skills or on the fact that they were incarcerated? Prison jobs are mostly working in the kitchen or cleaning the facilities. Prison does not have a reputation for serving wholesome, gourmet and healthy meals or for being clean and having high sanitation standards.

However, individuals who attended school or a training program while incarcerated should include the information on their resume. For example, if someone obtained their GED while in an Illinois state prison, the prison did not issue the diploma. Illinois College Commission Board, who issues GEDs throughout Illinois, issued the diploma. The recipients of a GED while incarcerated in an Illinois state prison should list obtaining their GED from Illinois College Commission Board and not the penal institution where incarcerated. If college coursework or a degree was completed while incarcerated, the post-secondary education institution should be listed and not the penal institution where incarcerated.

Different people will give different ideas about what should be on a resume and if prison experience should be included. You as a job seeker have to make the best decision for yourself. The resume is a representation of you and must represent you well. An employer will decide whether to interview you or not based upon the format of and content of your resume. Do you think prison is a good representation of you? Do you think being in prison is a good thing, and an employer will focus on your rehabilitation or that you were in prison? Will the prison where you were incarcerated give you a glowing reference or verify your prison employment and job assignments? Honestly answer these questions then make the right decision for you about whether you should include prison experience on your resume.