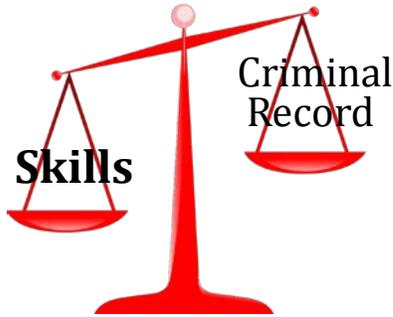


Ex-Offender Stories



How Skills Outweigh Criminal Records

Jorge's Story

- *Just out of jail.*
- *39 years old.*
- *Never had a job.*

When I was 39 years old, I was paroled from prison. I had never had a job. I lived off of my crimes. Since I turned 18, I had been incarcerated five times and spent almost ten years in jail, including nine months in solitary. My future promised more years in prison or death, if I didn't change my life and get a job. The barriers to doing that were huge. I had no skills and no work history.

I got a list of companies that would hire ex-convicts. No one wanted to see me. I asked my family and friends for referrals, and I got one interview at a carwash. It took me three months to get that far. I quickly realized that I couldn't make much money at the carwash, and there was little chance for advancement, so I kept looking for something better.

(Continued on back.)

Vernon's Story

- *No one wants to hire an ex-offender.*

After six years in prison, I was released on parole. I was thirty years old and my prior work experience was largely as a picker in a warehouse. It was in the middle of the big recession, so a lot of companies weren't hiring. But I needed a job and set out to find one, applying mostly for warehouse work.

For the next five months I went to as many companies as I could, but didn't get a single offer. They would tell me that the job had been filled or that they hired someone who was a better match. I heard dozens of reasons, but I knew they didn't want to hire someone with a criminal record. I felt frustrated and discouraged. I needed money for my family and didn't know where to get it. The best thing I could find was a job with the city, sorting garbage. It was recommended as a way for ex-offenders to transition back into the workforce. I wasn't ready to go down that road yet.

(Continued on back.)

(Vernon's story continued)

Then I went to a job-fair where I met some people from IMF. They told me about their program, which trained people in skills that were in short supply. It made sense, but I didn't want to go to school; I wanted to work. So, I kept at it for another month without any success. Then I decided to try their program, while continuing to look for a job. The people from IMF helped me apply for a grant to pay for it.

Four months later I started to look again. Now the companies were really talking about hiring me. I had three job offers within a month. The first was with a company where the machinery was old and the product large and heavy. The work was hard, hot and dangerous. I would have taken it, if I had to, but the people at IMF recommended that I keep looking. Then I got two offers at the same time. The first was for a factory production job that paid well and the second was for a position in a tool room for less money. The people at IMF advised me that there was greater opportunity at the second firm, because they were a more skilled operation and would invest more in training me to do highly skilled work.

I chose that firm and have been there nine years and now earn significantly more. I have been promoted to Purchasing Manager and Raw Material Inspector and Controller. I recently had lunch with the Vice President of Production to talk about my future. He told me I have a good shot at advancing to join the company's leadership. # # #

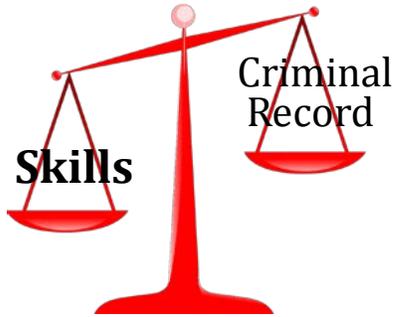
(Jorge's story continued)

I heard about IMF and called them. The staff member I talked with explained that they helped people, including ex-offenders, learn skills, which were in demand. People might hire me in spite of my background, if I had skills they needed. He helped me apply for a grant that paid for the program and that I didn't have to pay back. So, in 2012 I started a training program in machining skills. I liked working with my hands; I could take a piece of metal and make something out of it that other people couldn't.

In 2013 I completed the program and started looking for work. IMF staff helped me prepare a resume and post it. I had a big advantage over my earlier efforts.

I got seven interviews in six weeks, because the skills I now had were in short supply. Still, they wouldn't hire me, and I sensed that it was because of my background. I had to learn how to bring that background up and talk about it directly, so I could explain it. Once I started doing that, I got an offer for a job paying almost twice what I was getting at the carwash. Within seven weeks of getting my IMF certificate, I had a job. I have worked at this company ever since and am earning about 25% more than when I started. I still have hurdles to get over, but now I can see my way forward to a decent future. # # #

Ex-Offender Stories 2



How Skills Outweigh Criminal Records

Alonzo's story

- *My two stays in prison made me dread my job search.*

I was serving a second 3-year sentence at the Sheridan Correctional Center for a substance abuse related offense. In my second year I enrolled in a Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) machine tool operator program run by the Illinois Manufacturing Foundation (IMF), because a friend said he thought I'd be good at it. Boy, was he right! I learned theory regarding manual machining, followed by actually manually machining parts and eventually working through a complete CNC curriculum. This took one year and pointed me in a different direction from my previous career as a mechanic, heavy machine operator and rebuilder of generators. I felt like I was given a glimpse into the future of manufacturing and how I could be a part of it. Still, because of my record, I dreaded the job search that was to follow.

Upon release from Sheridan Correctional Center I immediately started looking for work under guidance from IMF's placement

director. He helped me write my resume and gave me the confidence to talk about my incarceration in job interviews without shame. He made multiple contacts for me and by the third month I had a part-time, job which converted into a full-time first shift job at the six-month mark.

My instructors from IMF gave me so much insight into real-world problems that the transition into full-time employment as a CNC operator was minimal. I quickly made the shift from project work to production and am able to read and even make blueprints because of my IMF training. My new bosses tested my knowledge in the first few months on the job and elevated me so I'm not just a button pusher but a real machinist. That felt great! My IMF instructor said that my training would equip me at such a level that I would likely impress and intimidate other employees with my ability, and I have found that to be true. So now I am sharing some of the knowledge I gained at IMF. That's helped me build ties with the people I work with.

After working for two years I was feeling frustrated with my progress. I

re-contacted my instructor at Sheridan and he said I needed to apply for jobs with better pay. So I met with the IMF placement director again and he helped me revise my resume in order to get a better paying job. I immediately got several interviews and received offers for jobs that will give me a nice boost in pay and getting me back to my pre-incarceration income level. I am now happily programming lathes and building automation machines for a top-flight employer 15 minutes from my home.

Jevon's Story

- *I tended to procrastinate about looking for a job*

I served two years at the Sheridan correctional Center for a drug related theft and got out three months ago today. Early in my first year my counselor suggested that instead of taking additional classes in welding, which is how I used to make a living. I look into a Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) machine tool operator program run by the Illinois Manufacturing Foundation (IMF).

I went for it and found the initial work in mathematics to be a good foundation for the machinist curriculum that also served as a foundation for the actual CNC course. I didn't think I would like the computer aspect, because I'm a hands-on guy, but it became my favorite part. Instructor Mark Kaufman made it come alive and made the key points easy to remember. Program Director

Luis Garcia always answered my questions in depth.

I was in class 4 hours a day and spent the rest of the day reading the materials provided by my instructors. In my last six months at Sheridan I was a teaching assistant in the program and that further solidified my knowledge and commitment to a career in CNC.

Upon leaving Sheridan I was immediately contacted by Harold Puckett, IMF's Business Liaison/Job Developer. He called me twice a day until I agreed to meet with him to build my resume and conduct mock interviews, an important exercise, believe me, for ex-offenders!! He wouldn't let me procrastinate about job hunting.

He sent me to a temp agency that set up several job interviews and by my 24th day of freedom I was offered a full-time job as a vertical milling machine operator not far from my home. I am on the third shift and have been designated as a rover to work on programming issues as they come up anywhere across the plant.

Much to my surprise, the training I received and skills I honed under IMF's tutelage made me a more valuable employee with more knowledge than most of the plant's long tenured programmers and operators. My employers are so impressed with the training I received that they're going back to IMF to recruit more people.