

Danny Howe:

Hello. My name is Danny Howe, Reentry specialist with Arizona@Work. As someone with lived experience, I know firsthand what it's like navigating the system after incarceration. I know discussing your criminal background during a job interview can be pretty tough. So hearing the phrase, "So tell me about your felony charge," can be intimidating. This question isn't a judgment against you. There are companies out there willing to give individuals a second chance. They just need to know upfront what they're getting into. Your past does not define who you are today. And don't feel like you have to lie in the application or during your interview, they will find out anyway. Being dishonest about your background could prevent your chances from getting the job now or jeopardize it from getting it in the future. It's just not worth the risk. When you talk about your criminal history, take ownership of what happened, but highlight how you've made positive changes since then.

So I break it down into four parts. First, admit to the charges, but don't go into detail about them. Instead of saying, "I have gun charges with possession of drugs, and the intent to sell," you could just say, "I have gun and drug charges." Or instead of saying, "I have aggravated assault," just say, "I have an assault charge." Second, talk about what you lost, your self-respect, your friends, your freedom. Third, talk about what you learned. For example, "While I was incarcerated, I learned a lot about myself. I took classes to further my education, and I rebuilt relationships, and now have self-respect again." Finally, this is where you get to brag a little bit, talk about why you're the best person for the job. Talk about any trainings that you've completed or skills that you're bringing to the table. Focus on showing positive experiences with your potential employers. I hope this gives you a boost of confidence for your next interview. For more information, check us out online at des.az.gov.