

Talent Acquisition

Excellence



How Companies Can Embrace Second-Chance Job Seekers

With 7.2 mn jobs to be filled and not enough talent available, companies must begin to diversify their talent pool



By Kellie Walenciak

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) launched its [Getting Talent Back to Work](#) initiative in 2019, urging companies to pledge to hire individuals with a criminal background. The stats they cite are as compelling as they are true:

- 2.3 million people in U.S. prisons and jails.
- Nearly 700,000 people are released from prison each year and are locked out of the job market.
- One-third of U.S. adults has a criminal record.

- With 7.2 million jobs to be **filled by the end of this year and not enough talent to fill** those positions, companies must begin to diversify their talent pool.

Some additional stats to add: the cost of incarceration in the U.S. is \$182 billion annually, the national [recidivism](#) rate within three years is 58 percent, and joblessness is the No. 1 predictor of people returning to prison.

We can all agree that the Getting Talent Back to Work initiative is both timely and relevant

and--having been launched by the **most prestigious non-profit HR** association in business today--it carries weight. But for companies that have never considered much less seriously explored the talent inside U.S. prisons, hiring women and men with a criminal record is a tall order, regardless of the data.

Meet Second Chance Employers

Fortunately, there are companies that are thriving today as second-chance employers. "Second-Chance" is the term used to describe actions taken to improve re-entry for citizens

returning to society from prison.

In business, the term defines

the expansion of workforce strategies to include formerly incarcerated individuals.

To learn how to embrace this community, it's good to look for direction and inspiration from organizations already doing it well. Below are three examples of companies that are in the business of second-chances.

JPMorgan Chase: The investment bank and financial services holding company announced in October 2019 several major steps to encourage second-chance hiring for those with criminal records. The bank officially "banned the box," proactively removing all questions about criminal records from its job applications. The company also expanded its recruitment efforts to attract a broader talent pool, which will now include individuals with a criminal background. Further, it's investing more than \$7 million toward organizations that provide job- and life-skills training to the formerly incarcerated.

Televerde: For the past 25 years, Televerde, a sales and marketing solutions company based in Phoenix, has been hiring and training incarcerated women in Arizona and Indiana in business acumen, sales and marketing, and the most in-demand hard and soft skills. This level of knowledge and on-the-job experience enables them to secure highly competitive career positions upon release.

Case in point: graduates attain employment after release at a rate of 44.3 percent higher than other released female U.S. prisoners and earn almost four times the national average for formerly incarcerated females. This leads to a recidivism rate that is 91 percent lower than the national average for Televerde program participants. The company launched a **non-profit organization, Televerde Foundation**, to help the women coming out of corrections address the issues that led them to prison and to provide job placement and life-skills training.

Arizona State University's Seidman Research Institute recently **released the findings of a study** that reviewed the **economic, social and fiscal** impact of Televerde's prison workforce development program on individuals, families, and the state of Arizona. The results tell a strong story about the transformative power of second-chance hiring.

Dave's Killer Bread (DKB): DKB began in 2005 when co-founder Dave Dahl joined his brother Glen at the family bakery after serving a 15-year prison sentence. The company, which began at a local farmers' market, is now sold in more than 9,000 stores in all 50 states and Canada. What's more, approximately 1 in 3 of the more than 300 employee-partners at the company's Milwaukie, Oregon bakery has **a criminal background. They fill** positions from entry level jobs to management positions that

are responsible for hundreds of employees and critical bakery operations. In 2015, **DKB launched a foundation** work to expand employment opportunities for people with criminal backgrounds.

These are just three of hundreds of employers that have tapped into the potential of this unconventional talent pool and, as a result, are generating massive business results while having a positive impact on society. (A fuller list of second-chance employers **is available here**.)

What You Can Do Today, As a Private Employer Visit a Prison

It's hard to conceive of the raw talent inside prisons if you haven't experienced it. The narrative that most people have in their heads has been created by Hollywood images, news headlines, and horrible stories of violence told over a lifetime. It paints a picture that prisons **are filled with people who are** unsalvageable. This is a myth. In fact, overwhelmingly, U.S. prisons house women and men who want to do the right thing; they either made a mistake or **are unable to find their way down** a better, more stable path. They need support and opportunity. **People have described** visiting Televerde's prison-run operations as "life-changing" because it is. You enter a prison with the worst labels swirling in your head: inmate, offender, thief, addict, felon, criminal, etc. You leave with these labels dramatically



changed: mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter, caregiver, friend, colleague, neighbor, etc. Know this: when the labels that society places on people change for the better, those people become inspired to live up to them.

Ban the Box

Join the growing coalition of private employers that are [removing the felon box](#) from job applications. Then take it one step further by delaying background checks until after a conditional letter of employment is given. This will help ensure that every candidate has a fair shot at employment and is considered for a role based solely on their talent, experience and aptitude, rather than their background or circumstance.

Commit to Hire

Now that you're ready and willing to create opportunity for individuals with a criminal background, you need to commit to hire. This is where SHRM's [Getting Talent Back to Work](#) can

help. Signing the pledge today on behalf of your company is **a great first step. As a second step, work with your finance and HR teams** to set a goal for the number of formerly incarcerated individuals you're willing to hire this year. As a third step, commit to introducing company-wide training and engaging in meaningful conversations with your employees as it relates to unconscious bias. An especially powerful add-on to this is to invite business professionals who have successfully transformed their lives to meet with your teams. This is an effective way to erase stigmas and to form connections with those who are stigmatized.

Join a Coalition

The [Global Impact Sourcing Coalition](#) is a global network of businesses that commit to provide meaningful career opportunities to people from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds (i.e., impact workers), including men and women with a criminal **background. It is really beneficial**

to align your organization with like-minded companies in order to further collaboration and share best practices that keep your business evolving and focused on deliberate, continuous and inclusive recruitment and hiring efforts. Be sure to also check out GISC's [Reducing Poverty Through Employment](#) toolkit, which serves as a guide for companies looking to expand their workforce strategies.

Now, it's up to you.



Kellie Walenciak is the Head of Corporate Communications for Televerde.



Reprinted with permission from HR.com