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8

REBUILDING

WORK AND RECOVERY

Finding a Job, Keeping It, and What to Tell Employers

STEPHEN DEASON

Alder Creek EDITIONS

Work and Recovery

With Thanks

These books are offered at a low price in print and free online through the generous support of Matthew Marberry and the Michael Marberry Family Fund.

Thank you, Matthew, for helping put these books in the hands of the people who need them.

Stephen Deason

DON'T PANIC

If you are in danger, call 911.

If you are in crisis, or thinking about suicide, call or text 988.

For free help finding treatment, call 1-800-662-4357.

For the work plan, turn to page 80.

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The Mile Marker Library

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Alder Creek EDITIONS

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Recovery Books

The Mile Marker Library: standalone books and tools for people getting into recovery on their own. Each one is numbered and labeled by what it helps with. Start with any of them.

RIGHT NOW

1. *Don't Panic: The First Hours After You Stop*
What to Do When You Stop Drinking or Using

2. *Wallet Crisis Card* **Free Printable**
Numbers to Call, Ready to Print

3. *Free Help Directory*
Meetings, Helplines, and Low-Cost Care

4. *Medications for Addiction, Explained*
What They Are, How to Ask, and How to Pay

DAILY PRACTICE

5. *Tools You Can Use on Your Own*
A Guide to Self-Directed Recovery

6. *Cravings and Hard Hours Workbook*
A Companion to Tools You Can Use on Your Own

7. *One Day at a Time, Written Down*
A 90-Day Gratitude Journal, in General and Christian Editions

8. *Daily Reader, 365 Days* **Forthcoming**
For Any Recovery Path

9. *Worksheet Library* **Forthcoming**
Every Journal Page and Exercise, Ready to Print

REBUILDING

10. *Money in Early Recovery*
Budgets, Debts, Benefits, and Credit

11. *Work and Recovery* **This book**
Finding a Job, Keeping It, and What to Tell Employers

12. *Finding a Safe Place to Live*
Sober Housing and What to Check Before You Move In

13. *Court, Probation, and Recovery* **Forthcoming**
What to Ask a Lawyer and What Records to Keep

PEOPLE AROUND YOU

14. *For Families*
When Someone You Love Can't Get to Treatment

15. *Group Facilitator Guide*
Running Free Peer Support Groups with These Books

16. *Employer Guide* **Forthcoming**
Hiring and Keeping People in Recovery

Who This Book Is For and How to Use It

This book is for people looking for work, keeping a job, or deciding what to tell an employer.

Work and recovery lean on each other. A job pays the rent, fills the hours that used to belong to using, and gives you something to say when someone asks what you do. It also brings deadlines, a boss, a paycheck in your hand on Friday, and people who drink after shift. Both of those are real, and this book takes both seriously.

This book covers finding work, getting hired with a gap or a record, what you have to tell an employer and what you do not, drug testing, keeping the job once you have it, and what to do when it goes wrong.

How to use it

- Start with Chapter 3 if you need your papers together.
- Start with Chapter 6 if you want free help and do not know where it is.
- Start with Chapter 9 if you have a record and that is the thing stopping you.
- Start with Chapter 10 if you are trying to work out what to say about your recovery.
- Start with Chapter 12 if you take medication for addiction and a drug test is coming.
- Start with Chapter 16 if you already have the job and are trying to hold it.

The fill-in pages are yours. Every service named in this book is free or low cost.

What this book is not

It is not legal advice, and the author is not your lawyer. Employment law is federal, state, and sometimes city law all at once, and it changes. Where the answer depends on where you live, this book says so and points you to legal aid, who do this for free.

It also does not tell you whether you are ready to work, whether a job is right for you, or what to disclose. Those are your decisions, and Chapter 2 names the people who can help you make them.

If you are in danger right now

Emergency: 911

Crisis or thoughts of suicide: call or text 988

Free treatment referrals: 1-800-662-4357

Free help finding work: 1-877-872-5627

1. What Work Does, and What It Costs

People in early recovery are often told to get a job as though the job were the point. It is worth being clearer than that, because knowing what you are getting lets you plan around the parts that are hard.

What a job gives you

- Hours with a shape. The stretch between two in the afternoon and bedtime is where a lot of people get into trouble, and a shift covers it.
- Money that is yours, which changes how the rest of your life feels.
- People who expect you somewhere. Being missed is worth more than it sounds.
- Something to say when a stranger asks what you do.
- A record of showing up, which is what courts, landlords, and family all want to see.
- Distance from the day. Eight hours spent on something else is eight hours.

What a job costs

- Stress, which is a trigger for most people and does not stop being one because the stress is legitimate.
- Money in your pocket on a set day, which Chapter 19 and the money book in this library both deal with.
- Coworkers who drink after shift, and who will invite you.
- Tiredness, which makes everything harder.

- A schedule that can collide with meetings, counseling, court, and treatment.
- Injury, in physical work, and the pain question that comes with it.

None of that is a reason to stay home. It is a list of things to have a plan for before they happen, which is most of what this book is.

The order that works for most people

Get stable first, whatever stable means for you. Then get your papers together. Then look. Then apply widely and expect it to take a while. Then take something that pays and is safe, even if it is not the job you want, and use it to get the next one.

The job you take in month two does not have to be the job you keep. It has to pay you, not put you in front of the thing you are getting away from, and put a recent employer on your record.

What I want work to do for me right now:

The part of it I am most worried about:

What I would take today if it were offered:

2. Going Back to Work: Who Decides

This book cannot tell you whether you are ready to work, how many hours you can handle, or whether a particular job is safe for you. Those are decisions about your own health and your own life, and the people below can help you make them.

Who to ask, and what to ask them

- A counselor or therapist, if you have one. What to say: I am thinking about going back to work. What should I be watching for?
- Your prescriber, if you take medication for addiction or for anything else. What to say: I am starting work. Does anything about my schedule or my medication need to change?
- Your sponsor, peer coach, or someone further along than you. What to say: When you went back, what did you wish you had known?
- A vocational rehabilitation counselor through your state, which is free. What to say: I want to work and I want help matching the work to what I can do right now.
- Your probation or parole officer, if you have one, because work conditions and travel limits are their call.

What is worth thinking about before you start

- Hours. Full time, part time, and whether you can build up.

- Shift. Nights are harder for sleep and for meetings. Days cost you daytime appointments.
- Where. A bar, a restaurant with a bar, a job that hands out prescription pads, a job that puts you back among the people you used with.
- Travel. If you cannot get there reliably, it is not a job you can keep.
- What happens to your benefits if you start earning. Ask the agency before you start, not after.

That last one catches people. Earned income can change SNAP, Medicaid, housing, and disability payments. Call the agency or 211 and ask what happens at what income before you take the job, so the first paycheck is not a surprise that costs you your coverage.

Who I am going to ask, and when:

What they said:

What I decided, and the date:

---

3. Your Papers

Most jobs cannot hire you without documents, and getting them takes longer than people expect. Start this before you start applying, because a job offer with a two-week wait for an ID is a job offer that goes away.

What almost every employer needs

- A photo ID: a state ID card or a driver's license.
- Proof you can work: a Social Security card, a birth certificate, or a passport. Employers fill out a federal form for this and will tell you what they accept.
- A bank account or a way to be paid, which Chapter 19 and the money book cover.
- An address where mail reaches you, and a phone number that works.

If you do not have them

- A replacement Social Security card is free from the Social Security Administration. Apply online at ssa.gov or at a local office.
- A state ID usually takes a birth certificate plus proof of address. Fees vary and many states waive them for people leaving incarceration or in a shelter.
- A birth certificate comes from the vital records office in the state where you were born, and costs a fee.
- Call 211 and say what you are missing. Many recovery community organizations, shelters, and reentry programs pay these fees and drive you there.

- An American Job Center can often help with the paperwork, and Chapter 6 covers what else they do.

Where to keep them

Get a folder, a large envelope, or a zip bag, and keep everything in one place: the ID, the card, the birth certificate, your work history, your references, and anything from court or probation. Take a photo of each one on your phone as a backup. Paper gets lost in early recovery more than at any other time in a life, and replacing it twice costs money you do not have.

What I have:

What I am missing:

Who I called about it, and what they said:

The date I expect it:

4. Your Work History, Gaps Included

You need a list of where you have worked before you can fill out a single application. Write it out once, keep it in the folder, and copy from it every time. Guessing at dates on an application is how people end up with a mismatch that looks like a lie.

For each job, write down

- The employer's name as it appears on a paycheck, not what people called it.
- The city.
- The month and year you started and the month and year you left. Month and year is enough.
- Your job title, or what you actually did if there was no title.
- Two or three things you did there that someone else would care about.
- A person who would say something good about you, and how to reach them.

If you cannot remember dates, your own Social Security earnings record lists your reported wages by employer and year. It is free at ssa.gov. Old pay stubs, tax returns, and bank deposits also work.

About the gaps

Everybody who has been out of work has a gap, and hiring managers see them constantly. A gap on its own does not disqualify you. What sinks people is having no answer

ready, because the silence gets filled with whatever the interviewer imagines.

You do not owe anyone your medical history, and Chapter 10 goes through what you do and do not have to say. What you do need is one plain sentence you can say without flinching, and Chapter 13 works on how to deliver it.

Things people put in the gap that are true and sayable: caring for a family member, a health matter that is now handled, school, moving, incarceration if it is already on the record anyway, and work that was cash or short term.

My work history

Use the next two pages. Then write your references on the page after.

My Work History: page one

Employer and city	Dates	What I did	Who can vouch for me

My Work History: page two

Employer and city	Dates	What I did	Who can vouch for me

My References

Ask each one first. A reference who is surprised by the call is worse than no reference.

Name	How they know me	Phone	Email

5. Where the Work Is

Some kinds of work hire quickly, ask fewer questions, and start you within a week. Others pay better and take longer. Early on, most people need the first kind while they line up the second.

Places that hire fast

- Staffing and temp agencies. You go in once, they send you out on assignments, and many assignments turn into permanent jobs. This is the single fastest route for most people.
- Warehouses and distribution centers, especially before holidays.
- Landscaping, cleaning, moving, and construction labor.
- Kitchens. Fast, cash-adjacent, and worth a thought about whether the restaurant has a bar and what happens at the end of shift.
- Retail and grocery, which hire on a schedule and often have openings posted at the store.
- Home care and caregiving agencies, which are usually short-staffed and will train you.

Places that take longer and pay more

- Trades: electrical, plumbing, HVAC, welding. Apprenticeships pay you while you learn, and Chapter 24 covers how to find one.
- Commercial driving, which needs a license and has its own federal drug testing rules.

- Manufacturing, which often trains on the line.
- Healthcare support roles, some of which need a certificate that takes weeks, not years.

Employers that have decided to hire people like you

Some companies hire deliberately from recovery and reentry. They exist in most metro areas and are worth finding before you spend a month getting turned down elsewhere.

- Ask your American Job Center which local employers work with them on second-chance hiring.
- Ask a recovery community organization, a drug court coordinator, or a reentry program for their employer list.
- Ask at meetings. Somebody in the room got hired somewhere that hires people in recovery.
- Call 211 and ask for employment programs in your area.

Work to think twice about, early on

Bars and liquor stores. Jobs that put you alone with cash or with medication. Jobs in the neighborhood where you used. Night shifts, if sleep is already a problem. None of these is forbidden, and people do all of them in recovery. Decide it on purpose rather than by accident, and tell somebody what you decided.

Three kinds of work I could start this month:

The one I will try first:

What I am ruling out, and why:

---

6. Free Help Finding Work

There is a public system for this, it is paid for already, and most people have never walked into it.

American Job Centers

There are roughly 2,300 of them. They run job search help, referrals to employers, resume help, computers and phones you can use, and in many cases they pay for training. There is no charge to you.

- Find one at careeronestop.org, or call 1-877-872-5627.
- Walk in and say: I am looking for work, I need help, where do I start.
- Ask specifically about training paid for under WIOA, the federal workforce law, which can cover a certificate or a short program.
- Ask whether they have a specialist for justice-involved job seekers, because many do.
- Ask about the Federal Bonding Program, which Chapter 9 explains.

Vocational rehabilitation

Every state runs a vocational rehabilitation agency for people whose health affects their ability to work. Services can include assessment, training, equipment, and help with a job search, at no cost. Substance use disorder can qualify. Call 211 or search for your state's vocational rehabilitation office and ask whether you are eligible.

Recovery community organizations

Many run employment programs, hold job fairs with employers who have already agreed to hire from recovery, and will drive you to interviews. Ask at a meeting, ask your treatment program, or call the SAMHSA helpline at 1-800-662-4357 and ask what recovery community organizations are near you.

Other places worth a call

- 211, for everything local, including clothing for interviews and bus passes.
- Goodwill, which runs free job training in most cities.
- Your public library, which has computers, printing, and often a jobs program.
- Veterans: your state workforce agency has a veterans representative, and va.gov has employment programs.
- Union halls, which sometimes take walk-ins for apprenticeship information.

The American Job Center nearest me, and its address:

_____

_____

The date I will go:

_____

_____

Who else I will call:

7. Applying

Applying is a numbers game with a small amount of craft in it. Most people apply too narrowly and then conclude nobody will hire them.

How many

Ten applications is not a job search. Aim for five a day, four days a week, until something lands. Most will go nowhere for reasons that have nothing to do with you: the job was filled, the posting was old, the company never called anyone back.

What to put on it

- Your legal name, as it appears on your ID.
- A phone number you will answer, and a voicemail that says your name.
- An email address that is your name and nothing else. Make a new one if you need to.
- Your work history from Chapter 4, with the dates you already wrote down.
- References you have already asked.

The questions that are hard

Applications ask about criminal history, about why you left your last job, and sometimes about gaps. Chapters 8 and 9 deal with the record. On the others:

- Why you left: short and neutral. Laid off. Company closed. Left for another position. Personal reasons. You do not have to explain a personal reason on a form.
- Do not write anything on an application you are not willing to say out loud in an interview.
- Do not lie. A lie that is discovered later is grounds for firing you even years in, and it is the one mistake that follows you.

Track what you send

Two weeks in, you will not remember where you applied or who you talked to. Use the next two pages. When somebody calls you back, you want to know immediately which job it is.

Applications: page one

Employer	Date applied	Who I talked to	What happened, and next step

Applications: page two

Employer	Date applied	Who I talked to	What happened, and next step

8. Background Checks

Most employers run some kind of check. Knowing what it is and what your rights are takes the ambush out of it.

What they are looking at

- Criminal records, from courts and state repositories.
- Employment and education, which is usually a call to confirm you worked there and when.
- Driving records, for anything that involves a vehicle.
- Credit, for some jobs that handle money, though many states limit this.
- Drug testing, which Chapter 11 covers separately.

What federal law gives you

When an employer uses an outside company to run the check, the Fair Credit Reporting Act applies, and it gives you four things.

1. They need your written permission before they run it.
2. Before they turn you down because of it, they have to give you a copy of the report and a written summary of your rights under the law. This is your chance to see what it says and tell them it is wrong.
3. After they turn you down, they have to tell you the name, address, and phone number of the company that produced the report, tell you that company did not make the decision, and tell you that you can dispute what is in it.

4. You can get a free copy of that report from the reporting company within 60 days.

Use step two. People assume the pre-adverse letter is a formality and throw it away. It is the one moment where a wrong record can be corrected before the decision is final.

When the report is wrong

Background reports carry other people's records, charges that were dropped shown as convictions, and cases that were expunged and never removed. Disputing is free.

- Write to the background check company named in the letter. Say what is wrong and what the correct information is.
- Send proof: court disposition papers, an expungement order, anything from the clerk of court.
- Tell the employer in writing that you are disputing it, and ask them to hold the position.
- Complain at consumerfinance.gov if they do not fix it.
- Call legal aid at lsc.gov. These cases are often taken at no cost to you.

Know what is on yours before they do

Get your own record first. Ask the clerk of court in the county where the case was heard, or your state's bureau of investigation, what a background check shows. Some charge a small fee. Walking into an interview knowing

exactly what will come up is worth the fee and the afternoon.

What I think will show up:

What I found when I checked:

Anything that is wrong, and what I am doing about it:

---

9. If You Have a Record

A record makes the search longer. It does not make it hopeless, and most of what makes the difference is preparation rather than luck.

What the law does and does not do

Federal law does not stop an employer from asking about criminal history or from considering it. What it limits is how a record can be used. Under federal civil rights law, an employer who screens out everyone with a record, without looking at the specifics, can run into trouble when that blanket rule falls harder on one racial or ethnic group than another.

The federal civil rights agency asks employers to weigh three things instead: what the offense was, how long ago it happened, and what the job actually involves. It also draws a line between an arrest and a conviction, because an arrest on its own does not establish that anything happened.

Many states and cities go further, and limit when in the hiring process an employer may ask. Those rules vary, and this book cannot tell you what yours are. Legal aid at lsc.gov can, for free, and so can your state's labor department.

Three things worth doing

1. Ask a lawyer whether your record can be sealed, expunged, or set aside. Rules vary by state and by

offense, many people qualify without knowing it, and legal aid and public defender offices often do this at no charge.

2. Ask about a certificate of rehabilitation or relief, which some states issue and which some employers accept.
3. Ask your American Job Center about the Federal Bonding Program. It gives an employer a fidelity bond covering the first six months at no cost to you or to them, and people in recovery are named among those it is for. It removes a specific worry from a specific employer's mind, which is more useful than reassurance.

What to say

When the record comes up, employers are deciding one thing: is this going to be a problem for me. Answer that, in about thirty seconds, in this shape.

1. Name it plainly. I have a conviction from 2019 for theft.
2. Do not argue it. No explanation of why it was not really your fault. This is the part people get wrong, and it is the part that loses the job.
3. Say what changed, concretely. I have been sober three years, I have a sponsor, I have not missed a shift at my last job.
4. Say why it will not touch this job. Then stop talking and let them respond.

Practice it out loud until it is boring to say. The delivery matters more than the words, and an answer you have said fifty times comes out steady.

What is on my record, and the year:

My thirty-second answer:

Who I am asking about sealing or expungement, and when:

10. What You Have to Tell an Employer

This is the question people lose sleep over, and the plain answer is shorter than expected. You do not have to tell an employer that you are in recovery. It is a health matter, it is yours, and no application question entitles anyone to it.

What follows is what federal law says. State law sometimes gives you more. It does not give you less.

What federal disability law covers

The Americans with Disabilities Act does not protect someone who is currently using illegal drugs. It does protect a person who has completed a supervised rehabilitation program and is no longer using, a person who is in such a program and is no longer using, and a person wrongly believed to be using who is not. Alcoholism is treated as a disability under that law.

Being covered means an employer may not refuse to hire you, or fire you, because of the addiction itself or because of your history of it. It also means you can ask for reasonable accommodation, which Chapter 17 is about.

What being covered does not mean

- An employer may forbid drinking and illegal drug use at work, and may forbid being under the influence at work.

- An employer may hold you to the same performance and conduct standards as everyone else. Being in recovery does not excuse missed shifts or poor work.
- An employer may test for illegal drug use, and a drug test is not treated as a medical examination under that law.
- Some jobs carry federal rules of their own, in transportation, defense, and nuclear work, and those rules govern.

When to say something, if you say anything

There is no rule here, only trade-offs, and it is your call.

- Saying nothing is the default, and it is the most common choice.
- Saying something after an offer, rather than before, is the more protected moment, because the offer already exists.
- You may need to say something if you are asking for a schedule change for appointments or meetings, and in that case you can usually describe what you need without naming what you have.
- You may need to say something if a drug test will show medication you take, and Chapters 11 and 12 cover that.
- Some people say it plainly on purpose, because they would rather work somewhere it is welcome. That is a real strategy and it works for some people.

The wording, if you decide to

Keep it to one sentence, in the present tense, aimed at the job.

I am in recovery and it is stable. I have a standing commitment on Tuesday evenings that I would like to keep, and I can work any other schedule you need.

That sentence gives them the thing that affects the job and nothing else. You are not obligated to answer follow-up questions about your history, and a simple that is all I am going to get into is a complete answer.

What I have decided to say, if anything:

When I will say it:

What I will say if they ask more:

11. Drug Testing

Many employers test. Knowing the process removes most of the fear from it.

When it happens

- Before hire, usually after a conditional offer.
- Randomly, in some workplaces and in most federally regulated ones.
- After an accident at work.
- When a supervisor has a documented reason to suspect impairment.
- As part of a return-to-work agreement.

What to expect

A urine sample at a collection site is the usual form. You will show ID, leave your bag and coat outside the room, and the sample gets sealed and labeled in front of you. Hair, saliva, and blood tests exist and are less common. The result goes to the employer, sometimes through a medical review officer.

The medical review officer

In federally regulated testing, and at many other employers, a non-negative result goes to a medical review officer, who is a physician, before it goes to your employer. Their job is to call you and ask whether there is a lawful explanation. That call is the most important one in this whole process.

- Answer the phone. A missed call often means the result stands as reported.
- Have your prescription bottles, or the pharmacy printout, or your prescriber's number ready.
- Tell them what you take and who prescribes it. They may verify it with the prescriber.
- If it checks out, the officer reports the test as negative to your employer, and your employer is told the result without your medical details.
- You can ask for the sample to be retested at a second laboratory. There is usually a deadline of a few days, so ask immediately.

Before the test, not after

If you take anything prescribed, get the documentation into your hand before the test. A photograph of the label on your phone, the pharmacy printout, and your prescriber's phone number saved in your contacts. Sorting this out afterward is possible and much harder.

What not to do

Do not use anything sold to beat a test. Collection sites check temperature and adulterants, the products mostly do not work, and being caught trying is worse in every case than the result you were trying to avoid. In some states it is its own offense.

What I take, who prescribes it, and their number:

Where my documentation is:

What I will say if the officer calls:

---

12. If You Take Medication for Addiction

Buprenorphine, methadone, and naltrexone are prescribed treatments. People taking them work in every kind of job. There are still employers who handle this badly, so it is worth knowing where you stand before it comes up.

What the law says

The federal agency that enforces disability law in employment has said that an employer cannot automatically disqualify you for lawful opioid use, including medication prescribed to treat opioid addiction, without looking at whether you can do the job safely. It has also said that someone who had an addiction in the past is entitled to accommodations needed because of that past condition, which can include time for counseling or support groups.

Certain safety-sensitive jobs carry separate federal rules, and in those roles the rule is whatever the governing agency says. If you drive commercially, work in aviation, or work in a federally regulated safety role, ask the employer which federal rules apply before you accept the job.

Who needs to know

- The medical review officer, if a test comes back non-negative. Chapter 11 covers that call.

- Nobody else, as a general matter. Your supervisor does not need your diagnosis.
- Human resources, if you are asking for an accommodation such as a schedule that fits a daily dosing window. You can usually describe the need without naming the medication.
- Your prescriber, if your new schedule affects your dosing. Tell them before the schedule starts.

If a clinic visit has to happen during work hours

Daily dosing at a clinic collides with an early shift more than any other single thing. Options people use: asking the clinic about earlier hours or take-home doses, asking the employer for a start time thirty minutes later, or taking a shift that starts after the clinic opens. Ask the clinic first, because they solve this constantly.

If you are turned down because of the medication

That may be unlawful. Write down what was said, by whom, and when, on the day it happens. Then call the federal civil rights agency at 1-800-669-4000, or legal aid at lsc.gov. Chapter 23 covers how those complaints work and the deadlines, which are shorter than people expect.

My medication, my prescriber, and the pharmacy:

What my dosing schedule needs from a work schedule:

Who I have decided to tell, and who I have not:

---

13. The Interview

An interview is a short conversation in which somebody decides whether you will show up, do the work, and be easy to have around. Most of what wins it is preparation you can do the night before.

Before you go

- Read the job posting again and write down three things they asked for.
- Write one example for each, from any job you have ever had.
- Know how you are getting there and leave early. Arriving late ends it before it starts.
- Clean clothes, a notch above what the job wears. 211 and Goodwill have interview clothing free in most cities.
- Bring your folder: ID, work history, references, and a pen.

The four questions you will get

1. Tell me about yourself. Sixty seconds, about work only, ending with why you want this job.
2. Why did you leave your last job? Short and neutral. Do not narrate a conflict.
3. What is this gap? One sentence, steady, then stop. Chapter 4 covers what goes in it.
4. Tell me about a time something went wrong. Say what happened, what you did, and what you would do now.

Keep yourself in the story as the person who handled it.

If the record comes up

Use the thirty-second answer from Chapter 9, the one you practiced out loud. Name it, do not argue it, say what changed, say why it will not touch this job, stop talking.

Questions to ask them

Ask two. Not asking anything reads as not caring.

- What does a normal day look like here?
- What makes somebody good at this job?
- What is the schedule, and how far ahead is it posted?
- What happens in the first week?
- When will you decide?

Afterward

Write down who you met and what they said, on the application tracker in Chapter 7. Send a short thank-you email the same day if you have an address for them. Two sentences is enough, and almost nobody does it.

When you do not get it

Most interviews do not end in an offer, for anybody. Getting turned down four times in a row is an ordinary week in a job search and it is not information about you. Keep the rate up, because volume is what ends this.

The three things this employer asked for:

My example for each:

My two questions for them:

14. The Offer

Before you say yes, get the details. Once you have started, the schedule is the schedule.

What to ask before you accept

- The pay, per hour, and whether there is overtime.
- The hours per week, and whether they are guaranteed.
- The schedule, how far ahead it is posted, and whether it changes.
- When the first paycheck lands. It is often two to three weeks out, and that gap has to be planned for.
- Whether they pay weekly, every two weeks, or twice a month.
- What it costs you: uniform, boots, tools, parking, a background check fee.
- Whether there is a probation period and what happens at the end of it.
- Whether there is health coverage, when it starts, and what it costs per check.

The schedule question, asked early

If you have a standing commitment, a Tuesday meeting, a Thursday counseling hour, a Monday check-in with probation, this is the moment to ask about it. Ask before you accept, not in week three. You do not have to explain what it is.

Wording that works: I have a standing commitment on Tuesday evenings. Is this schedule able to work around that?

What the job actually pays

Take the weekly pay, subtract what getting to the job costs you, and look at what is left. The money book in this library works this out in detail. A job paying less, closer to home, with no childcare, can leave you with more.

What This Job Actually Pays

Fill this in for each offer, and compare the bottom line rather than the hourly rate.

Line	Job A	Job B	Job C
Hours per week			
Pay per hour			
Weekly pay before deductions			
Taxes and deductions			
Take-home pay			
Gas, bus, or parking			
Childcare			
Uniform, boots, or tools			
Food bought at work			
Anything else it costs me			
What is left			
What that is per hour worked			

15. The First Thirty Days

Most jobs are lost in the first month, and almost always for the same two reasons: not showing up, and not asking. Neither is about skill.

Showing up

- Know your schedule for the week and write it where you will see it.
- Set two alarms. Put the phone across the room.
- Have a backup way to get there, decided in advance, for the morning the first one fails.
- Arrive ten minutes early. In the first month this is the whole reputation.
- If you are going to be late, call before your start time. Every workplace forgives a call and remembers a no-show.

Asking

New people who ask questions get taught. New people who guess make errors that somebody else finds later. Say I have not done this one, can you show me. Nobody has ever been fired in week one for that sentence.

Writing it down

Carry a small notebook. Write down names, where things are, and how to do the thing they just showed you. Early recovery and a new job together are more than memory can hold, and looking at your own notes reads as competence.

The first paycheck

Check the stub against the hours you worked and the rate you were told. Errors on a first check are common. Raise it once, politely, with whoever does payroll.

Protecting the recovery while this is happening

- Keep the meetings you already had. Cutting them because you are tired is the move that costs people the job two months later.
- Tell one person outside work how it is going, every week.
- Eat during the shift. Low blood sugar at hour seven is a bad combination with a hard day.
- Decide now what you will say when somebody asks you to come for a drink after work. Chapter 18 has wording.

My schedule this week:

How I get there, and my backup:

Who I check in with, and when:

What I will say to the first after-work invitation:

16. Who to Tell at Work

You will work alongside people eight hours a day and they will ask ordinary questions. Deciding in advance what you share keeps you from answering on the spot.

Three different audiences

- Human resources, if you are requesting an accommodation. They need the need, not the diagnosis.
- Your supervisor, who needs to know about your availability and nothing else unless you choose otherwise.
- Coworkers, who need nothing at all, and who are the group most likely to ask.

Ordinary questions with ordinary answers

- Not drinking tonight? I am not drinking these days.
- Are you in a program or something? I am, yes. Then change the subject, or do not.
- What did you do before this? Whatever you decided in Chapter 4, said the same way every time.
- Want to come to happy hour? Not tonight, thanks. Have one for me. No explanation required.

You do not owe anyone a reason for not drinking. The people who push are usually thinking about themselves.

Finding the one person

Most workplaces have someone who is also in recovery or has family in it. They usually turn up within a month. Having one person at work who knows makes a hard afternoon much easier, and you will know them when you meet them.

If it gets around

Sometimes it does, and it is rarely the disaster people expect. If somebody uses it against you, write down what was said and when, and read Chapter 23. Harassment because of a disability, including a past addiction, is not something you have to absorb.

What I will say to a coworker who asks:

_____

_____

What I have told my supervisor:

_____

_____

One person at work I could tell, if there is one:

_____

_____

17. Time Off for Appointments and Meetings

Counseling hours, clinic visits, court dates, and meetings all happen during the week. Getting these built into the schedule is ordinary and most employers handle it without drama.

Asking, in plain terms

Start with the simplest version. Many schedule requests never need to be more than this.

I have a standing appointment on Thursdays at four. Can my shift end at three-thirty on Thursdays, or can I make up those hours another day?

That is a scheduling conversation, not a disclosure. Most supervisors say yes and it goes no further.

If the simple version does not work

Under federal disability law, a person covered because of a past addiction can ask for reasonable accommodation, and a schedule change for treatment or support group attendance is a recognized example. Asking formally means going to human resources rather than your supervisor.

- Put the request in writing, and keep a copy.
- Say what you need, in schedule terms: a later start, a shift change, an unpaid hour on Thursdays.
- You may be asked for documentation from a provider showing the need. A note that states the need for the

schedule, without the diagnosis, is often enough. Ask your provider to write it that way.

- The employer can offer a different accommodation than the one you asked for, as long as it works.
- The employer does not have to lower performance standards, and does not have to excuse work you did not do.

Other kinds of leave

- Unpaid family and medical leave exists at larger employers for people who have worked there long enough. Ask human resources whether you qualify and what the paperwork is.
- Some employers have an employee assistance program, which Chapter 20 covers, and using it is usually confidential.
- Paid sick leave is required in some states and cities and not in others. Ask what the policy is in writing.

Keep the record

Write down what you asked for, who you asked, the date, and what they said. If this becomes a dispute later, the contemporaneous note is what carries it.

My Week: Work and Everything Else

Put your shifts in first, then your meetings, appointments, and check-ins. What collides is what you need to ask about.

Day	Shift	Meeting	Appointment	Other
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

18. Work Stress and the Hard Hours

Work brings its own set of hard moments, and they arrive on a schedule you can predict. Predictable is workable.

The hours that catch people

- The end of a shift, when the day drops and there is nothing next.
- Payday, especially if you are paid in cash or the check clears on a Friday.
- After a bad shift: a customer, a mistake, a supervisor.
- The drive home, alone, past everywhere you used to go.
- Sunday night, before a week you are dreading.
- A work party, a holiday lunch, a retirement send-off, all of which involve alcohol.
- Travel for work, which removes every routine you have at once.

A plan for the end of shift

Decide the next thing before the shift ends, not after. A meeting, a call to somebody on the drive, a meal with a person, a gym, a shower and food at home. The failure is an empty hour that nobody planned.

After-work drinking

You will be invited. Have the sentence ready so you are not composing it while six people wait.

- Not tonight, I am beat. Have one for me.

- I have got somewhere to be. Next time.
- I do not drink, but I will come for the food.
- No thanks.

If you do go, drive yourself, order your own drink from the bartender, keep it in your hand, and decide in advance what time you leave. Or do not go. Both are fine, and going once does not commit you to going again.

When you are the one who is angry

Work supplies more injustice per week than almost anything else, and resentment is the thing that takes people out. The tools for this are in the self-directed recovery books in this library. At work specifically: do not send the message the same day, do not talk about it in the parking lot with somebody who will repeat it, and write down what happened so you have the facts if it matters later.

My triggers at work

Fill in the ones you already know. Add to it as you find them.

Work Triggers and What I Will Do

When it happens	What happens in me	What I will do instead

19. The Money Side of a New Job

The first weeks of a job are the tightest money you will see, because you are spending to get to work before any of it comes back.

The gap before the first check

Two to three weeks is normal. Gas, bus fare, food at work, boots, and a uniform all land before any pay does. Ask on day one when the first check comes and what it will cover, then plan the weeks in between.

- Ask whether the employer offers early access to earned wages, which some do at no cost.
- Ask an American Job Center or 211 about work-related help: bus passes, gas cards, boots, tools, and uniforms are commonly covered.
- Ask the employer about an advance. Small employers sometimes say yes and nobody asks.
- Make lunch. Buying it every day is the fastest way to be broke on a wage that should have worked.

Read the first pay stub

Check the hours, the rate, the deductions, and the net. Errors are common on a first check and get harder to fix the longer you leave them. The money book in this library reads a stub line by line.

Payday is a recovery question, not only a money question

Direct deposit is safer than cash in a pocket for most people in early recovery. Decide before payday where the money goes, carry only what you need for the day, and tell somebody the plan. The money book has a full payday chapter.

What changes when you start earning

SNAP, Medicaid, housing assistance, and disability payments can all change when income starts. Report the income when the agency requires it, because an overpayment you have to pay back later is worse than the reduction now. Call 211 or the agency and ask what to report and when.

When my first check lands, and what it has to cover:

How I get to work until then:

What I need to report, to whom, and by when:

20. Employee Assistance Programs

Many employers pay for a service most of their staff never use. It is worth knowing whether yours has one.

What it is

An employee assistance program is an outside service the employer pays for, which offers a set number of free counseling sessions and referrals for personal problems, including substance use, mental health, legal questions, and money trouble. It is usually available to your household as well as to you.

What to know before using it

- It is free to you, and it is usually a fixed number of sessions, often three to eight.
- It is generally confidential. The employer is told how many people used it, not who or why.
- You do not need your supervisor's permission and usually do not go through them at all. Call the number directly.
- Ask about confidentiality at the start of the first call, and get the answer in their words.
- It is separate from a referral made by your employer after a positive test, which has its own rules and is not confidential in the same way.

How to find out whether you have one

Look on the back of your insurance card, in the benefits paperwork from your first week, or on a poster in the

break room. Or ask human resources: does the company have an employee assistance program and what is the number. That question tells them nothing about you.

Whether my employer has one:

The phone number:

What I would use it for:

---

21. When Things Go Wrong at Work

Everybody gets corrected eventually. How you take it decides whether it is one conversation or the start of a file.

Getting written up

- Read it before you sign it. Signing usually means you received it, not that you agree, and the form normally says which.
- If something in it is factually wrong, say so calmly and ask for your response to be attached in writing.
- Ask one question: what specifically do you need to see from me, and by when.
- Keep a copy. Every time.
- Do not argue it in front of other people, and do not quit in the moment.

If you made the mistake

Say so once, say what you will do differently, and then do it. Supervisors forgive errors that are owned quickly far more readily than errors that are defended.

If you are being treated unfairly

Write it down the day it happens: the date, the time, what was said, who else was there. A note made that week is evidence. A memory recalled six months later is not. Then read Chapter 23.

If you are struggling and it is showing

There is a point at which telling somebody is better than letting it run. If your work is slipping and the reason is your recovery, options include the employee assistance program in Chapter 20, an accommodation request under Chapter 17, or the plain conversation with a supervisor who has been reasonable so far.

Understand what asking for help does and does not do. It cannot undo discipline you have already earned, and the law does not require an employer to overlook work you did not do. Asking before the problem is severe gives you more room than asking after.

If you relapse

Get safe first. The recovery books in this library cover the first hours. Then, about the job: do not go to work under the influence, call in rather than not showing up, and get back to your supports the same day. Whether to tell the employer depends on your workplace, whether a test is involved, and whether you have an agreement in place. Ask somebody who knows your situation before you decide, and Chapter 23 is there if the response is unlawful.

What happened, and when:

What I was told to do differently:

What I am doing about it, and by when:

---

22. If You Lose the Job

Losing a job is a high-risk moment in recovery, and it is worth having read this chapter before you need it.

The first day

Tell one person the same day. Not for advice. So that somebody knows where you are. Then keep the day's structure: the meeting you would have gone to, the meal you would have eaten, the bedtime you would have kept. The empty week is what does the damage, not the firing.

Apply for unemployment

- File right away. Benefits generally start from when you file, not from when you lost the job.
- You file with your state, and the rules on who qualifies vary by state.
- Being fired does not automatically disqualify you, and quitting does not automatically disqualify you either. The state decides based on the circumstances, so file and let them decide rather than assuming.
- If you are denied, you can appeal, and the deadline is short. Read the denial letter for the date.
- Legal aid at lsc.gov handles unemployment appeals in many places at no charge.

Get your final pay

You are owed the hours you worked. State law sets when the final check is due and whether unused vacation is paid out. If it does not come, contact your state labor

department, or the federal Wage and Hour Division at 1-866-487-9243, which handles unpaid wage complaints at no cost.

Health coverage

Losing a job with health coverage opens a special enrollment period on the marketplace at HealthCare.gov, and a job loss may make you newly eligible for Medicaid. There are deadlines. If you are on medication for addiction, sort this out in the first week, because a gap in coverage is a gap in medication.

Then start again

Go back to Chapter 7 and restart the numbers. A job you held for four months is still a recent employer on your record and still a reference if you left on reasonable terms. Most people in recovery hold several jobs before one sticks, and that is the ordinary shape of it.

Who I told, and when:

The date I filed for unemployment:

What I am owed, and who I called about it:

What my week looks like starting tomorrow:

---

23. When Your Rights Are Broken

These agencies are free, they take complaints from anyone, and the deadlines are shorter than people expect. That last part is what costs people their claim.

Discrimination because of a disability, including a past addiction

- The federal agency is the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Call 1-800-669-4000 or start at eeoc.gov.
- The deadline to file is generally 180 days from the act you are complaining about, and 300 days in states with their own fair employment agency. Do not wait to be sure. File and let them sort out whether it qualifies.
- Filing is free and you do not need a lawyer to do it.
- Retaliation for filing is itself unlawful.

Unpaid wages, unpaid overtime, illegal deductions

- The federal Wage and Hour Division, at 1-866-487-9243 or dol.gov.
- Your state labor department, which often has shorter routes and covers things federal law does not.
- Both are free, and a complaint can be filed without your employer being told who you are in advance.

Unsafe work

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration takes safety complaints at 1-800-321-6742. You can file confidentially, and firing you for filing is unlawful.

Background check problems

Chapter 8 covers disputing a wrong report. Complaints go to consumerfinance.gov.

A lawyer, at no cost to you

Legal aid at lsc.gov handles employment matters for people with low income. Many employment lawyers also take discrimination and wage cases without charging you up front, because the law can make the other side pay the fees if you win. Ask. The call is free.

What to do today, before anything else

Write down what happened while you remember it: the date, the time, what was said, exactly, and who was there. Keep copies of every document you were given. Send yourself an email with the details so it carries a timestamp. This is the difference between a complaint that goes somewhere and one that does not.

What happened, and the date:

Who I am calling, and when, and my deadline:

---

24. Building Toward Better Work

The first job pays the rent. The second one is chosen. The gap between them is usually a certificate, a license, or a year of showing up.

Training that is already paid for

- Your American Job Center, which can fund training under the federal workforce law. Ask what is on the eligible training provider list in your state.
- Community colleges, where a certificate in welding, HVAC, phlebotomy, commercial driving, or coding takes weeks to months. Financial aid covers many of these.
- Apprenticeships, which pay you from day one while you learn a trade. Start at apprenticeship.gov or a local union hall.
- Employers who pay tuition. Ask in the first week what the company offers, because many have it and few people use it.
- Free online certificates, which are worth something in some fields and nothing in others. Ask somebody already doing the job before you spend weeks on one.

Licensing with a record

Many trades require a state license, and many states let a licensing board consider a conviction. A number of states now limit how far back boards can look or require the

offense to relate to the work. Rules vary and they have been changing.

- Ask the licensing board directly, before you pay for training. Many will tell you in advance whether your record is a bar.
- Ask whether your state offers a predetermination, which is a decision on your record before you enroll.
- Ask legal aid at lsc.gov. This is a common question and they know the local answer.

Do not take a training program's word for whether you can be licensed. The program is selling the training and the board issues the license.

The other thing that moves you up

A year of unbroken attendance at an ordinary job is worth more in a job search than most certificates. It is the thing every employer is actually screening for, and it is the one credential that nobody can take from you.

What I want to be doing in two years:

What it takes to get there:

Who I asked, and what they said:

My first step, and the date:

---

25. My Work Plan

Pull the pages together. Update it whenever something changes.

What I am looking for right now:

My papers: what I have and what is still missing:

Where I am applying this week:

What I have decided to say about the gap:

What I have decided to say about my record, if I have one:

What I have decided to tell an employer about my recovery, if anything:

My standing commitments that the schedule has to fit:

The hours of the week that are hardest, and my plan for them:

Who I check in with about work, and when:

Who I call for free help: job center, legal aid, 211:

One thing I will do this week:

If I Use Again

If you use again, this book is still yours. Get safe first, then use this plan. Fill it in now, while you are steady.

If you return to opioids after a period of not using or using less, your tolerance may be lower than it was before. Do not use alone. Keep naloxone (Narcan) nearby, and make sure someone with you knows how to use it.

The first person I will call:

If they do not answer, I will call:

A safe place I can go:

What I will do in the next hour:

Who else needs to know (doctor, counselor, group):

What I will do tomorrow morning:

If you are in danger, call 911. For crisis support, call or text 988.

People and Resources

Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number

Crisis: call or text 988
988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, 24/7. Chat at 988lifeline.org.

Emergency: 911

Treatment referrals: 1-800-662-4357
SAMHSA National Helpline, free and confidential, 24/7, English and Spanish. Text your ZIP code to 435748 or search FindTreatment.gov.

Free Support Groups

These groups are free to attend. Most meet in person and online. Try more than one until you find a room that fits.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) aa.org
12-step groups for people with a drinking problem.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) na.org
12-step groups for recovery from any drug.

SMART Recovery smartrecovery.org
Skills-based groups with no religious content, for any addiction.

LifeRing Secular Recovery lifering.org
Secular peer support, in person, online, and by email.

Recovery Dharma recoverydharma.org
Peer-led groups based on Buddhist practices.

Celebrate Recovery celebraterecovery.com
Christ-centered 12-step groups, usually hosted by churches.

Women for Sobriety womenforsobriety.org
Support groups for women.

For family and friends al-anon.org
Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, and SMART Recovery Family & Friends.

Online Meetings

Online meetings run at every hour of the day and night. You can use a first name only and keep your camera off. Many also have a phone number you can dial in to with no internet at all.

In The Rooms intherooms.com
Free live video meetings every week for many recovery paths, 12-step and others. A free account with a username is all you need.

AA Online Intergroup aa-intergroup.org
AA meetings by video, phone, chat, and email, around the clock.

Meeting Guide app aa.org
AA's free app lists in-person, online, and phone meetings.

Virtual NA virtual-na.org
Narcotics Anonymous meetings online and by phone.

SMART Recovery Online smartrecovery.org
Online meetings, chat, and message boards.

LifeRing Online lifering.org
Video meetings, chat, forums, and email groups.

Some recovery websites show phone numbers that connect to treatment centers selling their services. For free, neutral referrals, call the SAMHSA National Helpline:

1-800-662-4357

Alder Creek Editions is not connected to any group or website listed in this book. Websites change. If one stops working, the SAMHSA helpline can point you to current options.

About the Author

Stephen Deason has been in Recovery for more than eleven years and still begins and ends each day with meditation and gratitude. He writes The Mile Marker Library for people getting into recovery on their own, including people who cannot attend or afford a treatment program. He writes as a peer, from his own experience, and is not a physician, counselor, lawyer, or financial adviser.

He has spent more than thirty years building teams and companies in healthcare and technology, holds graduate degrees in business and accounting, and writes about recovery, economics, business, and social enterprise. You can find more of his work at aldercreekeditions.com and stephendeason.com.

Alder Creek EDITIONS

Also from Alder Creek Editions

The Mile Marker Library

Standalone books and tools for people getting into recovery on their own, and for the people around them. Free printable editions are at aldercreekeditions.com.

1. *Don't Panic: The First Hours After You Stop*
2. *Wallet Crisis Card*
3. *Free Help Directory*
4. *Medications for Addiction, Explained*
5. *Tools You Can Use on Your Own*
6. *Cravings and Hard Hours Workbook*
7. *One Day at a Time, Written Down*
8. *Daily Reader, 365 Days*
9. *Worksheet Library*
10. *Money in Early Recovery*
11. *Work and Recovery*
12. *Finding a Safe Place to Live*
13. *Court, Probation, and Recovery*
14. *For Families*
15. *Group Facilitator Guide*
16. *Employer Guide*

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Book I. A business fable about a family caring for an aging parent, and the failures that happen in the handoffs between the people and agencies involved.

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