

Fair Chance Hiring: Can Second Chances Boost Our Economy?

By Robert Malinn

The Shawshank Redemption, The Godfather, and The Dark Knight are the top three highest-rated movies on IMDb. These films captivate us with their themes of legal justice and redemption, portraying characters who rise above dire circumstances. We root for these underdogs because we see ourselves in their desires for fairness and second chances.

Offscreen, we're less supportive of those seeking redemption. Nearly 27% of formerly incarcerated people in the United States remain unemployed, a rate significantly higher than the general population (Prison Policy Initiative).

Our society preaches forgiveness but rarely practices it where it counts—in offering tangible opportunities for redemption and reintegration. One crucial area where we can bridge this gap is fair chance hiring practices. By opening doors to employment for those who have served their time, we provide them with the means to rebuild their lives, reduce recidivism, and contribute positively to our communities (The White House) ([The White House](#)), (SBA.gov) ([SBA.gov](#)).

Fair chance hiring addresses this gap. It enables employers to vet for jobs based on a person's qualifications. This practice recognizes their worth and potential contributions to society (Prison Policy Initiative) ([Prison Policy Initiative](#)).

Research shows that fair chance hires often perform as well as, or better than, their peers without criminal records (The White House) ([The White House](#)), (SBA.gov) ([SBA.gov](#)). The practice helps reduce recidivism and fosters more inclusive workplaces, tapping into a vastly underutilized talent pool (Prison Policy Initiative) ([Prison Policy Initiative](#)), (The White House) ([The White House](#)).

Jess Bonanno transitioned from house painter to software engineer at Slack through Next Chapter, a non-profit that trains people with criminal backgrounds for high-tech jobs. Her story underscores the transformative impact of fair chance hiring. Without it, talented people like Jess would not have the opportunity to prove their value and contribute meaningfully to the workforce.

Fair chance hiring ensures employers don't automatically exclude people with criminal records. Instead, they are judged based on their experience, talents, and character. This practice recognizes their value and potential contributions to society. For example, major corporations like Google, American Airlines, and CVS have adopted fair chance hiring practices and reported increased innovation and lower turnover rates, demonstrating the economic benefits for businesses as well (The White House) ([The White House](#)), (Prison Policy Initiative) ([Prison Policy Initiative](#)).

Moreover, fair chance hiring helps dismantle systemic barriers, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society. By providing opportunities to those with criminal records, companies help create a more just society and set a positive example for other businesses.

One Summer I worked on a factory assembly line for a company called CDP Fastener Group in Brockton, Massachusetts—a Fair Chance Business—I saw firsthand the positive impact of providing stable employment to formerly incarcerated people. My coworkers were some of the most dedicated and hardworking people I've ever met. Having a job gave them a sense of stability and hope, essential for rebuilding their lives.

The stability and hope that their jobs provided was something transformative, empowering them to pursue further education, build new lives, spend time with their families. The palpable sense of dignity and purpose at CDP was a daily reminder of the transformative power of employment, whether in Brockton Massachusetts or at Slack Headquarters in San Francisco.

Education and training are crucial in preparing people for skilled positions, ensuring they can transition into industries like tech. Policies like "Ban the Box," which removes conviction history questions from job applications, are essential in helping formerly incarcerated people get a fair chance at employment (The White House) ([The White House](#)), (Prison Policy Initiative) ([Prison Policy Initiative](#)).

Without potential employment and a sense of purpose, we cannot expect those leaving prison to reintegrate into society successfully. Fair chance hiring is critical in providing this opportunity, allowing people to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope. This practice benefits those directly affected and has far-reaching positive impacts on society.

My time at CDP Fastener Group and the success stories like Jess Bonanno's illustrate the profound impact of giving people a second chance. Employment offers stability, hope, and a sense of purpose—essential ingredients for a life worth living. By supporting fair chance hiring, we strengthen our communities and economy.

We should champion fair chance hiring and advocate for policies that support it. By doing so, we can ensure that everyone has the opportunity to succeed and contribute to a more compassionate and equitable society. It's time to turn our values of forgiveness and second chances so people we see ourselves in can get a first look.