

A Frequently Overlooked Segment of the Labor Force—the Formerly Incarcerated: Interview With Genevieve Martin

The United States has roughly 5% of the world's population, but has almost 25% of the world's prison



population.

Every year, the U.S. releases 700,000 men and women into society where they're expected to find housing, jobs and live stable, law-abiding lives. However, despite a shrinking workforce in the U.S., one of the biggest challenges they face is getting a job.

In this interview, Genevieve Martin, Executive Director of [Dave's Killer Bread Foundation](#), shares her insights into what can be done to overcome these obstacles.

Jathan Janove: Many employers avoid applicants with criminal backgrounds for fear they'll cause problems and create liability. What's the evidence?

Genevieve Martin: Although there is not a lot of available research data, there is a lot of anecdotal evidence that people with criminal backgrounds who are ready to change perform as well or better than the general population when it comes to performance, attendance and disciplinary actions. Many employers say their Second Chance Employees (what we call employees with criminal backgrounds) are some of the most loyal, motivated workers they have, because those employees understand this job is their shot at starting over.

Jathan Janove: What about people who have been convicted of particular kinds of crimes, like those that society would say are off limits? Would you treat them differently?

Genevieve Martin: Both as a hiring manager and as part of an organization working with a network of HR professionals who do screen job applicants, we look to understand where a person came from and where they are today. The context of the crime they committed and the steps they've taken since are enormously important. First, you evaluate a person with a serious felony conviction in the same way you would anyone else. In some jurisdictions, you can get arrested, "listed" or convicted for infractions that sound heinous and scary but in all actuality, are harmless examples of poor judgments. Issues like this are a key reason why a thorough and

open interview process is so vital to the employment process.

Jathan Janove: Is there anything about employees with criminal backgrounds that might actually make them more desirable job candidates?

Genevieve Martin: Employers who open their workplace to individuals with criminal backgrounds say these employees often become some of their most loyal, dedicated employees, committed to working hard on behalf of the business that is giving them a second chance. We hear over and over again that these employees promote to leadership positions, inspire their coworkers, and contribute to a strong and healthy work environment.

Jathan Janove: Is it ever appropriate to do a criminal background check and, if so, how should it be done?

Genevieve Martin: We advocate for an open, honest hiring process that includes discussing a person's past and how they have determined to move forward from it. A background check, if it is conducted, should be nuanced, comparing the conviction to the specific job in question, the date and nature of the offense, and use other information to determine whether the criminal history will have any impact on an individual's ability to be a great employee today. Employers are frequently given information that does not pertain to the qualifications or ability of the job candidate. It's important to partner with your screening agency to remove items that should not be a part of the assessment — depending on your industry and job responsibilities — and that may include arrest records and misdemeanors.

Jathan Janove: I understand that Dave of Dave's Killer Bread served many years in prison. As a business, how



has the company done?

Genevieve Martin: Since its founding, Dave's Killer Bread has gone on to become the #1-selling organic bread in the country. Of course, its super-seeded loaves paired with organic ingredients have attracted a lot of fans, but consumers also deeply connect with a brand that believes in Second Chances. Dave's Killer Bread was founded on a Second Chance, when co-founder and namesake Dave Dahl was welcomed back to the family bakery after fifteen years in prison. With the support of his family behind him, Dave threw himself into creating the best organic bread in the universe, and set an example of redemption that's been followed by the hundreds of people with criminal backgrounds the company has employed in the years since. Today about 40% of the people who work at DKB's Milwaukie, Ore., "BreadQuarters" have a criminal background.

Jathan Janove: What does your foundation do?

Genevieve Martin: The [Dave's Killer Bread Foundation](#) is dedicated to encouraging and inspiring Second Chance Employment, the employment of people with criminal backgrounds. We realize that sometimes a lack of information or understanding about employing people with criminal backgrounds is the reason that businesses are hesitant to explore this option, and we're here to change that. Through programming developed by the foundation, and educational and outreach events for employers, the DKB Foundation helps businesses develop a more complete understanding of the *why* and *how* to implement Second Chance Employment within their organizations.

Jathan Janove: Do you charge for your services?

Genevieve Martin: There is no charge to use our services; rather, as a nonprofit, we rely on donations to curate best employment practices in partnership with businesses who are already committed to thoughtful employment.

Jathan Janove: May readers contact you for more information?

Genevieve Martin: Absolutely! Readers can email me at gmartin@daveskillerbread.com for more information on the DKB Foundation or for ways to get involved with Second Chance Employment.