

How To Be A Good Employer to Team Members Directly Impacted by the Criminal Justice System

Concrete ways employers can support their justice impacted staff and team members employees, interns and contractors and with #PeopleFirst policies

Why become a #PeopleFirst employer?

The societal and economic costs of mass incarceration are vast and pervasive, particularly for the American workforce. As many as 100 million people in the US—that is, one in three Americans—have a criminal arrest or conviction record, and nearly half of all adults have a family member who has been incarcerated. People with criminal records often face overwhelming barriers to securing steady employment and safe and stable housing. The financial and emotional stress of incarceration extends past the individual and can further destabilize the families and communities of those entangled in the criminal justice system. Because of the shame and stigma associated with criminal justice system involvement, however, many people—our teammates, collaborators, and

staff members—bear these stresses and burdens in silence. In this way, the ongoing impacts of mass incarceration act as a hidden drag on our economy, affecting the wellbeing and productivity of employees, employers, customers, and business partners alike.

As a #PeopleFirst Employer, you can help your workforce achieve its full potential by putting in place robust resources and benefits to support system-impacted staff and by adopting policies and practices that reflect a commitment to stemming the tide of mass incarceration. You will not only create a more inclusive workplace, but will engender a culture of trust, loyalty, growth, and opportunity that will allow everyone to thrive.

#PeopleFirst Employer Guiding Principles

- Commit to providing robust resources and support to staff members who have past or present criminal justice system involvement, or who have impacted family members or loved ones.
- Recognize the myriad ways legal system current and past involvement for an individual or their family with the criminal justice system can destabilize a person's life beyond the confines of a legal case (e.g. housing instability, financial strain, and mental and physical health challenges).
- Avoid using dehumanizing language and create an atmosphere where staff members feel supported and seen.
- Treat criminal justice-impact related employment information as confidential and shared on a need to know basis only.



Employee resources and support

1

Commit to building a supporting environment for justice-impacted staff by using people first language and creating an affinity group for justice impacted team members.

2

Host a regular call with senior management, HR, and justice-impacted staff to ensure that the company is fostering an inclusive and supportive culture, encouraging trust and communication, and being responsive to staff needs.

3

Acknowledge differing levels of comfort of employees with respect to being public about their interactions within the justice system. Never “out” somebody to coworkers or speak about somebody’s involvement with the criminal justice system with others if that individual has not made explicitly clear that they consent to this information being shared.

4

If you have an employee assistance program (EAP), remind justice impacted employees of available **mental health resources**.

- If you do not have an EAP, make a list of in-network mental health service providers for easy access and consider highlighting providers with experience supporting people impacted by the criminal justice system; if superior options are only offered out of network, cover the difference.

5

Allow staff to take paid time off for their own justice system related matters (e.g. parole, probation or court visits, or related activities) and to visit family members and loved ones with criminal legal system involvement.

6

Host yearly *Know Your Rights* trainings during work hours for all staff that cover an individual’s rights when interacting with law enforcement at home, in public spaces, and in the workplace. Consider using outside counsel to facilitate this training.

- Establish, communicate, and implement company protocols to protect employee rights should law enforcement visit the work site or request employee information from managers. Employers can take these steps while simultaneously ensuring they observe their own legal obligations.

7

Make all **trainings and resources** widely available to all staff, and clearly designate an HR Point of Contact for anyone looking for additional resources or assistance (including legal assistance) to access confidentially.

8

Even minor contact with the criminal legal system can result in destabilizing financial strain. Similar to how many employers offer student loan repayment assistance, employers should consider offering legal expense assistance for expenses like **court costs, parole and probation fees and expungement**.

9

Provide **financial assistance** for communication with incarcerated loved ones, commissary, and visiting expenses.

Solidarity and service

1 Join the **#PeopleFirst Corporate Initiative** to promote inclusive policies and better re-entry practices throughout the calendar year and publicly showcase your support. Examples include:

- Publishing a blog post within the company/ organization about the importance of humanizing people impacted by the criminal justice system.
- [Celebrating Second Chance Month in April.](#)

2 Collaborate or partner with justice impacted community organizations to share your strengths and expertise through volunteer and/or mentoring opportunities. For example, employees from a financial institution may conduct a financial literacy workshop with a criminal justice reform or re-entry focused community organization and its members.

Advocacy

1 Recommit to supporting justice impacted staff by **releasing a statement of support** for all employees, and explaining the harm caused by mass incarceration.

- Distribute messages through the company's social media, written editorials, videos, or other outlets.

2 **Advocate for criminal justice reform legislation** as a priority within the company's government relation goals.

- Engage in letter/email writing/driving calls to legislative offices at key moments.
- Devote government relations capacity to supporting criminal justice reform effort
- Join public or private sign-on letters to policymakers.

3 Connect with elected officials to share your perspective as a People First-friendly employer. Support People First-friendly legislation.

4 Host a briefing or community event.