Understanding the Value of Hiring Individuals in Recovery

A practical overview for employers and hiring teams

Why second-chance hiring matters

People in recovery bring the same range of skills, experience, goals, and potential as other candidates. A history of substance use or treatment does not, by itself, tell an employer whether someone can perform a job well.

Expanding access to employment can help people build stability, reconnect with their communities, and sustain their progress. Employers may also benefit from a broader talent pool and employees who value the opportunity to contribute.

Potential benefits to employers

A wider talent pool Considering qualified candidates with varied life experiences can help employers reach capable applicants they might otherwise overlook.

Skills and perspective Candidates may bring valuable professional experience, persistence, problem-solving skills, and perspective. Evaluate each person on their actual qualifications rather than assuming particular traits.

Workforce stability Meaningful work can support routine and connection. As with any employee, retention depends on the quality of the role, supervision, workplace culture, and individual circumstances.

Building a fair hiring process

Define the essential functions and qualifications for each position before reviewing applicants.

Use consistent, job-related interview questions and evaluation criteria for every candidate.

Apply background-check and drug-testing policies consistently and in accordance with applicable law.

Do not ask applicants to disclose treatment or recovery history unless a specific, lawful, job-related reason permits the inquiry.

Assess current ability to perform the job, with or without reasonable accommodation where required.

Creating a supportive start

Provide a clear job description, orientation, training, and access to the same workplace resources offered to other employees.

Set expectations around attendance, performance, safety, and communication from the beginning.

Identify a supervisor or HR contact who can answer questions confidentially and consistently.

Offer information about available benefits, employee assistance programs, and leave processes without pressuring anyone to disclose personal health information.

Important considerations

Employment decisions must comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), state law, background-check rules, and industry-specific safety requirements may apply differently depending on the role and circumstances.

Do not assume that a person is currently using substances, is unable to work, or will have performance problems because they have a history of substance use or treatment. Make individualized, job-related decisions.

Consult qualified HR or legal counsel when evaluating background information, drug-testing practices, accommodation requests, or other complex employment questions.

A practical takeaway

Second-chance hiring is not about lowering standards. It is about using fair, consistent, job-related standards and recognizing qualified candidates as individuals.

This resource is for general educational purposes and is not legal, clinical, or employment advice. Employers should consult qualified HR, legal, and healthcare professionals about individual situations and applicable federal, state, and local requirements.