



**CORNBREAD  
HUSTLE®**

# **The Looming Labor Crisis and the Second-Chance Solution**

**Why Second-Chance Hiring is Essential, and its  
Proven Success at Multiple Employers**

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# Abstract

There are far more available jobs than workers to fill them in the U.S. today. [Research](#) in December 2023 by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce found a labor gap of 3.1 million: there are 9.4 million job openings but only 6.3 million job-seekers. That difference is one of the largest workers-to-openings shortfalls ever recorded. However, a population that includes millions of Americans could help offset this gap. In this report, we will explore the reasons behind the labor shortage, why it could get worse, and how employers can tap into a unique group of prospective workers to fill their labor needs. In addition, we will identify ways the process of second-chance hiring makes a positive difference for communities and the nation at large.

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# I. Introduction

Problems were developing long before the pandemic.

Baby Boomers were retiring. Gen-Xers and Millennials weren't having children. College and university enrollment rates were plummeting. A new form of addiction was emerging not in back alleys, but doctors' offices and pharmacies. Inflation was outpacing wage growth.

The long-term result: a steadily-declining workforce.

One group of Americans, however, was growing: those with a criminal background. The U.S. prison and jail population climbed a staggering [500 percent](#) from 1980 to 2010, when it began a steady decline. Justice reform initiatives were keeping more people out of prison, as lawmakers sought alternatives to incarceration.

But the damage was done. Resulting from well-intended but flawed tough-on-crime laws enacted in the 1980s and 1990s, millions of Americans were permanently branded with a sort of scarlet letter that often prevented gainful employment: a criminal conviction, and an often alarming "resume gap" from time spent behind bars. By [some estimates](#), as many as one out of three American adults has some kind of arrest record. It is a status which for many is an impenetrable barrier out of poverty, and an exclusion from doing any kind of "legal" work to survive.

The beginning of the 2020s saw numerous events that are pushing employers toward a new view of hiring workers whose past includes a criminal conviction. The COVID-19 pandemic, shifting voter attitudes about criminal justice, and a growing negative attitude among younger Americans toward the traditional job market have combined to fuel an ongoing labor shortage across industries.

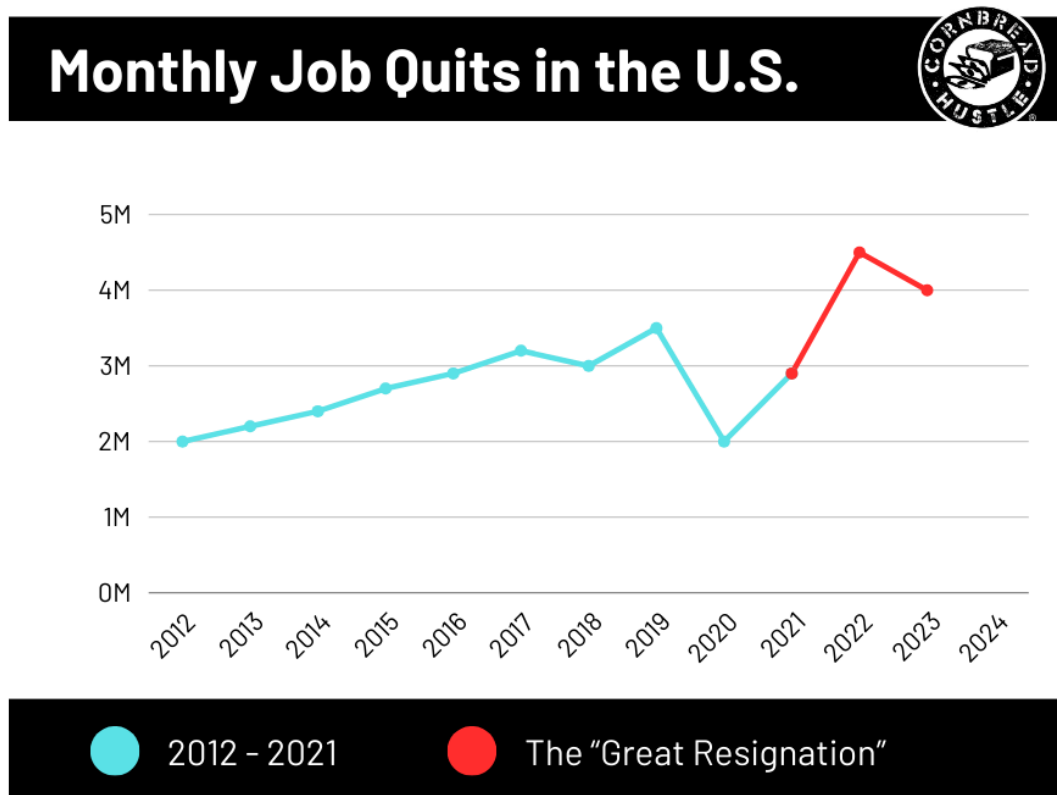
The problem is going to get worse, and soon. Employers who take action now will benefit from a stronger, more loyal, and better-prepared workforce to enjoy periods of prosperity and endure economic downturns.

Those who do not act will find themselves unable to meet their customers' needs, and those customers will respond accordingly.

Second-chance hiring is no longer an option for long-term growth; it is a necessity. In this report, we will explore the reasons behind the labor crisis, why second-chance hiring is a solution for employers, and offer data-supported evidence for its long-term success.

## II. A Titanic Shift in the American Workforce: Labor Demand Outstrips Supply

Much has been written about “[The Great Resignation](#),” a dramatic increase in resignations, retirements, and other forms of voluntary separation by workers that began in late 2020 and accelerated during the pandemic’s second and third years.

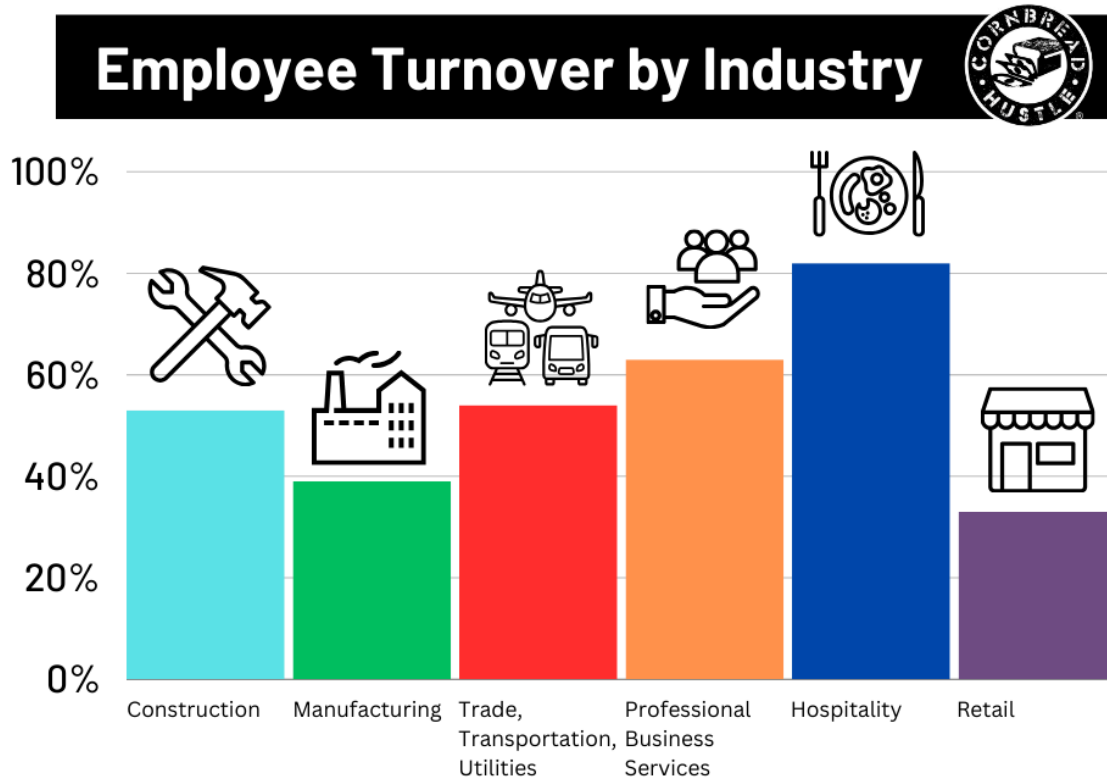


Sources: *Economic Policy Institute, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, BappleBusiness*

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported 47 million Americans [quit their jobs](#) in 2021, and 50 million did so in 2022; a startling jump from the then-record 42.1 million voluntary resignations in [2019](#). (Data for 2020 is skewed because of the pandemic, especially in Q1 and Q2.)

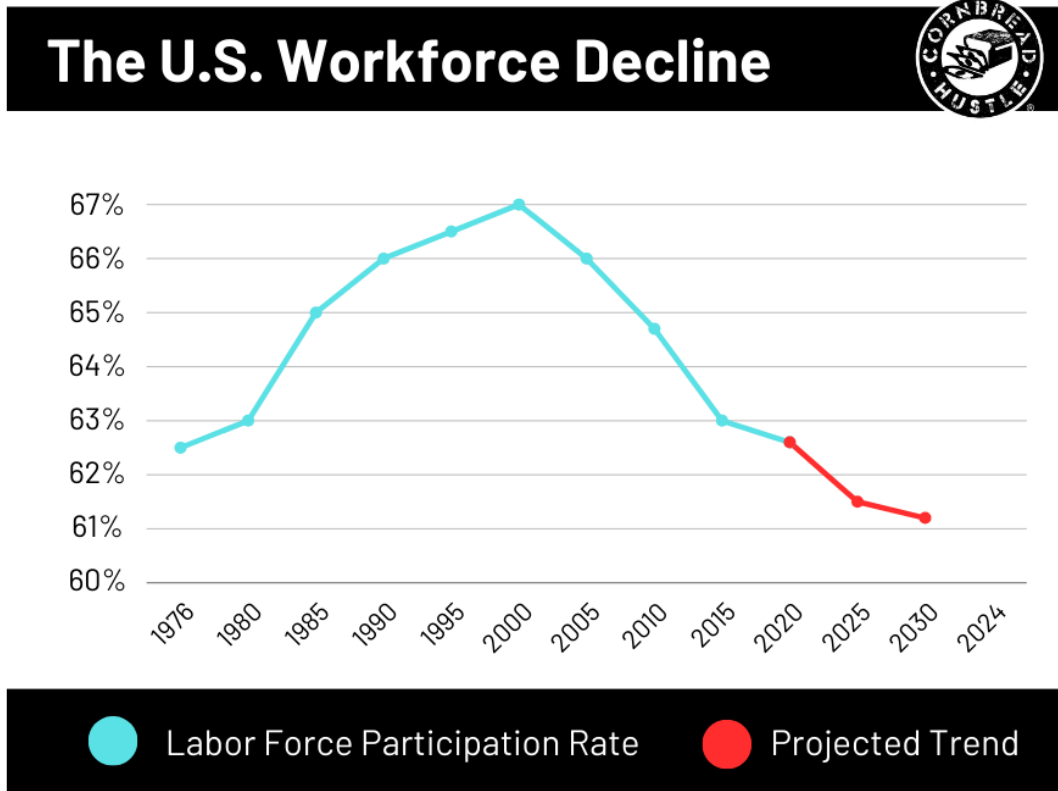
While the drastic increase in resignations slowed in 2023, it remains part of an overall trend that began before the pandemic. For a variety of reasons, working-age Americans are increasingly less-interested in workforce participation.

Just over half of employers say they have [difficulty hiring or retaining workers](#), but some industries are hit harder than others. By far, the hospitality industry - which includes restaurants, hotels, and tourism, has the highest reported [annual turnover rate](#), at a whopping 82 percent. Construction, a vital component of a healthy economy, also showed significant turnover rates in BLS reporting.



Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Awardco

But quitting is only part of the picture. Over the past 25 years, [participation in the workforce](#) by working-age American adults has been on a steady and increasing decline.

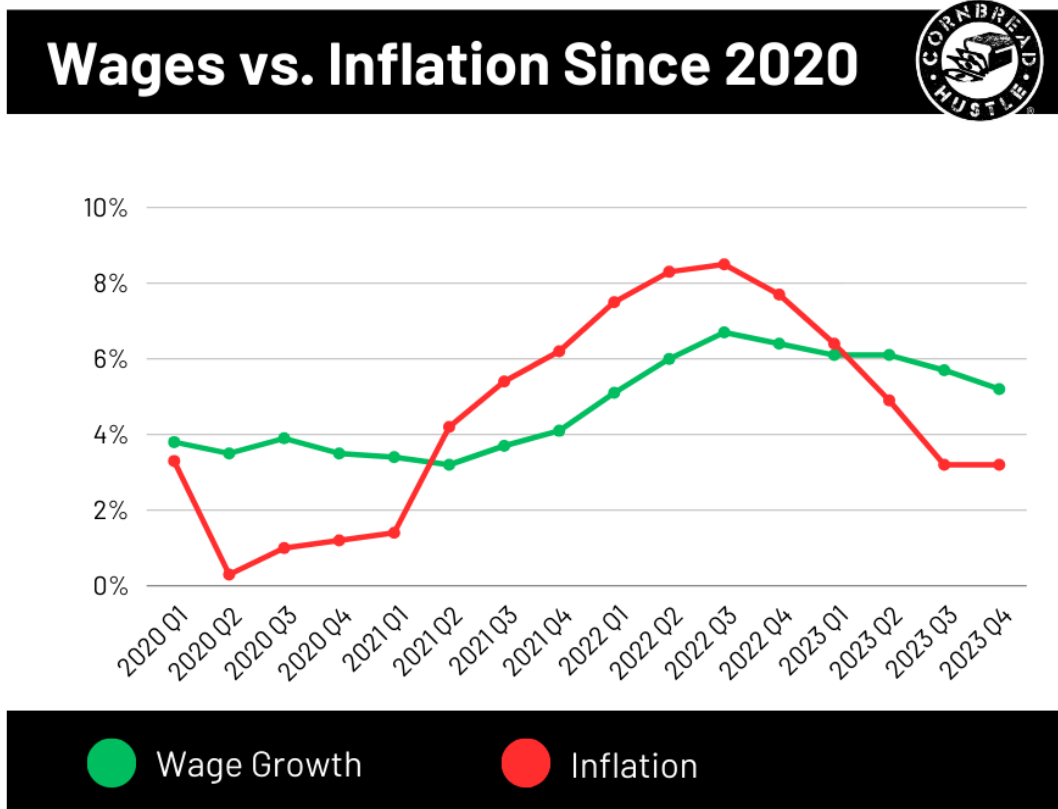


Source: U.S. Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco

Why are fewer Americans working? The reasons are manifold, and the impact on business is increasingly dire.

**Pushed Out by the Pandemic.** Nearly four years after the COVID-19 pandemic began, labor force participation has still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels, as noted in the chart above. Hundreds of thousands of these missing workers either lost their lives to the virus, or were left permanently disabled and unable to return to the workforce. Others [lost their jobs](#) in the early weeks and months as the global economy came to a sudden standstill. For varied reasons, these workers either could not find jobs as the world returned to normal, or they chose not to return to work.

**Wage stagnation.** While the severity and significance of wage growth vs. inflation is a matter of considerable debate among economists, it is widely accepted that inflation significantly exceeded real wage growth during the pandemic, particularly from [Q1 2021 to Q1 2023](#).

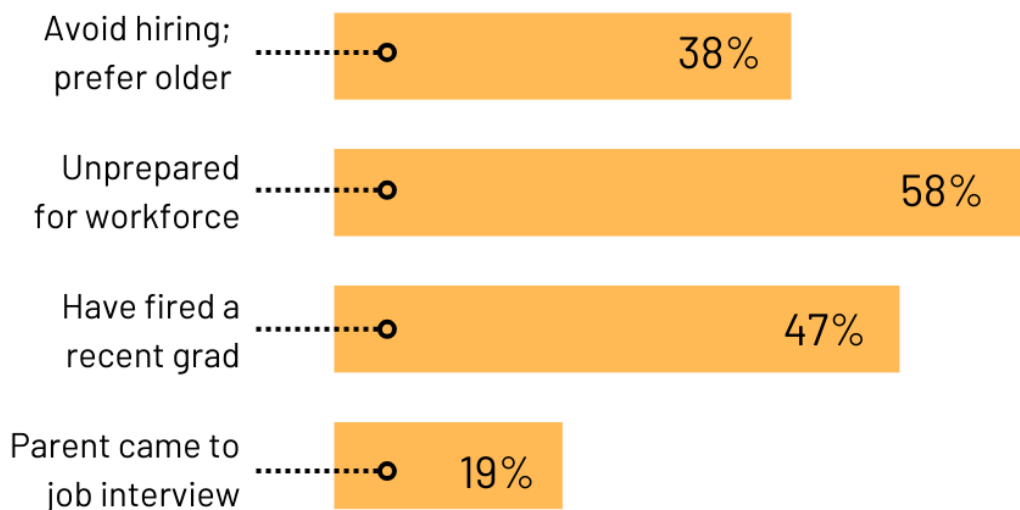


Source: Statista Research

As workers realize their dollar doesn't go as far as it used to, they are less likely to accept jobs paying what they believe to be insufficient wages for the type of work that is being done. Many may be inspired to job-hop, aiming for higher wages, better working conditions, or both. Others may have decided that, with their decreased spending power, a traditional job is simply not worth the effort, and they may prefer to rely on gig economy / freelance jobs, savings, social safety net programs, or even support from their families.

**A Mismatch with Young Professionals.** Anecdotal evidence suggests Generation Z or “zoomers” -- young adults born after 1997 – may be incompatible with the traditional labor market. One recent example comes from higher education magazine [Intelligent](#), which polled hundreds of U.S. business management professionals in December 2023. It found a high rate of dissatisfaction with recent college and university graduates entering the workforce.

## Managers on Recent Graduates



Source: *Intelligent.com*

In the survey, 38 percent of employers said they prefer to hire older workers over fresh grads, even when this means higher acquisition costs. More than half said new graduates are “unprepared for the workforce,” and nearly half said they’ve terminated a recent graduate.

Although this is only one study, the reasons for employer skepticism around Gen Z may sound familiar. Many employers surveyed said they found young professionals to be “entitled,” prone to making unrealistic salary demands, inattentive, lacking in social skills / workplace etiquette, and immature. One in five said they’d seen an applicant bring a parent to a job interview – something practically unthinkable for older generations.

This is not to suggest that all or even most Zoomers are unsuitable for the workforce. It is merely one of several recent reports on frustration among employers with young professionals. In an already lagging labor market, some younger workers are making themselves less appealing to employers.



**Baby Boomers Bowing Out.** The highest and largest spike in U.S. births is well-known as the post-war baby boom, from 1946 to 1964. As the largest generation of native-born Americans in history, Baby Boomers have played an outsized role in the economy and politics for more than 50 years.

However, Boomers [did not have as many children](#) as their parents did, and the economic growth Boomers drove is therefore slowing down. More and more members of this generation exit the workforce every year, [as they retire](#), become physically unable to work, or die. All three of these factors were accelerated by the pandemic.

The problem is not new. Pre-pandemic, economists were already concerned about a drop in labor force participation, as they observed growing signs of the decline.

“It’s been a long, slow trend since about the year 2000,” said Justin Wolfers, an economics professor and labor researcher. “The low levels of participation we see today are not due to the economic cycle. They’re due to much longer-lasting demographic influence. It’s not just something we have to get used to. It’s actually going to continue over the next decade... if the trends the authors document continue, then that’s going to continue to decline, and we’re going to have to get used to the fact that labor force participation rates are never going to recover.”

It would be alarming if Dr. Wolfers made those remarks today. He actually [made that prediction in 2014](#). In the decade-plus since, he has been proven correct.

**Children? No, thank you:** unlike their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, more Americans of child-bearing age than ever are [deciding against starting families](#) of their own. Others are having fewer children, and starting to do so much later in life.

The U.S. birth rate has trended steadily downward or remained nearly flat for some six decades. Economists struggle to pin the blame for this on any particular circumstance, but generally agree that a confluence of socioeconomic factors are the driving force. The purely financial costs of raising children have grown substantially, acting as a natural deterrent to many would-be parents. For women in particular, priorities have changed: far more women have chosen to enter the workforce immediately after high school or college, compared to older generations who were expected to be stay-at-home mothers and “housewives.”

Because this trend started more than 40 years ago, its effects on the economy are now becoming much more tangible. A [pandemic-fueled “baby bust”](#) is cited as the reason for some 100,000 fewer U.S. births than would have been expected from August 2020 to February 2021. There are just not as many Americans reaching working age as there once were, and birth rates show this trend will continue.

### **The Other Health Crisis: Opioids**

The COVID-19 pandemic partially overshadowed another ongoing public health catastrophe: opioid addiction. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognizes the [opioid crisis](#) as taking place in the form of three “waves” since 1999, with the current and by far deadliest wave beginning in 2013. It was then that synthetic opioid overdose deaths first started a frightening trend upward, one that continues today with no signs of slowing.

Since 1999, the CDC says more than 640,000 Americans have died of opioid overdose. A further 3 million struggle with [opioid addiction](#), according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine. Sadly, this suggests many more deaths are to come.

Opioid use disorder is a tragedy affecting millions. It is taking parents, children, siblings, and spouses away from their families. The ripple effects of these heartbreaking losses include a statistically significant number of Americans [unable to enter or remain in the workforce](#), either because of their own addiction or that of a family member.

### III. Hidden in Plain Sight: The Underutilized Population of Potential Workers

With millions of Americans unwilling or unable to enter or remain in the workforce, employers are faced with few alternatives.

However, an increasingly potent and essential solution exists: the vastly under-utilized pool of workers who have criminal records.

It's difficult to know precisely how many Americans have a criminal background, because so many jurisdictions exist, and it's not always clear what is meant by a "criminal background." Definitions range from simply being arrested to serving sentenced time in jail or prison.

A frequently-quoted figure is [79 million](#) Americans, or about 1 in 3 adults, have at least some sort of criminal record. Regardless of how serious the crimes might be - or whether the individual was even convicted and sentenced - the impacts can be devastating. People with criminal backgrounds often find themselves ineligible for housing, education, financial services, and employment. Attempting to (legally) get by without access to all is devastatingly difficult for most.

The situation is even worse for the subset of this population who have served prison time. Research by the Prison Policy Initiative (PPI) estimates about 2 million Americans are in prison right now, with an additional 5 million having formerly been incarcerated. About 19 million have at least one felony conviction in their past, though many were sentenced to probation or other non-incarceration penalties.

***“Access to legal employment is key to reducing recidivism and the post-prison social disabilities that returning citizens endure. Extensive research has documented the interaction between employment and increased educational attainment as pivotal to reducing an individual's propensity to recidivate.”***

- Grant Duwe and Makada Henry-Nickie, [The Brookings Institution](#)



# INCARCERATION IN AMERICA



**1.9 Million**

Currently incarcerated or jailed in the U.S.



**4.9 Million**

Formerly incarcerated

**19 Million**

Felony conviction



Source: Prison Policy Institute

## Punishment After Prison

The true punishment for those convicted of a crime continues long after a sentence has concluded and the offender has “paid their debt to society.” [Unemployment rates](#) among people with criminal records are exponentially higher than those with no record. Studies find unemployment peaks immediately after release from prison or jail; about one in three returning citizens were unemployed for the first two years following their discharge. Viewed from another angle, [RAND Corporation researchers](#) found more than half of all unemployed American men in their 30s have a criminal record. PPI says its data show “the unemployment rate for formerly-incarcerated people is nearly five times higher than the unemployment rate for the general United States population.”

[Fresh data](#) from the Alliance for Safety and Justice paints a darker picture. In its 2023 nationwide survey of people with criminal records, the group found 73 percent of respondents with a felony conviction have experienced difficulty getting a job, keeping a job, or otherwise earning money. Even among those with only a misdemeanor conviction, nearly half said they had problems with employment.

The struggle to make a living without resorting to past behaviors in turn creates a vicious cycle of recidivism. A [2016 study](#) published in Science Direct found more than two-thirds of returned citizens were re-arrested within three years of release from prison or jail.

Numerous studies find correlational links between increased employment and reduced recidivism. But much of the evidence also shows the quality of work is perhaps more important than the work itself. [National Institutes of Health research](#) noted job stability and commitment played a more significant factor in reducing criminal behavior. Simply providing formerly-incarcerated people with entry-level, minimum-wage jobs that offer no benefits or employee engagement may not be a much better alternative than unemployment, while stable, meaningful jobs with competitive pay can play a more significant role in reducing recidivism.

The benefits are obvious. Not only are gainfully-employed people less likely to reoffend, their [reduced risk of recidivism](#) provides plentiful benefits to their community, and the nation at large. By keeping formerly-incarcerated people employed and out of the justice system, society enjoys overall reductions in crime, generational poverty, and taxpayer burdens for incarceration and the collateral impacts of crime itself. In other words, good jobs for returned citizens mean a safer and more prosperous community for everyone.

## IV. Why This Matters to Employers: Advantages and Concerns

As discussed in Section II, America's employers face a labor crisis created by a shrinking labor pool. More workers are needed than the market currently provides, and increased wages have not fully solved the problem. There are simply not enough workers available to fill the jobs needed to keep the U.S. economy running and growing at maximum efficiency.

We have now identified a potential solution to this problem, and it is one employers cannot afford to ignore: the millions of working-age Americans with criminal records. Traditionally, employers have avoided this group, often at the very beginning of the hiring process: asking applicants if they have ever been convicted of a crime, and using an affirmative answer as a filter to reduce the number of candidates for a given position.

For decades, this practice worked. People who had a criminal past were viewed as unreliable, dishonest, or even dangerous. A general abundance of qualified workers also resulted in few incentives for most employers to consider applicants whose history included jail or prison time.

The monumental shift in labor market demographics is forcing employers across all industries to reconsider that position. However, skepticism remains. Many employers are still reluctant to embrace what has become known as fair-chance or second-chance hiring: offering jobs to people with a criminal background.

Economist and author [Jeffrey Korzenik](#) identifies what he calls the three primary objections to second-chance hiring: "Number one is a combination of safety and liability concerns; will the workplace be safe, and will I have liability as an employer for anything that goes wrong? A second consideration is a quality consideration: is this a viable workforce? Do people do the job right? And then, the final consideration is public reputation risk."

Korzenik goes into great detail addressing these concerns in his 2021 book, *Untapped Talent: How Second Chance Hiring Works for Your Business and the Community*.

"People with criminal records are the solution to the labor shortage," Korzenik writes. "From a purely quantitative perspective, the numbers are compelling. The sheer quantity of people who have a record suggests that we should question the wisdom of automatically excluding job candidates with records." (p. 33)

Korzenik is quick to point out that quantity does not always equate to quality, and he tackles the question at the top of many employers' minds when they consider second-chance hiring: just how *good* are these workers?

Just ask Dan Meyer, founder and CEO of [Nehemiah Manufacturing](#), a Procter & Gamble licensee whose products include Tide laundry detergent and Downy fabric softener. According

to Kreznik in *Untapped Talent*, Meyer credits his company's focus on second-chance hires with increasing EBITDA by more than 5 percent. "In his consumer products manufacturing business, 130 of his 180 employees are second chance hires," Korzenik writes. "His [Meyer's] estimate of the financial benefit of low turnover takes into account the loss of hours worked, recruiting expenses, and lost productivity." (p. 58)

There's also the case of Zephyr Products, a Kansas metal manufacturer that partners with a prison to provide on-the-job training for incarcerated people, many of whom are hired after their sentences are complete. The partnership boasts an incredible success rate: a 2019 study found more than 97 percent of participants had stayed out of legal trouble following their release from prison. (Korzenik, p. 95)

Korzenik notes the Cornbread Hustle model in his 2021 book, *Untapped Talent*. "The agency provides employers with the option of temp-to-hire," Korzenik writes. "Many of their workers are sourced from workforce development and reentry nonprofits, and the organization drug tests workers. Her workers also have access to an in-house "resiliency expert," who can provide coaching through work challenges or personal trauma. Cornbread Hustle shares the faith-based inspiration that appears among many of the second chance employment leaders. [Founder and CEO Cheri Garcia] told me: "We like to see ourselves as kingdom builders. We solve all of our problems using the Bible." (Korzenik, p. 100)

## **Lesser-Known Benefits: Tax Credits and Bonds**

Did you know the IRS will give you a tax credit if you hire people within their first year of release from prison?

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit, or [WOTC](#) (pronounced "WATT-see") offers a maximum tax credit of up to \$2,400 per worker hired who meets certain qualifications. One such qualification applies to workers hired within one year of being convicted of a felony or being released from prison on a felony conviction. This can quickly add up to large tax savings for businesses who employ multiple workers in the months after they return from incarceration.

Many of these workers are also eligible to be covered by what are known as Fidelity Bonds. These are securities that are something like insurance policies against adverse actions by employees, such as theft or fraud. In Texas, up to \$5,000 in coverage per worker is offered to employers at no cost for six months, through the [Texas Workforce Commission](#). Longer coverage can be purchased if desired, and bonds can also be purchased in states that do not offer free initial coverage.

## What About Liability?

One of the principal objections employers may have to second-chance hiring is the fear of liability resulting from the actions of an employee with a criminal record. In general, some employers worry that a criminal act committed by a second-chance worker will result in a liability lawsuit against the employer.

A [landmark 2023 study](#) by the Legal Action Center, National HIRE Network, and National Workrights Institute takes a microscope to this very concern. Researchers pored over thousands of negligent hiring lawsuits filed in the U.S. from 1974 to 2022. In that 48-year period, the study found just 435 lawsuit trial court outcomes which “held employers liable for negligent hiring because they employed someone with a conviction record.” A further 1,740 were settled out of court.

Considering the number of lawsuits filed every year in U.S. courts - a number exceeding 10 million by at least one estimate - this makes up a tiny percentage.

Perhaps more importantly, the liability study found the vast majority of those negligent hiring outcomes - about 97 percent - involved risks associated with highly-specific jobs and settings, such as access to vulnerable populations, private homes, firearms, or alcohol. For nearly all other jobs, such as those in office, warehouse, factory, or typical retail settings, researchers found “...negligent hiring liability is virtually non-existent.”

Korzenik’s review of labor data also shows the lack of a correlation between the type of crime committed and the likelihood of workplace violence. “Bureau of Justice statistics show that those who commit violent crimes are actually less likely to be rearrested than those who commit property or drug crimes,” he writes. “Taken to its extreme, of those murderers who were eventually released, recidivism is actually dramatically lower than other crimes... those who have generally served a long sentence are more likely to have ‘aged out of crime.’” (P. 48)



# V. Why and How it Works: Evidence for Second-Chance Hiring Success

Since 2016, Cornbread Hustle has placed more than 2,500 individuals with criminal backgrounds, or a history of substance use, at meaningful, full-time jobs with good pay. The results have been life-changing for many, resulting in reduced risk of recidivism and greater economic opportunity.

Here are just a few examples of the kinds of employees we have placed with companies large and small:

## **Carlos Rosales**

### *Manufacturing Team Lead*

Carlos spent much of his adult life as a drug user and dealer, which led to multiple convictions and lengthy sentences in state and federal prison.

Today, he is clean and sober, and has steadily worked his way up at a Dallas-area manufacturer, ensuring a brighter tomorrow for himself and his children. He also “pays it forward” through regular volunteer work with disadvantaged families in North Texas.

Carlos credits the job opportunity he found with Cornbread Hustle with changing his mindset and outlook. Watch Carlos’ story here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9RLBBXUJn0>

## **Vincent Thomas**

### *Warehouse Associate*

A promising future as a talented athlete was cut short when Vincent fell in with a notorious Dallas gang. His association with organized crime led to a harsh sentence and a decade incarcerated. It was late in his time behind bars Vincent began to find transformation through his faith, and he made leaps and bounds after returning from incarceration, thanks in part to a job he found with Cornbread Hustle: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2o9OmlFfe-Y>

Today, Vincent is rebuilding his life and continues to be one of the top workers at a Dallas-area distribution company. He hopes to someday own his own business, and to produce online videos that will inspire others.

**JoJo Munoz**

*Construction Industry Manager*

Another star high school athlete, JoJo grew up in Texas' Permian Basin and attended Midland Lee High School, of "Friday Night Lights" fame. Drugs sent him down a different path, one that led to a prison cell.

Watch JoJo's story here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0R-SRPJRn0>

JoJo remains drug-free and has continued to enjoy success in his business, while ensuring generational change for his family.

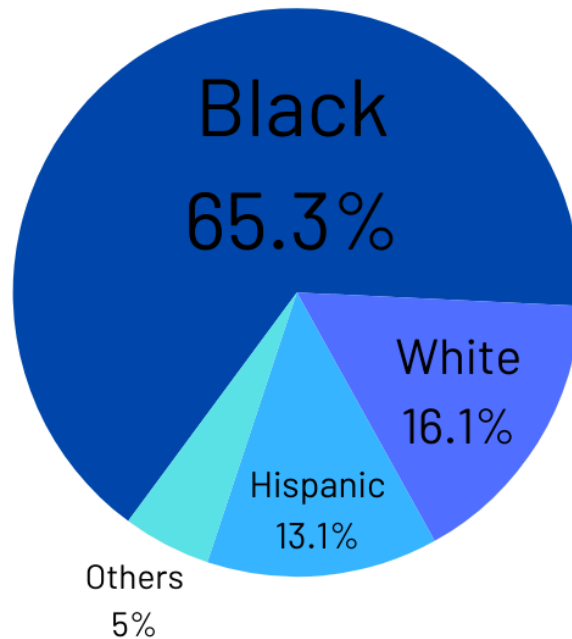
**Who Do We Hire?**

In preparing this report, we conducted a data analysis of all our hires since 2016. What we found is that the Cornbread Hustle workforce closely mirrors the reality of incarceration in America. A vast majority of our hires are men, mostly in their 30s. As is the case with prison and jail populations, about two-thirds of our hires are Black, with White and Hispanic making up most of the rest.

**The Populations We Serve**

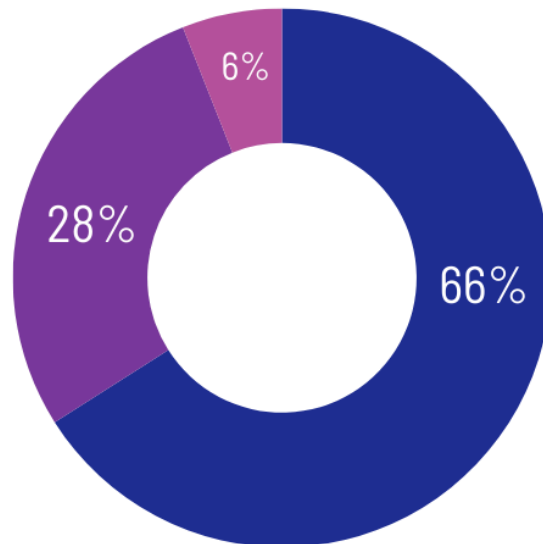
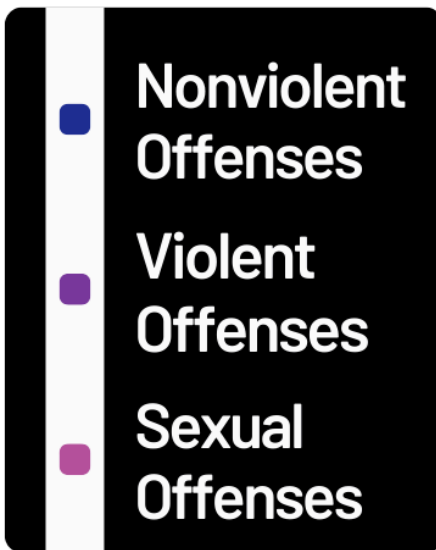


**83% Male**  
**Median**  
**Age: 34**



Among criminal backgrounds, we found similar data. About two-thirds are classified as having “nonviolent” records, with nearly 30 percent having at least one violent offense conviction. People with sex offenses make up a small but significant subset of this population.

## Criminal Backgrounds



It is important to note that these data reflect the demographics of employees we have hired, but they differ somewhat from those of the applicants to the jobs we offer. Because some of our employer partners are not in a position to hire people with certain backgrounds, it can be more difficult to place applicants with records that include sex offenses, robberies, or other violent crimes.

We continue to evaluate internal data based on our employees’ criminal backgrounds, employment situations, and outcomes. Among the most promising trends is the discovery that **employees with violent crime backgrounds are five times more likely to convert to permanent status than those with either nonviolent charges or no criminal history at all.**

This is why we continue to advocate for employers to open their hiring to more types of backgrounds, because our evidence shows that so-called “violent criminals” are often more successful than people with non-violent records.

## How Do We Hire?

Cornbread Hustle is a for-profit staffing agency that uses a unique, tested, and proven system for identifying, recruiting, screening, and placing job-seekers with criminal backgrounds.

All Cornbread Hustle recruiters have lived experience with incarceration and / or substance use. This gives them a decided advantage when evaluating candidates; they are able to personally relate to the applicant on a level that few others can truly understand. Recruiter training places an emphasis on empathy and thoroughness, treating all applicants with respect and dignity while recognizing that not everyone returning from incarceration or with a criminal record is ready for the jobs we offer.

We use two models for providing employment opportunities: Direct Hire and Temp-to-Hire.

With Direct Hire, we identify and recruit quality candidates for skilled professional jobs nationwide. These hires include industrial professionals, manufacturing professionals, technicians, IT experts, corporate managers, and other careers. Clients are charged a one-time fee with a guarantee, depending on the salary and the role, and invoiced on Day One of employment.

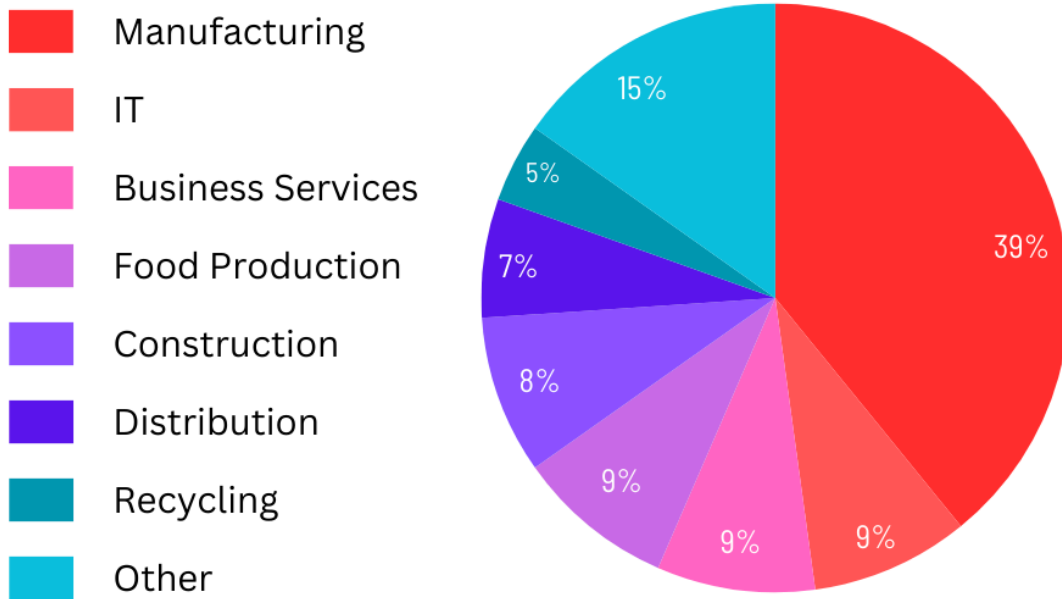
For Temp-to-Hire, we offer jobs in North Texas that include both entry-level / manual labor and skilled opportunities. Once they are placed at a job, candidates are employed as W-2 employees and paid by Cornbread Hustle on a weekly basis. We carry a variety of liability insurance policies and workers' compensation for every active employee, and assume most risk.

Employers are invoiced weekly by Cornbread Hustle, with a markup added to the employee's base pay. An employee can convert to a permanent, full-time employee with the employer after 720 working hours under Cornbread Hustle. Earlier conversions are available for a fee.

# Who Are Our Clients?

Since 2016, we have successfully placed second-chance workers with nearly 50 employers across a variety of industries.

## Our Clients and Their Industries



While a majority of our placements have been in manufacturing, our data show varying levels of success based on individual employers and how they approach second-chance hiring.

## **Large Industrial Manufacturer**

In 2021 and 2022, we placed more than 300 entry-level workers with a Fortune 500 large-scale industrial manufacturer at its factory in a rural community.

This client was a good fit for two reasons: its location in an area with a relatively high number of formerly-incarcerated people, and the jobs which offered high pay without the need for special skills or experience. The employer demonstrated a willingness to work with second-chance candidates, and after several months it chose to use Cornbread Hustle as its exclusive staffing partner.

Practices introduced by Cornbread Hustle included a “clean-up day” that involved leadership and managers joining employees to beautify employee parking and lounge areas, and the invitation of a nationally-recognized motivational speaker, himself formerly-incarcerated, who met with managers and employees to talk about second chances and empathy.

By bringing hundreds of new workers to an employer where they had not previously been considered, we were able to demonstrate the effectiveness and success of second-chance hiring at a high-scaled level.

## **B2B Supplies and Equipment Distributor**

One of our most-successful newer clients is a commercial distributor of electrical wiring and components. It relies on us for dozens of temp-to-hire workers throughout the year and has proven a fertile ground for formerly-incarcerated people aiming to get a fresh start.

Located centrally in the Dallas / Fort Worth Metroplex, this employer is easily accessible by both car and public transit, making it convenient for members of our worker population who live in transition homes with parole GPS monitors. Thanks to dedicated managers who work closely with Cornbread Hustle recruiters, it has seen among our highest rates of permanent conversions and lowest rates of overall turnover.

## **Construction Manufacturer**

Another industrial employer located in the central D/FW area, this company hired nearly 70 workers from us, ranging from entry-level general laborers all the way up to a six-figure salary plant manager. It also provided excellent jobs for workers of varying skill levels and those interested in developing specific careers, such as plumbers and electricians.

The company’s president and founder was an enthusiastic supporter of second-chance staffing and worked to ensure that all of our hires were treated like they were part of a family. The workplace culture makes a huge difference in determining outcomes; employees who are made to feel welcome and offered a robust support system are far more likely to succeed.

## **A One-of-a-Kind Pipeline**

Because Cornbread Hustle has been in business for so long, it has developed unparalleled word-of-mouth marketing. Nearly all of our applicants heard about us from a reentry guidance professional, from employee referrals, or from our staff themselves in our routine visits to prisons. The result is a pipeline of more than 20,000 prospective workers, many of whom are eager and ready to start work immediately.

However, our recruiting process is rigorous and designed to ensure only top-quality candidates are offered to our employer partners. Every applicant identified as a potential fit for a job opportunity is first interviewed over the phone or in a video call with one of our recruiters. This is followed by a more thorough in-person interview, which includes a six-panel mouth swab drug test. The recruiter takes this time to get to know the candidate well, and to establish a professional relationship that will continue long after job placement.

The final step is an on-site interview with managers at the jobsite. Once the company approves the candidate, they can begin work immediately, or at any date agreed upon by managers and the candidate.

## **Thorough Candidate Screening**

Many employers and staffing agencies only run basic background checks on new hires. This has the unfortunate consequence of both leading to rescinded offers for candidates with a criminal record, as well as missing important information that may not come up on a typical background check, such as federal criminal charges and convictions, which are not identified in most screening products.

Cornbread Hustle is different. Although we are a staffing agency for second chances and hire people with criminal records of all kinds, we ensure transparency and validity as essential to recruiting. Each of our employers are unique, with varying policies regarding the types of criminal backgrounds they can accept. We understand these needs and work closely with employers to ensure we are only submitting workers who will ultimately be eligible for conversion, because that's what's best for both employer and employee.

As part of the onboarding process, every new hire is subject to a thorough background screen that searches for conviction and incarceration records in counties where they have had a verified residential address, as well as federal charges and alias searches. We further use a multi-step process to ensure full compliance with the Federal Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) and state laws that restrict using arrest or conviction records older than seven years when making adverse hiring decisions.

As the industry leader in second-chance hiring, we rarely find surprises on these background checks. Our recruiters use their lived experience with incarceration to relate personally to all candidates, and assure them that their honesty and transparency about any criminal past is both beneficial and essential. We find that applicants are generally eager to share their stories, giving us a nuanced and honest look at what happened and why. This context is critical, as a criminal background check does not tell the whole story. It enables us to place the right candidate with the right employer, preventing conflicts that could be detrimental to both parties.

Our background check process not only provides employers with peace of mind, it sharply reduces the risk of exposure to negligent hiring and other liability.

## **Continued Service After Placement**

Once a Cornbread Hustle hire is placed with an employer, we provide the highest levels of support to both, starting with the employee.

Each Cornbread Hustle staffer is given free, lifetime access to The 12-Week Starting Over Program. This innovative, interactive video series was created by our founder Cheri Garcia. It walks participants through methods of identifying and overcoming past traumas, establishing boundaries, and improving their overall health, productivity, and quality of life.

Throughout the year, all active Cornbread Hustle hires are provided with safety and wellness training. We choose a different set of topics every month, with two goals: reduce the risk of workplace injuries, and improve mindfulness and mental health in their personal and professional lives.

In addition, every recruiter maintains a constant relationship with every employee whom they have placed. Employees are encouraged to call or text their recruiter any time to talk about anything, work-related or personal. We provide resources as needed for issues such as healthcare, housing, mental health, substance use recovery, and much more.

Our management team maintains regular contact with clients, ensuring not only that staffing needs are being met, but that hires are meeting or exceeding expectations of performance and cultural fit. For larger clients, we offer empathy training workshops for supervisors and management to ensure a healthy workplace environment for everyone involved.



## VI. Summary and Conclusions

The American economy is undergoing one of its most significant transformations since the Great Depression. Millions of adults are permanently leaving the workforce, and monumental demographic changes mean there are not enough workers to replace those who are no longer able or willing to work.

Faced with this stark reality, backed by a mountain of evidence and warnings from respected economists and analysts, employers must decide now how they will navigate the new reality of labor.

Among the possible solutions is a clear leader: tapping into the vast and diverse pool of workers with criminal backgrounds. In doing so, employers gain access to valuable skills, abilities, and experience, while playing an essential role in making their communities safer for everyone.

The impact of generational change created by employment for formerly-incarcerated people cannot be overstated. With meaningful jobs that pay well, these individuals are far less likely to offend again, and can provide better futures for themselves and their families. Keeping more people out of the justice system results in less crime and a reduced burden on taxpayers.

Ultimately, employers may not have a choice. Artificial intelligence, overseas outsourcing, and other adaptations simply cannot fill millions of the jobs that remain open nationwide. The companies that are among the first to take advantage of second-chance hiring will have a decided advantage over their competitors, both today and in the future as labor markets shift in ways we may not anticipate.

## VII. About the Authors



**Cheri Garcia** is the founder and CEO of Cornbread Hustle, Inc., a recruiting and staffing agency for second chances. For more than a decade, Cheri has worked to

help formerly incarcerated people and those in recovery find meaningful full-time jobs. In 2016, she launched Cornbread Hustle, one of the first staffing agencies focused on second-chance job opportunities. Cornbread Hustle has placed more than 2,500 workers in jobs around North Texas and the U.S.



**James Jackson** is the Director of Communications and Technology for Cornbread Hustle. A former journalist, he spent 20 years in the television news

industry, with stints at CNN, NBC News, and several local stations. He was recognized in 2020 by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences with an Emmy award for investigative reporting.

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*A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS: Every effort has been made to carefully and thoroughly research the findings in this report, to present information accurately, and to appropriately credit the sources of our research. Questions or comments are welcome via our website, <https://cornbreadhustle.com/contact>*

*Thank you for reading!*