

BE YOUR OWN BOSS, ON THE OUT.

It might be easier than you think.



**THE
ESCAPE
ROUTE →**

ARE YOU AN EX-PRISONER, OR SOON TO BE RELEASED?

If so, you'll be thinking about the best way to earn a living.

Most ex-prisoners seek work as an employee. That isn't easy. You often have to disclose your conviction. Jobs for ex-offenders can be hard to find.

Self-employment doesn't suit everyone. But for some, it offers an amazing future. Maybe that includes you?



People always need their car serviced and repaired

Why work for yourself?

It's not easy to get a job as an employee. There is a lot of competition. Self-employment allows you to earn a living. You get freedom, a good income and no boss.

What are the disadvantages?

If you don't get customers, you'll run out of money. If you borrow money to start the business, and can't repay it, you could go bankrupt. Tip: Don't borrow money.

Is it more risky than being employed?

Not really. Few jobs are secure these days.

What work can I do?

What are you good at? If you can tile a floor, you could advertise yourself as a floor tiler or carpet fitter.

What work are other people doing? What trades seem to be busy? Look at the services being sought on Facebook and NextDoor.

Have you gained a skill while in prison? You could use that to earn a living.

Offer something that people need and understand. There will always be a demand for basic services such as hairdressing or handyman work. If you have to explain the service, it probably won't sell.

What kind of people are good at self-employment?

You need to be totally committed. You'll have to work hard, and accept low paid contracts to start with. If you want an easy life, self-employment isn't for you.

What does it cost to set up?

Choose a trade that has minimal costs. To be a window cleaner, you only need a bucket, squeegee and cleaning liquid. Whereas, to start a shop you'll need to pay three months' rent up front, the cost of stock, and a solicitor. That's expensive.

Work from home, and borrow tools from friends or family. Buy second hand equipment. Don't spend money you don't have. That shiny van can wait.

Choose a trade that doesn't involve legal difficulties. Check with your probation officer.

How do I price a job?

Discover other traders' hourly or day rates. Decide how many hours or days the job will need. Add the cost of materials etc.

Do I need a business bank account?

No. Use your personal account to start with. If you don't have a bank account, try one of the new online banks such as Suits Me, Pockit or Pepper.

Do I need insurance?

You will need public liability and employers' insurance. Get an online quote. Many start ups don't get insurance until they have done a few jobs. That's a bit risky.

Should I be VAT registered?

Avoid registering for VAT until you reach the threshold. VAT adds a lot of paperwork. Staying under the VAT limit means you will be 20% cheaper.

Do I need an accountant?

You don't need an accountant on Day 1. But you should have a bookkeeper (maybe a family member) or do it yourself. Look for a free online bookkeeping app such as Quickfile, Wave, or ZipBooks Starter.

What are the secrets of success?

- **Spend a lot more time marketing than you'd expect.** Put leaflets through doors. Put your business card on chip shop notice boards. Ask friends and family if they know of people who need work. If you have a spare hour, carry out some marketing.
- **Do online marketing.** Get found on Google My Business. Post on Facebook and Next Door. Be active in the online community. It's where you'll find work.
- **Be prepared for 100 days without income.** The work won't come in straight away.
- **Keep your costs low.** Don't spend money you don't have.
- **Stay away from old mates.** They may drag you back to prison.
- **Do the work thoroughly and well.** Never leave a client unhappy. Do more than they expect.
- **Ask for referrals.** Ask the client if they need more work doing. Ask them if they know anyone who needs similar work.

Should I set up a limited company?

Start as a sole trader. You don't need to be a limited company to begin with. It adds complexity and paperwork.

What about self-employment for sex offenders?

Find a role that will be acceptable to your probation officer. That usually means not coming into contact with children or vulnerable adults.

How do I promote my business?

- Get a free 'Google My Business' account.
- Post messages on social media.
- Get a website (check out Weebly, Squarespace and WordPress). Add lots of content so Google will find it.
- Put a leaflet through people's doors.
- Tell friends and relations you're looking for clients.
- Ask people if they know anyone who needs work doing.
- Ask every client to post a review. Testimonials are a powerful selling tool.

Why new businesses fail

- They aren't visible to potential customers.
- They don't do regular marketing
- They overspend on items they don't really need.
- They don't get around to sending quotations.
- They don't follow up enquiries.
- They don't ask for the work (Would you like me to book you in?).
- They overprice their work initially.
- Their work is substandard.
- They don't satisfy their customers.



Do you have white-collar skills, such as IT support, programming or digital marketing?

	Cheap to set up		Expensive to set up
<p>Simple</p> <p>Complicated (eg legislation)</p>	Window cleaner Physical trainer Handyman, builder Hairdresser, barber Beautician Gardener Interior designer Dog walker Painter, decorator Programmer Digital marketer Patio cleaning Gutter clearance Mobile car wash/ valet	Photographer Carpenter Dog groomer Life coach Technology repair IT support Virtual assistant eBay merchant Furniture upcycler Car repair	Shop Café Restaurant
	Market stall Graphic designer Tutor Chef Child minder Emergency plumber Foot health care	Nanny Brewer, distiller Book keeper Electrician Plumber Caterer	Solicitor Property development

You're more likely to succeed with a simple business that is easy to set up.

CHECKLIST

What are my skills?

What product or service will I offer?

When can I start?

What can I do in advance?

What marketing activity will I do?

What tools and equipment will I need?

Do I need to learn additional skills (YouTube? Friends?)

Anything else?

Want to know more?

For more information, speak to a prison careers advisor.

Or go to [TheEscapeRoute.com](https://www.TheEscapeRoute.com)

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