Do you have any tips for dealing with a criminal history?

A: It really is dependent on what type of criminal history the client has. If it’s a low-level drug offense, that will not present as many challenges / barriers to employment as, say, embezzlement or a violent crime. Here are some general tips I can give:

* Determine what sorts of employment / careers are not accessible to the client, due to their criminal background. If they embezzled money, then they are probably not going to be able to, say, work in a bank. Or, if they were caught selling drugs, they will never be able to work in the pharmaceutical industry.

* Determine what sorts of employment or careers your client might be interested in, and then work with your client to identify networking opportunities within that field. See if there is a professional association associated with that particular field – and have your client attend conferences and workshops. That way, they’ll be around professionals in that field and will have the opportunity to establish relationships with individuals who might be willing to overlook their criminal background. Also, have them attend chamber of commerce networking (and other) events. Again, they’ll be around professionals in the community – and will have the opportunity to create relationships with potential employers.

* Coach your client on how to talk about their criminal background. Coach them on how to talk about it in a positive light - that they understand how they messed up, but that they have changed their lives around, and have become better people because of it.

* There are organizations and businesses out there who work with the criminal justice population, helping them to become employed. I do not know where you are located, so I can’t give you a specific resource in your area. But, I do know that they are out there. For instance, there is an organization called Maine Works, which places individuals who have a criminal record in industrial construction jobs. Their website is here: http://www.maineworks.us/.

* There may be, also, non-profits in your community who provide general (and employment) services to the criminal justice population. They may be a great resource, in terms of giving you suggestions for working with clients with criminal records.
Do you recommend the client tell potential employers that they are in recovery? If yes, when?

A: I think that there is rarely a time when a client would need to tell an employer that they are in recovery. I know that clients often feel compelled to divulge this information, in the name of “rigorous honesty”. However, I think this is where we get to educate our clients on the difference between “rigorous honesty” and “inappropriate divulging”. You can explain to a client that they (probably) wouldn’t tell their supervisor about other intimate details of their personal life (such as a fight with a boyfriend, girlfriend, etc..), so there is no need to disclose that they are in recovery from addiction / alcoholism. The exceptions to this rule are:

- If the information they are disclosing would be beneficial to the employer / organization / position. For instance, if they are seeking employment in an addiction recovery center, it would probably be beneficial to the clientele / position, if the job applicant was knowledgeable about the 12 steps and process of addiction recovery.
- If their condition will, somehow, affect their performance on the job. For instance, if they work at a restaurant and cannot be around alcohol, they may want to explain to their employer why they cannot handle alcohol.
- If they have a criminal record, they will (probably) have to explain to their new employer the circumstances around their criminal record. It would be beneficial, then, to explain to the employer that they are now in recovery – and are working to turn their life around.
- If they still have the same job that they did before they got sober – and there is wreckage to address. For instance, if they are on the brink of getting fired because they showed up late and hung-over multiple times, they can explain to their employer that they are now in recovery, and are striving to become a better, more responsible employee.

What is the cost of the Via character strengths report?

A: There is no cost. The VIA Character Strengths report is free-of-charge.

Regarding the strength finder report-is it consistent, or do results vary over time?

A: The results can change over time. However, according to a study conducted by Laurie A. Schreiner (in 2004 – 2005), 52% of her sample population (of 438 college students) had at least three themes that remained the same (after the student took the StrengthsFinder assessment a second time). 35% of the sample population retained two of their top five themes, and 11% retained only one of their top 5 themes. Thus, the majority of individuals (in this study) retained at least three of their top five themes over time.

What type of organization would be best for starting a job club?

A: - An addiction recovery organization
   - a community services organization
   - a non-profit organization

Any organization, where there is a need for employment services, and at least a few individuals who are currently seeking employment.