

**MAKE** *the* **CASE**



# REASSEMBLING THE WORKFORCE: THE CASE FOR FAIR CHANCE HIRING

How JBM Packaging revolutionized their talent strategy by hiring justice-involved individuals.

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**A lot of people might have biases around folks coming out of prison, and I can say that very confidently because I was one of them. Before the Fair Chance Program, if you checked the box that you had a felony background, I promise you were not going to get a job at JBM.”**

**MARCUS SHEANSHANG**

President & CEO of JBM Packaging

## **1** **RECOGNIZE THE POTENTIAL OF AN UNTAPPED TALENT POOL**

Marcus Sheanshang always knew what he was going to do when he grew up. His dad, Greg Sheanshang, founded JBM Envelope Company with three employees in 1985 – naming the company after his children: Jennifer, Bridget, and Marcus (JBM). From age 11, Sheanshang did every job he could to learn the envelope manufacturing business, so that when his father was ready to retire, he could carry the torch.

One quality Sheanshang admired most about his father’s leadership was how much he cared for his employees. So, when Sheanshang purchased the company and became President & CEO in 2008, he was eager to continue his dad’s legacy of building a profitable, leading business that was also a great place to work. Unfortunately, Sheanshang came into leadership when the economy was reeling from the greatest recession since the Great Depression. Sheanshang recalls, “It was horrible timing.”

As Sheanshang settled into the top role, he and the rest of JBM’s executive team knew they had to keep the company whole as they rode out the tumultuous economic climate. To achieve this, they decided to develop a strategic plan to drive the company’s strategy – starting with defining a new north star with a revised mission statement: “Dominate targeted small, open-end envelope markets.” Open-end envelopes were a specific type of envelope, with an opening on one of its shorter edges. If JBM was going to dominate the open-end envelope market, they were going to need a strategy to attract and retain more employees – and sooner rather than later. Most of the company’s tenured team members were getting ready to retire.

**JBM Envelope Company is now JBM Packaging. Since its inception, it has produced 30+ billion envelopes and packages, helping businesses move from plastic to paper, from its 100,000 square-foot manufacturing facility in Lebanon, Ohio, where it employs 170 people.**

**“ Second chance employees are no different from you and me. They made a mistake. Now they want to come here, work hard, and do a good job.**

**MARCUS SHEANSHANG**

President & CEO

Hiring and retaining employees proved to be difficult following the 2008 recession. JBM was a great place to work, but two factors made recruitment challenging:

1. Young people were discouraged from entering the goods-producing economy and pushed to go to college right after they graduated high school. After college, most wouldn't choose to enter the manufacturing industry. While there was still a portion of high school graduates that didn't go to college, the company couldn't get 18- or 19-year-olds to stick around for more than a few weeks on the job.
2. Lebanon, Ohio, was a relatively isolated town of only 20,000 people with very little public transportation. While the city wasn't far from Cincinnati, it wasn't feasible to commute, unless you had reliable transportation. This made their open roles a tough sell in comparison to employment opportunities closer to residential centers.

No matter how many recruitment events at local high schools or attempts made to entice local workers to the manufacturing facility, JBM's job offers gained little traction and the labor shortage gap began to widen. Bridging this gap became one of the most difficult and urgent priorities for JBM.

Eager to come up with a solution, Sheanshang became curious about "second chance hiring" – employing people with criminal backgrounds. He first learned about second chance hiring in early 2016, when his church shared how it helped people reentering society get back on their feet through employment. Curious about the concept, Sheanshang met with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), who was open to the idea of partnering with JBM.



From there, Sheanshang knew he needed to learn more. He visited prisons like Pickaway Correctional Institution (PCI) to understand the environment and the individuals they could hire if they decided to use prisons as a recruitment source. He knew this would be a radical departure from how JBM tried to recruit employees in the past, but they needed talent. After getting comfortable visiting PCI and meeting several justice-involved individuals, he had no doubt this could be a viable solution. The challenge, however, would be rallying his team and convincing them the idea was worth exploring.

## 2 REWRITE THE NARRATIVE OF JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS

In 2016, Sheanshang came to his executive team and floor supervisors to discuss second chance hiring. Unsurprisingly, it was met with hesitation and concern. "Who are we hiring?," "Is this even safe?," and "Would they be reliable workers?" were just some of the questions he received. It was often the most-tenured employees who were most skeptical.

To bring the team onboard, Sheanshang thought about what he'd need to communicate through a set of three objectives:

- The first was to humanize formerly incarcerated individuals, so that second chance hiring wouldn't be seen as a radical, dangerous practice.
- Second, he wanted to clearly communicate that under no circumstance would he jeopardize any employee's safety.
- Finally, and emphatically, Sheanshang wanted to stress that just because someone had a background, it didn't mean that they didn't have skills to do the work.

He was eager to rewrite the narrative about who JBM wanted to employ and what they were trying to achieve, so it would be relatable to employees who had never been involved with the criminal justice system. Communication that addressed everyone's hesitations would be essential, because without it, Sheanshang knew he would never get the buy-in and support he needed from his team.

## HUMANIZE THE PERSON

The majority of people JBM would employ would likely be justice-involved individuals who committed non-violent, drug-related crimes. Since Ohio was ranked second only to West Virginia in opioid overdose death rates, drugs in their community was a very personal issue to many people. There was a high likelihood that JBM employees had family and friends impacted by drugs, so if they could picture their loved ones as the people JBM was looking to hire, Sheanshang hoped it would change their perception of those who had been incarcerated as a risk to an opportunity.

In addition to getting the executive team on board, it was important for Sheanshang to convince the human resources team to be advocates for the program. While the Human Resources Supervisor was new to the team in 2016, she became an early ally in convincing the rest of the organization that they should remain open-minded and give this potential new talent pool a chance.

The Human Resources Supervisor became the point person that existing employees could turn to with questions about second chance hiring. In one-on-one conversations with concerned employees, she was adamant that her fellow team members should take some time to think about the worst mistakes they'd made in their own lives. Were they defined by them? If not, she challenged them to not prejudge those coming out of prison so that their circumstances or mistakes didn't define them too.

**“ The early visits were important, as they gave us, as leaders, credibility when we were discussing the program internally. We felt comfortable enough to enter the walls of prison and be with [individuals who were incarcerated] in close quarters. [After these experiences], we didn't believe we were compromising safety at JBM as we looked to start hiring more reformed citizens.**

**DAN PUTHOFF**  
Chief Financial Officer



In addition to one-on-one conversations with HR, employees knew Sheanshang had an open-door policy to discuss concerns around second chance hiring. Sheanshang also increased buy-in by sending some of JBM's leaders to neighboring prisons – recognizing that the power of proximity couldn't be matched through town halls. This proved incredibly effective because the team was able to learn more about the justice system, feel comfortable being in community with those who were incarcerated, and recognize that JBM should be able to find a way for those eager to re-enter the workforce without compromising safety.

## ALLEVIATE SAFETY CONCERNS

While JBM's leadership became more open to accepting job applicants with criminal backgrounds, such as misdemeanors and certain felonies, they also saw the need for background checks and to put some restrictions on what criminal backgrounds would be allowable. For example, JBM felt comfortable removing barriers for those who had committed lower-level crimes, like selling controlled substances, and placing less weight on transgressions that occurred more than seven years ago, believing that someone's past mistakes shouldn't infinitely define their future. They also decided that, on a case-by-case basis, people who were convicted of more-severe crimes would undergo a second interview with a review panel. Leadership created this procedure because they felt it was important for people to be able to speak to their story in their own words – something a background check couldn't do. The only backgrounds they would categorically deny would be crimes committed against children, women, or anything sexual in nature as they tried to balance what the company and legacy team members were able to handle.



Finally, to categorically address any lingering safety concerns, Sheanshang shared that he expected his children to work at JBM and he would never put them in harm's way. He felt confident that having his kids work with justice-involved individuals wouldn't pose any risk to their safety. He made good on this promise, and not long after the program started, his daughter and son started working at JBM during the summers, where they were trained by and worked alongside people with criminal backgrounds.

## ASSURE WORK QUALITY WON'T BE IMPACTED

To address the concern that people reentering society wouldn't produce quality work, JBM sent members of their team to visit [Nehemiah Manufacturing](#), another Ohio-based manufacturer, who had a long-standing second chance hiring program. Seeing the ins-and-outs of Nehemiah showed them that justice-involved job candidates were just as skilled, trainable, and motivated as any other prospective employees. In addition to seeing how successful their model was, the JBM team saw something else in Nehemiah as well: that it wasn't just good for business, but how inspiring it was for a company to play such a critical role in people's lives too.

Lastly, Sheanshang knew the messaging they used mattered – both internally with the team and externally with the world. He didn't want there to be any doubt: justice-involved employees weren't second rate, and so they would move away from the term "second chance." Instead, he and the rest of the company would use "fair chance," as it more accurately depicted their talent pool.

After months of addressing fears and getting people energized about the program, the Executive Team was fully on board; however, there were still employees who weren't won over. To ensure there wasn't any confusion, with unwavering conviction, Sheanshang made a statement: **"This is the company we are today and the company we will be tomorrow. If you can't align yourself with that, this might not be the company for you."** With that, there was no room for debate: JBM would be a fair chance employer.

### 3 DEFINE A FAIR CHANCE RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

#### CHOOSE THE BEST-FIT REFERRAL PARTNERS

Initially, JBM leadership wasn't sure where to focus their recruitment efforts. At first, they looked to workforce and reentry nonprofits that served those coming out of incarceration, but their partnerships weren't yielding the results they hoped. They found reentry and workforce organizations didn't always have direct access to people while they were still imprisoned, and therefore didn't know them well once they got out.

To gain greater access to individuals while they were still incarcerated, JBM started going directly into prisons on days when employers and resource providers were invited to share their services. When JBM started, they were surprised to find that many individuals who attended their resource fairs either weren't interested or wouldn't be a good fit – in part, because there was no pre-vetting. That's when they learned they needed partners in prisons who could help with matchmaking between JBM and individuals who would soon be released, and who would be the right fit for JBM based on their career interests, skills, and conviction eligibility.

Creating these relationships within the prisons would take time and would require convincing the ODRC's Office of Enterprise Development (OED), which facilitated partnerships with private sector employers. To achieve this, they would need to pitch why JBM had great post-release employment opportunities. Over the coming months, they took several meetings with individuals from OED – culminating in a presentation to the OED Advisory Board in November 2016. The board was comprised of OED employees and individuals from the private sector. After giving the presentation, JBM received unanimous approval.

Once OED agreed, JBM had permission to build relationships with individual prisons. However, that proved to be difficult because not all prisons were receptive, communicative, or ready to partner. In turn,



they created a one-sheet used to outline what the prisons could expect from JBM and what they would need from the prisons in return. This was critical in determining whether a specific prison would meet their partnership expectations. When building relationships with prison staff such as case managers and wardens, they would present on the following:

- What can the prison expect from JBM?
- What do JBM's recruitment visit schedules entail?
- Who is JBM looking to recruit?
- Who is JBM not able to recruit at this time?
- What does JBM expect from a partnership with you?
- What can you expect after JBM interviews candidates and wants to follow up with them?

Through thoughtful relationship building, vetting, trial, and error, JBM focused on recruiting from PCI and Dayton Correctional Institute beginning in 2016. By 2018, they also added the Ohio Reformatory for Women and the London Correctional Institution.

Not long after they started recruiting directly from prisons, they learned that halfway houses could become a vital talent source as well – and in many ways, were easier to recruit from. Halfway house staff could bring their residents directly to JBM during open house days, which they affectionately called “Talent Tuesdays,” to expedite the recruitment process since the job seekers could interview and get to work sooner than those still in prison.

JBM staff regularly visited prisons and halfway houses to speak with staff and present to justice-involved individuals, while also welcoming their employees onsite who wanted to learn more about the fair chance program or needed to be in contact with JBM's employees, like parole officers who needed to meet with their parolees. The more JBM was able to establish relationships with the employment specialists, case managers, wardens, and prison and halfway house staffs, the more accurately they referred good candidates to work at JBM. These trusted relationships were built on regular touch points, including calls and in-person visits, which went both ways.

## **RECRUIT AND SCREEN JUSTICE-INVOLVED JOB CANDIDATES**

Since recruiting candidates from prison required more coordination – both in terms of preparing for JBM's visits and readying candidates for the workforce upon release – JBM and their partners at the prisons decided that quarterly recruitment would be the most sustainable recruitment schedule. For halfway houses, it was much more feasible for JBM to visit monthly to begin the screening, interviewing, and hiring process.

Recruitment was predominantly led by JBM's Better Lives Coaches, a role specifically created to support the Fair Chance Program. Better Lives Coaches went into prisons and halfway houses to present on JBM – specifically highlighting the job opportunities and the supportive services JBM offered its employees. After the presentation, Better Lives Coaches would conduct a series of “speed interviews” where the



main goal was to ask questions about their time during incarceration and their hopes for their future. These interviews, which were ten minutes or less, were designed to interview as many candidates as possible. To make that possible, JBM came up with some deal breakers so they could quickly narrow down the candidate pool. These included:

- 1. Backgrounds:** The crime had to be one they could accept:
  - Violent crimes against women/children, sex crimes, and murder were ineligible.
  - Candidates needed to convey that they had learned from the mistake(s) of their crime.
- 2. Housing:** They had a solid housing plan residing within a reasonable distance to JBM or had secured early release to a halfway house, with adequate time to secure housing before the completion of their sentence.
- 3. Transportation:** They had a transportation plan, which meant they met one of the following criteria:
  - They were released to halfway house where JBM could provide transportation to/from work.
  - They had no barriers obtaining a driver's license and vehicle once released.
  - They had a guaranteed commitment from family/friends.
- 4. Recovery:** They were sound in their recovery with a solid plan on how to continue their success upon release.
- 5. Productivity:** They had been productive with their time while they were incarcerated – for example, they had completed:
  - Some type of programming (recovery, behavior modification, etc.)
  - College
  - Work release
- 6. Goals:** They had established short- and long-term personal and professional goals.

While most of JBM's entry-level roles were Machine Operators, they also began administering a series of assessments for the Adjuster role, more widely understood as a Machine Maintenance Technician. The two main tests to assess the skills of an Adjuster candidate were the Weisen Test of Mechanical Aptitude, which tests a candidate's ability to learn how to use and maintain mechanical equipment, and the Standard Timing Model, a hands-on test with varying degrees of difficulty, involving physically manipulating a "machine" within the kit. All tests were easily administered within the prison or halfway house, so nobody needed to come to JBM to take them.

“ The scariest day of being in prison is [the day] you actually go in. The second-scariest day is when you're leaving, because you don't know what to expect as you try to re-enter society.

MARCUS SHEANSHANG  
President & CEO

While the recruitment process was being solidified, JBM's leadership quickly learned there would be unexpected challenges. Some candidates didn't have basic math skills required for the job. Others had to navigate the absence of a strong support network. While there were many qualified candidates, some would need to commute more than 45 minutes or relocate. Sometimes candidates were overqualified and wouldn't

be a good fit for either a Machine Operator or Adjuster. Recruitment became a delicate dance and required a significant amount of trial and error.

## 4 PROVIDE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TO RE-ENTER SOCIETY

Once JBM started hiring from prisons and halfway houses, they quickly realized that these individuals faced unique barriers that could get in their way of building a successful career and a happy, healthy life. It wouldn't be enough to only offer a justice-involved individual a job, they would need wraparound supports to get them on solid ground as they re-entered society.

Without an intentional investment in fair chance employees' needs, JBM would be right back where they started: trying to fill a slew of vacant positions.

### LEVERAGE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

JBM's leadership team knew they weren't experts in social services, so they began looking for community-based organizations to meet the growing needs of their fair chance employees. Transportation, housing, health, and wellness were all areas employees who weren't justice-involved had a much easier time navigating – oftentimes taking their ease for granted.

Through conversations with their new hires, JBM learned that it was almost always more difficult for people with a criminal background to obtain resources that fulfilled these basic needs. And down the road, access to them could determine whether someone fell into poverty, slid back into addiction, or found themselves back behind bars.

Transportation, no matter where you live, is essential to keeping a job. In Lebanon, Ohio, there wasn't a robust public transportation system, so it was incumbent upon its residents to have access to a car. But for someone who didn't have an income yet, getting a car wasn't going to be an option. JBM quickly realized this and introduced themselves to local nonprofit Beacon of Hope, which provided a van service for employees in the Cincinnati area, the closest major city. The service was free for the first two weeks of a justice-involved employee's job, then after they received their first paycheck, it cost them \$5 each way with JBM subsidizing any additional cost.

While Beacon of Hope was incredible for getting fair chance employees to and from work for the first couple of months on the job, JBM wanted to offer a more permanent, sustainable way for employees to acquire transportation. To achieve this, they partnered with nonprofit Wheels, an organization known throughout the Cincinnati area for reconditioning donated vehicles and passing them on to people in need. Together, JBM and Wheels created an initiative they named the "Roadmap to Wheels Program."



Through the Roadmap to Wheels Program, Wheels donated a used car to employees who spent four to five months working with a financial coach to save a \$1,000 emergency fund and a \$1,400 “trade-up fund.” Once an employee saved enough in both funds, they were able to trade in their used vehicle for a new vehicle from a local dealership. JBM also paid the dealership \$1,000 for each car.

JBM also recognized housing as another significant challenge for justice-involved employees. They explored housing options with partner organizations and learned that many landlords and property management companies conducted criminal background checks as part of the rental application process. This scrutiny often resulted in automatic disqualification or reluctance from landlords to rent to individuals with felonies.

To make matters worse, housing discrimination against those with criminal histories was widespread, regardless of the nature or timing of the offense, further complicating the housing search for those with felonies. Legal restrictions on where justice-involved individuals can reside, such as “one-strike” policies in public housing, further limited their housing options, prohibiting individuals with certain convictions from living in government-subsidized residences or specific areas.

To mitigate these challenges, JBM built relationships with background-friendly apartment and housing owners, who they referred their unhoused or housing-insecure employees to contact. To build these relationships, JBM had to identify apartment complexes, property management firms, and individual landlords known for their conviction-friendly policies. This often required extensive online research, participation in community gatherings, and networking with organizations focused on housing for individuals with criminal histories. Additionally, for individuals requiring immediate emergency housing who faced financial constraints beyond JBM’s available options, JBM began providing loans, which aimed to support teammates in urgent situations.

Once housed, JBM turned to nonprofits like New Life Furniture Bank to get their employees furniture, clothing, and any other housing needs. They also wanted to make sure their employees were set up to build credit and save money, so they could move into an upgraded apartment or home down the road. To achieve this, they partnered with Sharefax Credit Union, who made fair chance accounts and a credit card repair program available.

Finally, in addition to transportation and housing, JBM leadership had conversations with fair chance hires on what other areas of their lives could use support. Based on their feedback, JBM created a curriculum of life skills courses called “Cultivate Classes” in conjunction with outside partners who taught on subjects like parenting and financial literacy. These were free, widely utilized resources by employees who had goals



like regaining custody of their kids. They also ensured health and wellness resources beyond Cultivate Classes were available, such as subsidized memberships for the YMCA/YWCA.

## **INCORPORATE AN ESSENTIAL ROLE: THE BETTER LIVES COACH**

In the early years of the Fair Chance Program, JBM saw a need to not only fill the gaps in access to resources like transportation and housing, but also to bridge the traditional life skills gaps their employees may have missed while incarcerated. JBM's leadership hadn't anticipated the level of trauma fair chance employees had faced, and quickly learned that sometimes those team members just needed an ear and someone to be there to help guide them on their path forward.

To provide this support, JBM created a new position called a "Better Lives Coach." Better Lives Coaches were individuals who possessed a passion for guiding others to reach their full potential, were informed about trauma, demonstrated empathy, and had a willingness to gently encourage progress. Through their coaching, they would work with staff to dig into issues and equip people with the necessary tools and techniques to overcome obstacles.

The first coach JBM hired created a framework named the "Better Lives Plan." The Better Lives Plan had fair chance employees, and any other employees interested in the program, commit to a six-month training program. During that time, team members met weekly with a Better Lives Coach to discuss their goals and challenges, both personally and professionally. Whether it was saving money to meet their financial goals or discussing how to work with their manager more effectively, sessions with Better Lives Coaches were a time to connect and work through their everyday concerns. This would also be when Better Lives Coaches could gain a deeper understanding of the needs of their fair chance employees and build community partnerships to access resources JBM didn't offer on their own.

At the end of the six-month Better Lives Program, graduates were honored at a formal graduation dinner, where the keynote speaker was a past graduate who shared their journey and inspire fair chance and non-fair chance employees. This annual graduation celebration continues today.

Over the years, the role of a Better Lives Coach has evolved, eventually assuming the responsibility of going to prisons and halfway houses to begin the recruitment process, working with prospective employees on transitioning from prison or the halfway house into the workforce, building community partnerships to provide personal and professional resources, and, most importantly, to coach each fair chance employee through the first six months of employment.

## **5 LAUNCH A FAIR CHANCE PROGRAM AS A COLLECTIVE**

When the JBM team launched their Fair Chance Program, they had to pay close attention to change management, as the program was reinventing the way JBM had operated for decades. They also needed to continuously reflect on how their justice-informed employees were adapting, so they could quickly solve challenges that would keep the new hires employed. Finally, they didn't want this to be a static initiative that remained small, so JBM leadership needed to determine how they were going to grow and innovate as the program got off the ground.

## PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT

When JBM launched their Fair Chance Program in 2016, they knew they weren't going to get everything right the first try, especially when it came to guiding their pre-existing employees on how to support their new justice-informed teammates. The biggest mistake came from having good intentions, which was choosing not to disclose who was or was not a fair chance hire to managers.

While the intent of non-disclosure was an earnest attempt to ensure every employee was treated the same, it soon became evident that there were some key differences and levels of support justice-informed employees needed, such as resources and life-skills education. Ultimately, JBM didn't accomplish anonymity by refusing to disclose a new hire's criminal background, because it was easy to Google someone and find their criminal history. Fair chance employees were also more likely to be the ones who accepted transportation support because they didn't have a way to get to and from work, so they informed managers in advance – realizing it would help both the manager and employee succeed.

By letting managers know who on their team was a fair chance hire, it helped normalize the concept because it wasn't a secret anymore and they could better prepare and onboard faster and more effectively. In fact, the more honest JBM's leadership was about the realities that justice-informed employees faced, the more their tenured team members wanted to get involved along the way.

Early on, Better Lives Coaches taught educational sessions to managers on addiction and other issues that often created serious challenges for recently released employees. This allowed everyone to have greater empathy and genuine interest in the lives of those reacclimating back to society. Before they knew it, more and more tenured employees wanted to serve as mentors to their justice-informed teammates to increase job success and satisfaction for their peers. Today, all managers go through a coaching program that teaches leaders how to manage more effectively, especially when you have justice-informed teammates who need a little more coaching than those without a criminal background.

## BALANCE THE HEAD AND THE HEART

By the end of the Fair Chance Program's first year, JBM's leadership had learned that success wasn't simply hiring justice-involved individuals but retaining them while also running a business. For some fair chance hires, once they had the resources and support they needed, they were able to transform their lives and successfully launch their careers with JBM.

One of JBM's first fair chance hires was Bobby who was, and still is, very quiet. A member of JBM's leadership team took the time to get to know Bobby, even taking him to Walmart shortly after his release to buy clothes and other items needed to stabilize Bobby's world. Fair chance team members do the hard work, but if JBM can walk with them, the company can provide needed assistance to help them be successful.

**“ Sometimes people come out of prison and they have a small support system. Our job is to grow that support system, so they have more people to reach out to.**

**JACQUELINE COOLEY**  
Better Lives Coach



Unfortunately, some team members struggled because of the immense obstacles they faced in their personal and professional lives. The worst cases of employees not working out were those who slid back into drug addiction. That's why it was vital for JBM to create a sense of community where people found purpose in their work and a support system when things got tough. That support system was key and one of the main focuses of Better Lives Coaches during those first six months.

Peer mentoring also played a vital role in the Fair Chance Program and provided a unique support system, because many employees were working to maintain their sobriety. While it was important to go to Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings and have a sponsor, sometimes employees needed somebody to support them at work too. Peer mentors were there to walk alongside their team members, so if justice-involved employees were having a bad day, needed somebody to talk to, or felt an urge to use again, there were people besides managers or Better Lives Coaches to lean on.

The biggest challenge for JBM in the Fair Chance Program's early days was that they wanted to be an all-encompassing support system, but they also had a business to run and could only do so much. When justice-involved employees were underperforming, JBM would do everything possible to accommodate them – whether it was connecting them to more resources in their personal life or mentoring them and giving additional job-specific training.

Ultimately, JBM needed to find a balance between being supportive and holding fair chance employees accountable to the same standards as any other employee. Sheanshang admitted: **“We led too much with the heart but have learned that we can only help those who are ready. We still struggle with that. It's a fine line.”**

## **COMMIT TO GROWTH AND INNOVATION**

As their program model took off, the JBM team looked for new ways to grow and innovate. One of their biggest wins early on was utilizing Pickaway Correctional Institution's (PCI) established print shop for training. While JBM couldn't hire incarcerated people before they were released, they could help them get necessary training by working with PCI to install the necessary machines and create a program. This program was led by a former employee who landed back in prison.

In collaboration with PCI, JBM worked with their former employee to setup a stipend-based program where incarcerated individuals could go through a three-to-six-month training program on manufacturing paper products that wouldn't be sold, but simply recycled since they were solely for training purposes. That way, individuals who went through the training program could get hired at JBM faster upon release and at higher pay.

## EPILOGUE & ADVICE FOR COMPANIES INTERESTED IN FAIR CHANCE

### HOW FAIR CHANCE CHANGED JBM'S MISSION

The Fair Chance Program wasn't just an answer to a labor shortage: it became the inspiration for who JBM Packaging would become. It made the company and the work more meaningful for non-justice-involved employees. While initially JBM's mission statement was to "Dominate targeted small, open-end envelope markets," the Fair Chance Program gave the company a new sense of purpose, realizing that they had the potential to change people's lives.

Their new mission statement became, "Be the role model for a sustainable, purpose-driven company."

"This was a revolution, not an evolution. We are certainly a packaging business, but we are more than that," Sheanshang said. In 2017, JBM also created a purpose statement to underscore the company's shift: **"Better Solutions, Better Lives, Better World."**

While JBM wanted to be a leading, profitable business, they began to broaden their success metrics to include how many fair chance employees they hired, how JBM supported fair chance hires as they built their lives, and how the company shared their learnings with other business leaders so they could implement fair chance programs at their organizations.

Success became stories of people getting custody of their kids, staying sober, and regaining their belief in themselves. For people like Amanda Hall – who lost her 13-year career, fell into addiction, and then found herself in prison – the chance to work at JBM and get promoted into a lead role in their human resources department was beyond anything she ever thought was possible.

As JBM deepened their Fair Chance Program, they simultaneously began a nonprofit that did ministry work in prisons called Jumpstart Ohio. This program helped justice-involved individuals in prison make a meaningful change to a faith-based life and navigate re-entering society. The original Jumpstart model was created in South Carolina, and graduates of the program had a recidivism rate of less than 4%, much lower than the 30% to 50% most states were facing. That's why Sheanshang helped bring and adapt the program to Ohio to supplement the employment opportunities JBM provides.

Since JBM started its Fair Chance Hiring Program, 109 fair chance employees have worked on their team for at least six months. They are also proud that two of their three original justice-involved hires still work at JBM almost eight years later. By 2030, their goal is to have employed 240 justice-involved people, with the firm belief that everyone deserves a fair chance at a better life.

**“ We need to shift the narrative for other companies to have fair chance programs. We have a whole population of people who need employment, and we have a country who needs employees. There is no reason for us not to hire people who need to work. ”**

**JACQUELINE COOLEY**  
Better Lives Coach

## ADVICE FOR COMPANIES INTERESTED IN FAIR CHANCE

Like most companies, JBM Packaging was initially hesitant to hire people with criminal backgrounds. Nonetheless, their journey to building their Fair Chance Program was nothing short of game-changing, from the moment Sheanshang learned about “second chance hiring” to recruiting their first team member directly from prison.

Along the way, JBM reimagined their talent strategy and invested in community-based support services to meet the evolving needs of their team members who faced tremendous barriers reacclimating to society. And in the end, the company did more than overcome a labor shortage – they revolutionized JBM’s overall mission and purpose.

For companies looking to create their own fair chance program, below are five key lessons JBM Packaging shared that can help other organizations integrate fair chance hiring into their talent strategies:

- 1. Enthusiasm, trust, and buy-in have to be sought at every level.** It’s essential for senior leadership to be invested in removing barriers and implementing new practices that allow for fair chance hiring. It takes human and financial resources, clear messaging to assuage fears, and a lot of trial and error when learning how to onboard and retain justice-involved employees. In JBM’s case, Sheanshang was the catalyst that made JBM adopt fair chance hiring. Adopting fair chance hiring took intentional shifts – having an executive leader who can champion those shifts is key.
- 2. Dispel myths about people with criminal backgrounds by having your team meet justice-involved individuals face-to-face.** Oftentimes, people fear what they don’t understand – a common barrier to fair chance hiring. In JBM’s case, it wasn’t until their leadership team went into prisons and met those serving time, that they overcame mental models that prevented them from being open to fair chance hiring and helped them think how – not if – they could make it a reality within JBM.



AMANDA’S STORY

“

Growing up, my family was always proud of me. I had a 4.0 GPA when I graduated high school, and then went on to college. I built a successful career as a Regional Training Manager for a prominent, multimillion-dollar restaurant company. I had everything together at work, but outside of work, I was a mess.

I went from toxic relationship to toxic relationship, and that’s when my life started to take a turn. Drugs got involved, which led to losing my job with the restaurant company after 13 years. After that, I struggled with addiction and couldn’t keep a job. I resorted to selling drugs to survive, and before I knew it, I ended up at the Ohio Reformatory for Women.

During my two years in prison, I worked hard to become the best version of myself. Then, right before I was released, JBM came and gave a presentation. It blew me away that they were offering jobs to people with felonies. I had a great resume, but I never thought anyone would hire me because of my record.”

Not only did JBM hire Amanda, but she has been promoted multiple times and now serves as a key leader in their human resources department. For Amanda’s full story of how she transformed her career at JBM Packaging, visit:

[www.caracollective.org/amanda-jbm](http://www.caracollective.org/amanda-jbm)

- 3. Care for the whole person, and not just on the job.** To maximize the likelihood that justice-involved employees could be successful, JBM took the time and care to understand the barriers that could get in someone's way. They learned that necessities like housing and transportation were not a given for people exiting the prison system, so JBM created the Better Lives Coach to cultivate partnerships with local community-based partners to provide resources for housing and transportation. Better Lives Coaches also got to know employees on a personal level, so they could help navigate if things were going on outside of work that could prevent them from bringing their best selves to work – ultimately, improving retention.
- 4. Make fair chance part of the company culture.** JBM's Fair Chance Program became part of their DNA, eventually removing any stigma behind being a justice-involved employee. The company accomplished this by providing training for managers that allowed them to empathize with their new hires, as well as an open-door policy for team members with questions or concerns about fair chance hiring. It didn't take long for everyone at JBM to be proud of working for a fair chance employer instead of skeptical of its business practices. Now JBM is able to recruit and retain strong team members who are not fair chance, because job seekers want to work for businesses that are making a difference.
- 5. Be curious and ask questions about the fair chance model.** As JBM became a fair chance employer, they quickly decided that they wanted to share what they had learned to help more companies tap into this talent. As Sheanshang noted, "I have not met any business that hires fair chance team members and isn't proud of the program." Just as JBM visited Nehemiah to learn from them, asking other companies about their experiences and learning from their best practices and mistakes, means you don't have to go at it alone.

For more case studies and resources on building an inclusive economy, visit: [www.caraplus.org/case](http://www.caraplus.org/case)

To dive deeper into more tactical best practices for fair chance hiring, read Jeffrey Korzenik's book, [Untapped Talent: How Second Chance Hiring Works for Your Business and the Community](#)

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