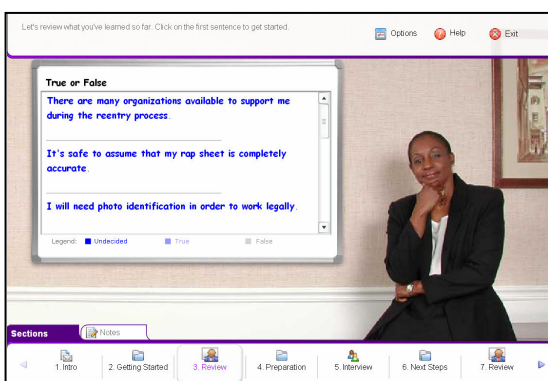


## Using Soft Skills Simulations to Enhance Pre-Release Training and Support Successful Reentry

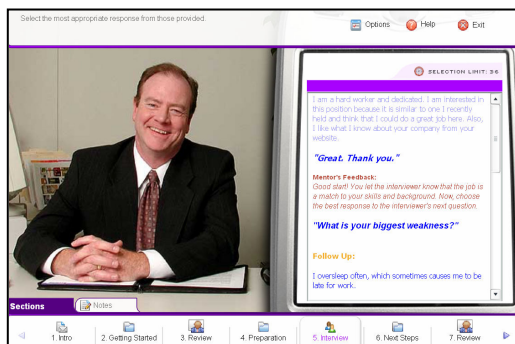
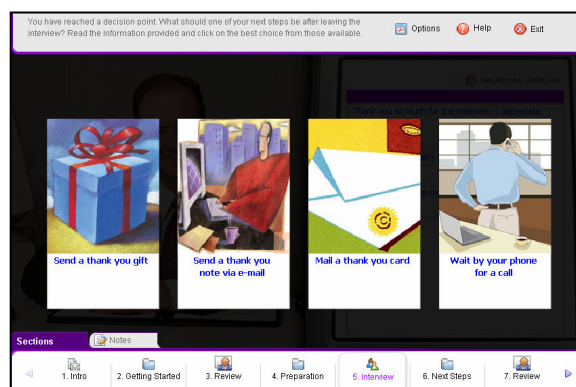
**Research on low-income jobseekers conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that “soft skills are the key for applicants who want to get in the door of a good job and stay there.” Specifically, employers feel that an effective soft skills training program alleviates some of the perceived business risks associated with hiring non-traditional workers, among which are ex-offenders.**



Access Technologies Group, Inc. (ATG) provides innovative computer-based soft skills training to support the employment efforts of incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals. ATG's *Targeted Job Search for Ex-Offenders* simulation is designed to help learners reduce barriers to workforce reentry, interview and complete job applications effectively, and follow up after meeting with a potential employer. Specific topics include:

- Local government, community, and online resources\*
- Rap sheet clean-up\*
- Obtaining important documents (birth certificate, social security card, driver's license or non-driver ID, etc.)\*
- Eligibility and instructions for obtaining an expungement pardon or provisional pardon\*

- Pursuing appropriate employment opportunities, including identifying “ex-offender friendly” employers and avoiding restricted industries and jobs
- Developing an honest resume that gets past “screeners” who may be uneasy interviewing an ex-offender
- Background and reference checks
- Employer incentives (Federal Bonding Program and Work Opportunity Tax Credit)
- Preparing a master job application in advance of an interview
- Interview planning and practice, including:
  - Appropriate attire
  - Non-verbal communication (body language)
  - Answering common questions, including those related to criminal history
  - Recognizing and handling illegal questions effectively
  - Asking meaningful questions of the interviewer, including those about parole meetings
- Thanking the interviewer, assessing the interview, and following up on the status of the position

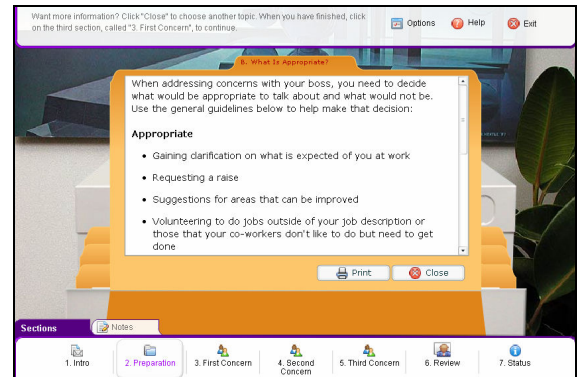
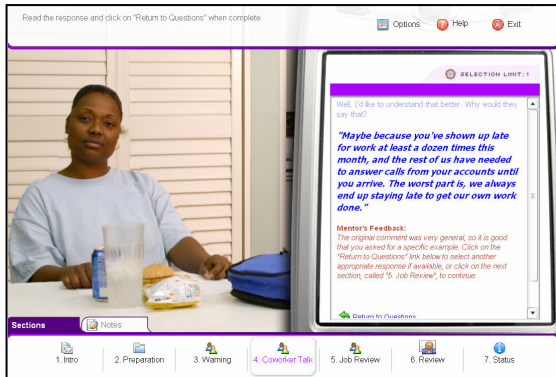


At the heart of the training is a simulated meeting with an interviewer that includes, in addition to traditional interview questions, many uncomfortable ones frequently faced by former offenders. Several possible answers are presented for each, one of which represents the most suitable choice. A friendly mentor provides meaningful feedback as to why the selected response was the ideal one or, if not, specifically what would have made it better. The facial expressions, tone of voice, and words subsequently spoken by the interviewer provide further clues as to the appropriateness of the learner's reply.

\* Certain topics, such as local resources and legal issues, are currently applicable only to the state of Connecticut and can be customized on a state-specific basis.

Two additional ATG simulations teach desired “on the job” behaviors, communication techniques, and attitudes:

- **Receiving Criticism:** This simulation explains various types of criticism, ways to effectively handle criticism from both a boss and co-workers, and questions to ask oneself in preparation for a performance review. Learners then practice dealing with criticism in three different scenarios: receiving a verbal warning from a supervisor, hearing negative feedback from a co-worker, and having their work critiqued by a manager. As a result of this simulation, learners will be able to accept and respond to criticism well using both body language and words, defend themselves verbally when necessary, and remain calm when criticized by others.



- **Addressing Concerns:** This simulation describes appropriate and inappropriate topics to discuss with one's manager, offers advice for handling these sensitive conversations, and provides tips for requesting a raise. Learners then practice addressing concerns in three different scenarios: seeking clarification on new job duties, asking for time off, and making a case for a pay increase. As a result of this simulation, learners will be able to determine which issues should be addressed with their boss, conduct these discussions effectively, use techniques for compromising, and deal well with undesired outcomes.

All ATG simulations include realistic interactions, constructive and actionable feedback, scorable content reviews, and printable resources throughout. *Their focus is on actual behavior change and performance improvement, not just knowledge acquisition, using real-life context/situations to increase their ability to relate to other people.* Our unique training model allows learners to practice – not just learn about – critical interpersonal skills “on demand,” at their own pace, and in a non-judgmental setting. Individual performance is tracked, and the strengths and weaknesses of the learner’s approach are presented at the conclusion of a simulation.

Additionally, our simulations can be used with or without an Internet connection, benefiting even those individuals who are restricted from accessing the Web.

ATG simulations can serve as the foundation for subsequent training, reinforce that which has already taken place, and/or provide standalone learning events. By providing the opportunity to continually reinforce effective workplace understanding, attitudes, and behaviors, ATG simulations can – in combination with other pre-release training – play a key role in helping ex-offenders become productive and proud members of society.

## About Access Technologies Group, Inc.

Access Technologies Group, Inc. (ATG) has extensive experience helping public, private, and non-profit organizations develop – in both incumbent and potential employees – the attitudes and behaviors necessary to enter, re-enter, and succeed in the workplace. ATG is currently working on a federal Department of Labor contract related to researching the soft skills that drive workforce effectiveness and developing a curriculum that will teach these skills to youths and young adults, including those with disabilities. Additionally, the simulation-based training programs described above have been successfully deployed as an OnDemand Service of the Hartford-area (Connecticut) One Stops through a contract with Capital Workforce Partners.

ATG’s simulation-development platform, Simentor<sup>®</sup>, can be used to target a wide range of soft skills pertaining to countless business scenarios. These include external interactions such as sales, customer service, and vendor management as well as internal interactions involving upward, downward, lateral, and cross-functional communication. Nearly any process or set of circumstances involving interpersonal skills can be effectively simulated using Simentor<sup>®</sup>.

For more information, please call (203) 966-8572 or visit [www.atghome.com](http://www.atghome.com).