



Earning Freedom 2021 Journal: January

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TESTIMONIALS

I regard Michael Santos as an eminent policy analyst in the field of sentencing and corrections. At Stanford Law School, we welcome his great wisdom about the most needed and feasible improvements in reentry practice and programs.

Joan Petersilia, Professor of Law,
Stanford Law School

As Deputy Warden of Programs and Services at the Maine State Prison I wanted to find a Reentry program designed specifically to build intrinsic motivation for people in prison. I personally facilitate the Mastermind course to our prison's most problematic prisoners. This strategy keeps the highly resistant participant engaged and challenged.

Michael Tausek, Deputy Warden
Maine State Prison

Prisons should give serious consideration to the curriculum prepared by Michael Santos, specifically designed to prepare inmates for release. I read his book, *Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term*. He has the life experience, knowledge, skills, and intellect to contribute to the rehabilitation process.

Honorable Robert Tafoya,
Superior Court Judge,
Bakersfield, California

Michael Santos is a great resource for students at UC Berkeley! I invite him to speak regularly to my large class in Wheeler Hall, with more than 500 students in attendance each time. His dynamic presentations always inspire and educate the Berkeley community. Michael shows the power of human potential and we welcome him to present at Berkeley anytime.

Professor Alan Ross,
UC Berkeley Haas Business School

I've done business with Michael Santos and I will continue to do business with Michael Santos. He inspires me every day and I'm glad to have his friendship. I've never had any doubt of the success he would build.

Lee Nobmann,
Founder, Golden State Lumber

Michael Santos wants to give back. I find him to be very genuine. He feels very strongly that whatever he can do to help offenders change their lives and become successful, he would like to do. It's a very compelling story.

Michael Colwell,
Assistant Director
Washington State Correctional Industries

Immediately after his release in 2013, Santos began lecturing at a respected state university. Today, he has a website, course materials for persons facing lengthy prison sentences, scores of supporters and mentors, and the charisma and character to hold a law symposium audience spellbound for every minute of his thirty-minute presentation.

Rory Little,
Professor of Law, University of California Hastings College of the Law

Michael Santos is one of the most inspiring people that I have ever met. I had the good fortune of meeting him last year when he spoke at Gideon's Promise. He has inspired many lawyers. He works with lawyers to improve the outcome for our clients, preparing them so they have meaningful lives in prison and beyond.

Colette Tvedt, Director,
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Michael Santos has channeled his fine mind and abundant energy into academic work of excellent quality. His personal and academic achievements while incarcerated convince me that he has become a serious and intellectually sophisticated man who has great potential for doing good as well as doing well. His life and skills give promise to anyone enduring challenge.

Alfred Cohn,
Professor of Psychology,
Hofstra University

Michael Santos' articles have appeared in scholarly journals and textbooks. His knowledge of the federal prison system and succeeding inside and outside of prison is without equal.

George F. Cole,
Professor Emeritus,
University of Connecticut

I have noticed over the years that we listen to some people because of what they have to say, and that we listen to others because of where they have been. I listen to Michael Santos for both reasons.

J. Colin Harris,
Professor of Religion of and Philosophy
Mercer University

“Santos relates how he has structured his prison time to avoid confrontations with other inmates and trouble with guards and has pursued every educational opportunity open to him. This culminated in a master’s degree from Hofstra University.”

Edward Humes,
Los Angeles Times Sunday Book Review

As *Success After Prison* shows, nothing can stop an individual who chooses to succeed. Despite being incarcerated for longer than 26 years, Michael Santos has come back to society strong. He quickly began applying all that he learned to launch a number of successful business ventures while simultaneously making contributions to society.

Tim Ufkes,
Managing Director
Berkadia

In *Success After Prison*, Michael Santos shows the results of making good decisions. Even though he started life with a 45-year prison term, he came out and quickly launched a career that brought him into the top percentile of all earners. He embodies the characteristics of a hardcore closer. If you follow the guidance in *Success After Prison*, you will too!

Ryan Stewman,
Hardcore Closer

I was happy to assist Michael with the purchase of three investment properties. I found him to be honest and fully capable of articulating an investment strategy—just as he described in *Success After Prison*. I’m looking forward to assisting Michael with all of his real estate financing needs. His work ethic, as characterized in this book, inspires me to work toward achieving more.

Derek Clemons, Mortgage Banker,
Evergreen Mortgage

Other Books by
Michael G. Santos / Prison Professors

Earning Freedom:

Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term

PrisonProfessors.com

(Shows strategies to build strength and discipline through long term)

Prison! My 8,344th Day

PrisonProfessors.com

(Shows strategies to be productive through single day in prison)

Triumph! The Straight-A Guide

Preparing Prisoners for Reentry

PrisonProfessors.com

(Shows strategies to serve time productively)

Success After Prison

How I Built Assets Worth \$1,000,000

After Being Released from Prison

PrisonProfessors.com

(Shows outcomes for people who use time in prison to prepare for success)

Ten Steps to Prepare for Success

from Jail or Prison

PrisonProfessors.com

(Self-directed course to help people in jail or prison)

Inside: Life Behind Bars in America

St. Martin's Press

(Insight to high-security prisons in America)

**Please visit our store at PrisonProfessors.com
Get more insight into all of our books and courses.**

Contact:

PrisonProfessors.com

Team@PrisonProfessors.com

949-205-6056

Dear Journal Participant:

The team at Prison Professors created this Earning Freedom Journal series specifically for people in a jail or prison setting. Negative messages permeate the environment of jails and prisons. We encourage the pursuit of a self-directed pathway to success. This interactive journal both teaches and inspires people.

The Earning Freedom Journal series includes all of the leadership strategies that empowered me through 26 years in prisons of every security level. My name is Michel Santos.

Anyone can use this journal to develop better critical-thinking skills and more persuasive communication skills. Use this journal to build strength, restore confidence, and prepare for success. The journals help people navigate challenging times.

Leaders taught me the power of keeping personal-accountability journals. By making values-based, goal-oriented decisions, we can live productively and intentionally, regardless of where we may be.

By using this strategy, I earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in prison. Publishers brought books I wrote to consumers. I got married in prison. Together with my wife, I started a publishing company to help others learn the lessons that leaders taught me. As a result of documenting the 9,500 days I served in prison, many income opportunities opened upon my release. Anyone can use this tool to build higher levels of liberty and prepare for success. One key to success is in documenting the journey. Each page of the journal offers instruction to prepare for personal growth and prosperity:

1. Define success,
2. Create a strategy,
3. Set priorities,
4. Develop tools, tactics, and resources,
5. Measure progress every day,
6. Execute the strategy to succeed, and
7. Use the record of accomplishments to leverage new opportunities.

Participants may use this journal interactively. We encourage family members to follow along by visiting the PrisonProfessors.com/Journal or the Prison Professors' YouTube channel to see the journal in action. We offer insight and practical steps that anyone can follow to prepare for success while serving a prison sentence.

Please visit PrisonProfessors.com for more books and courses to help people prepare for success while going through challenging times.

Sincerely,
Michael Santos and our team Prison Professors

Friday, January 1, 2021 / Day 1 / 364 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Defining Success

In what ways are you defining success? Leaders taught me how to start with that question. Readers may derive value from the strategy, whether they're overcoming the challenge of a prison term—or the challenge of rebuilding their life. I'll share how such questions empowered me through 26 years in prison, hoping the lesson will teach and inspire others.

During the first year of my imprisonment, I picked up a book that changed my life. It wasn't the type of text that I ordinarily would read.

For a historical context of when I began serving my prison term, President Ronald Reagan still led the nation. The year 1987, my age, 23. Authorities charged me with crimes related to selling cocaine. I began those *nefarious* activities when I turned 20. After my trial, a jury convicted me on all counts. As a result of that conviction, I faced a potential life sentence.

A story Plato wrote about Socrates can help people find an answer to that question. Both Plato and Socrates lived more than 2,000 years ago in ancient Greece. As philosophers, they brought wisdom to the world. From reading their work, we can learn how to think differently.

The story took place while Socrates—locked in a jail cell—awaited his execution. Authorities had convicted him for the crime of spreading wisdom. They sentenced him to death, ordering that he would have to drink a lethal poison known as hemlock.

Socrates's friend, Crito, visited him in jail. Crito had made arrangements for Socrates to escape. Rather than taking Crito up on his offer, Socrates explained why he would accept his punishment and drink the hemlock.

Socrates's reasoning made an impression on me. Rather than defining success by living, he defined success by living honorably, as a good citizen. That story of how Socrates responded to his punishment persuaded me to change. I needed to live with a better philosophy.

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By reading Plato’s story about Socrates and his approach to decision making, I accepted that it’s best to confront problems by defining success.

The operative word in the previous question is “possible.” Sometimes we focus on what we want rather than what is possible. When confronted with the problems that I created, I wanted to get out of prison. Yet I had broken the law. A jury convicted me. Getting out of prison wouldn’t be possible. Socrates taught me to think about the best possible outcomes and what I could do to engineer a new path. When we think about possibilities, we can engineer our way to success. Start by defining success.

- » How does a person define success while climbing through struggles?
- » Given your circumstances today, what is the best possible outcome for you?
- » What does success look like to you?
- » How are you defining success for the day?
- » How are you defining success for the quarter?
- » How are you defining success for the year?
- » What does success look like for you in five years?

Word of the day: *nefarious* / Define *nefarious*:

Use *nefarious* in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Friday, January 1, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » Given your current challenges, how are you defining success?
- » What strategies are you laying out to succeed, as you define it?
- » How will you measure your progress toward the best possible outcomes?

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Saturday, January 2, 2021 / Day 2 / 363 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Document the Strategy

When we're in a problem, we need to navigate our way to success. By studying leaders, we learn techniques they used to overcome challenges. The same strategies that worked for other leaders can also work for us. It's a technique anyone can use to grow. Become the CEO of your life by documenting a strategy you designed to succeed.

I hated being in jail. Yet my dislike for circumstances that followed terrible decisions I made didn't matter. The **onus** would be on me to make a change.

Reading that story about Socrates helped me to understand that—as an American citizen—I had duties, responsibilities, and obligations. Some people go to jail or prison because of social injustices or mistakes. That wasn't the situation with me. Rather than making a mistake, by selling cocaine, I made a series of bad decisions.

Socrates taught that if we trained ourselves on how to ask the right questions, we could work toward better solutions. As human beings, all of us face many struggles. All of us face challenges. The choices we make when challenges confront us will define who we are and what we become.

I could not change the bad decisions I made during the reckless years of my youth. Yet by learning the art of Socratic questioning, I could project myself into the future. I could look toward the best possible outcomes.

The judge presiding over my case sentenced me to 45 years. If authorities awarded the maximum amount of good-time credits, I could satisfy that term in 26 years. I hadn't been alive that long. Still, I could begin projecting into the future.

I wanted to walk out of prison unscathed, capable of walking into any room without the social stigma of incarceration. If I succeeded, I would walk into any room with confidence, knowing that no one would dismiss me with assumptions that I'd been in prison for a quarter-century.

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To get a second chance, I believed that I'd have to prove worthy of a second chance. I needed a strategy. That strategy began by thinking about the people I wanted to meet in the future. I intended to meet leaders, and I understood that they would assess every aspect of my life. Those projections helped me to establish a three-part strategy that would help me succeed:

- » I would work to earn academic credentials, believing those credentials would lead to new opportunities.
- » I would work to contribute to society in meaningful, measurable ways.
- » I would work to build a strong support network.

By documenting this strategy, I could invite others to hold me accountable. In time, I hoped the plan would help me triumph over the injustices and ancillary consequences of mass incarceration.

- » What strategy have you engineered to work toward success, as you've defined success?
- » In what ways does your strategy differentiate your approach to success from other similarly situated people?
- » How do you anticipate your future employer would respond to the strategy you engineered?
- » In what ways does your strategy show that you're acting with a CEO mindset?

Word of the day: **onus** / Define **onus**:

Use **onus** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Saturday, January 2, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What does the CEO mindset mean to you?
- » What mindset led to the state of affairs in your life today?
- » How would developing a CEO mindset influence your self-esteem or confidence?

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Weekend Recap

Use these pages to reflect on your progress during the previous week, and project what you'll accomplish in the next week. Consider the following questions as you memorialize your journey to success:

1. What books are you reading and why have you chosen to read those books?
2. What are you learning from these books?
3. How will the books you're reading contribute to your success?
4. What progress have you made toward your fitness goals?
5. In what ways are you tracking your diet, your spending habits, your daily progress?
6. What can you share about your spiritual growth, or contribution to your community?
7. In what ways are you growing your support network?

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Sunday, January 3, 2021 / Day 3 / 362 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Set the Goals

Leaders teach us a great deal about strategy. All individuals can talk about wanting to succeed. Creating a plan, however, requires us to do more than talk. We need to identify specific goals that we can achieve along the way. Every day we must work toward the clearly defined goals we set, knowing those goals will open new opportunities.

Many people have written about the importance of goal setting. The idea of S-M-A-R-T goals makes a great deal of sense. The *acronym* tells us that when we're setting goals, we should be very specific. We should be able to measure our progress toward the goal. If we use the technique appropriately, we should be able to take action steps toward the goal regularly. The goals should also be realistic. And finally, SMART goals are time-bound.

When I learned about good-time credits in prison, I understood that I could satisfy the 45-year sentence in 26 years. With limited life experiences, I didn't know how to project that far into the future.

At the time of my arrest, I'd only been alive for 23 years. Perhaps we can put into perspective the anticipated time I would serve in prison. If a person went into the system today and had to remain in confinement for 26 years, that person would not get out until 2047.

Setting SMART goals could help a person make incremental progress. With each bit of progress, that person could work toward opening new opportunities. As long as those opportunities aligned with how a person defined success, that person would start to restore confidence.

To work toward the strategy that I set, I'd need to set SMART goals within a tighter time frame. I chose to focus on the first ten years. During those first ten years, the specific goals I set aligned with the strategy I documented.

- » Can you see how setting SMART goals can help you work toward new opportunities?

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- » Within the first ten years of my imprisonment, I set a goal of earning a university degree.
- » Within the first ten years of my imprisonment, I intended to contribute to society by becoming a published author.
- » Within the first ten years of my imprisonment, I intended to contribute to society by bringing ten people into my support network.

That disciplined pathway could carry me through the first decade of my imprisonment. And since I knew what I would want to achieve during my first decade, I could assess the progress as the weeks turned into months, and the months turned into years. Every day I could evaluate whether I advanced toward the goals that I set. If the complications of imprisonment got in the way, I could adjust.

As you work through the challenges of your life, think about the goals that you're setting. Use all of your critical-thinking skills and Socratic-questioning abilities to advance prospects for your success.

- » What specific goals did you work toward last week?
- » In what ways do those goals relate to the idea that you have defined success?
- » How would you assess your progress toward achieving those goals?
- » In what ways will the goals that you're setting lead to new opportunities?
- » How will the people you intend to influence in your future react to the disciplined goal-setting strategy you've engineered?

Word of the day: **acronym** / Define **acronym**:

Use **acronym** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Monday, January 4, 2021 / Day 4 / 361 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Create Resources

Leaders teach us that we can empower ourselves by being self-directed. Rather than waiting for others to solve our problems, we can create resources to leverage growth opportunities. At a basic level, we can work to develop our communication skills. We can strengthen our critical thinking skills. Learning to communicate better, and to think creatively, we can engineer a trajectory to succeed.

With shackles locked around my ankles, I had a hard time walking through the bus’s narrow aisle. The officer called my name, and I responded with my registration number. He asked a few more identifying questions. After I answered correctly, I hobbled off the bus and started to climb the stairs that led me into the prison.

Once all of the other prisoners were inside, the gates locked behind us. The staff members fingerprinted us all, took our mug shots, and processed us inside. With a 45-year prison term to serve, I had to grow stronger. I looked around the crowded holding cell, assessing the other prisoners. They looked older, harder. Every choice I made would influence how I matured and what opportunities would open.

After being released from the holding cell and settling into my housing unit, I walked to the library. I hoped to find resources I could use to begin climbing my way out. If I didn’t get into any trouble, I could earn up to 19 years in good-time credits. That meant I could walk out in 26 years when I would be 49 years old.

As I walked into the library, I wondered what steps I could take to influence the life I would lead then. I tried to visualize the future. If I didn’t create opportunities, I would not have any clothes when I got out. I would not have any work experience when I got out. I would not have any credit when I got out. I would not have any money when I got out.

» How can I start working today to prepare for the challenges ahead?

Those kinds of questions helped me to think differently. There wasn’t anything I could do about the crimes I started to commit when I was 20. Likewise, I couldn’t do anything

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about the 45-year sentence I served. But I could do something about the choices I made each day. I could choose to complain about unfairness or injustice. Or I could begin working to grow stronger.

Knowing the importance of mental health, I started looking through the shelves of the library. If I spent too much time **perseverating** on the sentence, I could lose myself with thoughts of what I lost. Conversely, if I read biographies or profiles of other people that triumphed over struggle, I could build hope. I could learn. Reading stories about others who overcame challenges in their lives led me to believe that I could do the same. I would never meet those people, but they became my teachers. From them, I learned that I had the power to develop as a human being. And if I could grow as a human being, I could create meaning and relevance in my life

- » By learning to think differently, I could become resourceful.
- » What does it mean to be resourceful?
- » What resources can you create?
- » In what ways can the way you think influence opportunities to grow?
- » In what ways can the way you think threaten your progress?
- » How can you start to create more meaning in your life right now?

Word of the day: **perseverate** / Define **perseverate**:

Use **perseverate** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Insert Date if different from Monday, January 4, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What resources can you create from where you are right now?
- » What steps can you take to document the way you created those resources?
- » How will creating those resources advance your prospects for success?

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Tuesday, January 5, 2021 / Day 5 / 360 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Define Tactics

When we're pursuing a pathway to succeed, we need a strategy. That strategy becomes our game plan. We use tactics to convert our high-level plan into reality. The tactics give us clear guidance on what we must do every day to move closer to the success we've defined. Regardless of the challenges we're facing, the tactics at the beginning of our plan will evolve as we progress. Every day we should pursue tactics that align with our strategy.

Deliberate reading would become a tactic to grow stronger. The library included books from different **genres**. There were stacks of westerns by Louis L'Amour, romance novels, by Danielle Steel, thrillers by James Patterson, and horror books by Stephen King.

Fictional books can entertain us, and we can learn lessons from the stories. Since I defined success as being able to emerge from prison strong, with my dignity intact, I wanted to read books that would teach me how to grow and become stronger.

When I was in jail waiting to transfer to prison, I grew stronger by reading the story about Socrates. I could identify with Socrates because of his imprisonment. I wanted to find and read books that would teach me the tactics of other people in prison use to improve their lives.

On one of the bookshelves in the library, I found The Autobiography of Malcolm X with Alex Haley. More than 20 years had passed since the book came out, but I did not know anything about Malcolm X. I heard that he served time in prison. While serving his sentence, Malcolm transformed his life. I read his book with hopes of finding clues on how he used time in prison to grow.

When I read books, I frequently came across words that I did not understand. Sometimes I could decipher the meaning in context. Other times, I skipped over words that I did not understand. When I read Malcolm's biography, I learned how he responded to terms

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that he did not understand. He wrote down the words. Then he looked up the words in the dictionary. This tactic helped him to become a better communicator.

That book inspired me to work toward building my vocabulary. Since I aspired to become a better communicator, I thought of words as being tools. Like a carpenter needs tools to become a more efficient builder, a communicator needed a more robust vocabulary to become more persuasive. Learning more words would become a tactic I could use to create more opportunities. I had to learn how to define words and how to use those words in sentences. The tactic, I believed, would be invaluable, helping me to become a better communicator.

- » What tactics have you created to help you overcome your challenges?
- » If you added 500 words to your vocabulary, how would that tactic influence your prospect for success?
- » What steps could you take to add 500 words to your vocabulary?
- » What influence does language have on your ability to open opportunities?
- » What tactics could you pursue to make you a more persuasive communicator?

Word of the day: *genre* / Define *genre*:

Use *genre* in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Tuesday, January 5, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What tactics did you create to align with your strategy?
- » How did earlier tactics you set open opportunities for growth in your life?
- » How will a tactic you created influence your pathway to succeed?

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Wednesday, January 6, 2021 / Day 6 / 359 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Develop Tools

To build anything meaningful, we need tools. Sometimes those tools exist already; sometimes, we need to create new tools. Pursuing a self-directed path to success requires us to think creatively about how to develop tools. Those tools should make us more efficient and lead us closer to success, as we've defined success.

What would people expect from a person serving a 45-year term? In thinking about that question—and how to respond to the question—I anticipated that people would immediately form an opinion about anyone serving a lengthy-term. The sentence a judge imposed would influence perceptions other people had about me.

To *transcend* those perceptions, I needed to develop tools. We all have to develop tools to become more efficient, especially when we're striving to triumph over problems.

A book report became one of the first tools I developed.

Some people may not consider a book report as a “tool.” If we were to ask ten different people to name tools, I suspect few people would mention a book report. Instead, they'd cite examples like a hammer, a drill, a wrench. Those tools would undoubtedly help a person become more efficient with a specific task.

For a person serving a lengthy prison sentence, a book report could be equally as effective.

Anticipating that I would read hundreds of books during the time that I served, I wanted to be systematic about recording what I learned. Accordingly, I created a template that would memorialize the experience.

At the start of each year, I set a goal to define how many books I would read. Hypothetically, I might set a goal of reading 50 books during the year. After reading each book, I would complete the template as follows:

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- » On (*insert date*) I finished reading (*insert title of the book*)
- » (*Insert title of the book*) was the ___ book I read of the year, and I have ___ more books to read to complete my goal.
- » (*Insert author's name*) wrote (*Insert title of the book*)
 - » I chose to read (insert title of the book) for the following reason:
 - » (*Write as much as necessary*)
 - » (*Insert title of the book*) made an impression on me for the following reasons:
 - » (*Write as much as necessary*)
 - » Reading (*insert title of the book*) will contribute to my success upon release for the following reasons:
 - » (*Write as much as necessary*)

As the months passed, those book reports became a tool for me. I could use them to show people how I used time in prison in ways to grow and become productive. Those book reports would become an invaluable resource.

- » What tools have you developed to get a better outcome at any time in your life?
- » What tools are you working to develop now?
- » What tools do you anticipate in the next year?
- » In what ways will the tools you're creating contribute to your success?
- » What tactics have you created to help you overcome your challenges?

- » **What influence does language have on your ability to open opportunities?**

Word of the day: *transcend* / Define *transcend*:

Use *transcend* in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Wednesday, January 6, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What tactics did you create to align with your strategy?
- » How did earlier tactics you set open opportunities for growth in your life?
- » How will a tactic you created influence your pathway to succeed?

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Thursday, January 7, 2021 / Day 7 / 358 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Accountability Metrics

When we're developing projects that are years in the making, we need to create our accountability metrics. An accountability metric helps us to assess the level of progress we're making. Distractions or interferences may impede our progress. The accountability metrics we create should provide the insight we need. That insight can help us make adjustments as necessary.

Three DEA agents arrested me on August 11, 1987. I didn't know what to expect because authorities had never put me in custody before. They told me that the charges I faced exposed me to the possibility of life in prison. The following day, I attended the *incipient* court proceedings at the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida. A judge would not allow my release on bail. A few days later, the U.S. Marshals transferred me in chains to stand trial in the Western District of Washington. I didn't know what to expect.

Like anyone else in such a predicament, I wanted to get out of jail. But after a jury trial, and a unanimous verdict on many counts, my judge imposed the 45-year sentence. I didn't know what to expect. It wasn't until after I settled into those first weeks in prison that I learned about the concept of good-time credits.

The sentencing laws that existed in 1987 meant that I would receive 19 years in good-time credits at the start of my sentence. I didn't have to do anything to earn the good-time credits. But if staff members charged me with violating the disciplinary code, they could take those good-time credits away from me.

I could do the math. If I didn't lose any good-time credits, I would complete my sentence in 26 years. That would be better than serving 45 years. But I didn't know how to process the concept of 26 years—I hadn't been alive that long. It occurred to me that if I served the entire term, I would have lived more of life in prison than I had lived outside.

That was a wakeup call for me. It prompted me to commit myself further to that three-part strategy I mentioned previously: 1) I would earn a university degree, 2) I would be-

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come an author, and 3) I would build a support network. I intended to reach each of those three goals within ten years.

The accountability metric I created would help.

A reader may wonder how I designed a form to help me stay accountable. I can tell you that it looked very much like the Earning Freedom Quarterly Journal. The prison wouldn't allow us to receive "journals" in the mail. But wanting to keep track of the progress I made, I created my journals. On blank pages, I drew calendars. At the start of the journal, I wrote out what I intended to achieve in the quarter. I also wrote out what I expected to accomplish before the end of the year. Since I knew what I meant to accomplish during my first decade in prison, I could assess whether the progress I made each day would lead to success.

The accountability metrics I created helped me to exceed expectations. Within four years of the day I transferred to prison, I earned my undergraduate degree. After eight years, I had a master's degree. In the process, I opened mentor relationships with several influential professors, and they opened opportunities for me to become a published author. I'd build a support network that included dozens of people.

- » In what ways to educators use accountability metrics?
- » In what ways to business leaders use accountability metrics?
- » In what ways to athletic coaches use accountability metrics?
- » In what ways do parents use accountability metrics?
- » In what ways do investors use accountability metrics?

Word of the day: ***incipient*** / Define ***incipient***:

Use ***incipient*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Friday, January 8, 2021 / Day 8 / 357 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Board of Directors

Publicly traded companies recognize the value of getting guidance from a diverse group of people. Shareholders, or the owners of the company, elect a Board of Directors to look after their interests. They trust the Board of Directors to put the right people in place to increase value for all of the shareholders. This strategy is something that we can use in our personal life as well.

At the start of my journey through prison, I began reading books that would help me understand leadership. I especially liked reading about business leaders and the companies they built. Steve Jobs, one of the most innovative business leaders of the time, wrote about the importance of ideas. Paraphrasing Picasso, he said that good leaders copy ideas, but great leaders steal ideas. Since I was starting my education from inside of prison boundaries, I wanted to steal ideas from leaders that built great companies.

While growing Apple, Steve and other members on the Apple team was very young. They didn't have any experience in managing a company or managing people. To reach their highest potential, the young team members understood that they would need to bring people into the company that had more experience. Most people became full-time employees, but others would serve the company in an advisory capacity. Those advisors provided the leadership team with ideas that they could consider or open relationships that could potentially accelerate the business's success.

Those efforts helped Apple build its Board of Directors. Ironically, one of the people that Steve added to the Board engineered a **coup** that led the Board to fire Steve Jobs from Apple.

By reading books on leadership and business, I could see the value of a Board of Directors. A good Board would advise us on what we could do to accelerate progress. As a prisoner, I knew that I needed to bring people in my life that could help me through the journey. The right Board of Directors would also be instrumental in helping me to transition into society successfully when that time.

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The accountability journals I created were an essential tactic for building my Board. Besides, I also created a portfolio—a document that offered a snapshot of who I was, why I was in prison, and the steps that I was taking to reconcile with society. The combination of my accountability journals and the portfolio of accomplishments I created became enormously valuable resources. They helped me bring influential mentors into my life. Those mentors, in a sense, served as my Board of directors. They opened doors for me, and they certainly helped me to accelerate progress.

As a person serving a lengthy sentence in prison, I understand that I had a responsibility to reach beyond the prison boundaries. If I didn't learn how to communicate with people on the other side of the prison walls, I'd be limited to the relationships I made with people inside. I wanted a different kind of life from what I saw inside the prison, but to get that life, I had to think different, and I had to think differently.

There is an old mantra in prison. It suggests the best way to serve time is to forget about the world outside and to focus on the time inside. The people who give that advice frequently learn how to live inside of prison boundaries. Those who want to learn how to succeed in the broader society should learn from leaders. And leaders of businesses build a strong board of directors to help them make better decisions.

I learned how to do the same.

- » What characteristics would you want the people on your Board of directors to have?
- » What strategy could you deploy to build a board of directors?
- » How would the people on your Board of directors respond to the adjustment strategy you're using now?
- » What would your Board of directors expect from you?
- » What would you expect from your Board of directors?
- » What tools could you create to empower those on your Board to help you?
- » What tools could you create to empower those on your Board to help you?

Word of the day: ***coup*** / Define ***coup***:

Use ***coup*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Saturday, January 9, 2021 / Day 9 / 356 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Shareholders

The best business leaders get very clear on what mission they're striving to achieve. They communicate that vision to the shareholders of the company. It's how they define success. Then, they lay out a plan, showing shareholders what to expect. That's how they document their strategy. With regular communications to shareholders, the business leaders invite their shareholders to hold them accountable.

By reading about corporate structure, I learned a great deal about how to overcome the challenges of a lengthy prison term. Rather than complaining, or allowing time to define me, I could act as if I were a CEO. A CEO creates strategies to overcome problems. By living as if I were the CEO of my own life, I could prepare to solve problems that I anticipated facing in the future.

As a long-term prisoner, I anticipated many problems. The world would be advancing, but in a sense, I would be standing still. A series of incremental action steps could help me overcome that challenge. But I would have to think about all of the stakeholders in my life. In a sense, they would be the equivalent of my shareholders.

Shareholders could include people that I knew, and people that knew me.

In this category, I'd place my family and friends. I had to think about what steps I could take to prove worthy of the trust, the love, and the support that I felt from them.

Shareholders could include people that I knew, but they didn't.

In this category, I could think of the staff members that oversaw me. They had a duty or a job to do. The more I understood about the purpose of their job, the more **brinksmanship** I could bring to my interactions with them.

Shareholders could include people that I didn't know, and that didn't know me.

In this category, I'd think about the people that would influence my life later on in my journey—including employers, potential business partners, lenders, and investors. By thinking about those people, I could put plans in place with hopes of winning their favor when the time came.

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Shareholders could include people that knew something about me, but that I didn't know.

Finally, there would be a class of people that had perceptions about who I am. I may not know those people at all. But if I genuinely executed on the goals that I set, my influence or reach would grow. After all, I would be writing for publication. That means people would read some of my ideas. Based on what they read, some of those people could form an opinion. The opinions they formed about me could open opportunities, or they could threaten my progress. I had to think of those people as being shareholders, too.

As the CEO, I had to think about all of those shareholders. They had a stake in my life, and they could influence prospects for my success. By thinking about those people, and projecting how I could prove worthy of their support, I could engineer better adjustment strategies.

- » What steps have you taken during the past year to show you're committed to proving worthy of your shareholders?
- » What do your shareholders expect of you?
- » What steps can you take to bring new shareholders into your life?
- » In what ways does the perception of your shareholders differ from impressions of the people closest to you?
- » How are you empowering your shareholders to open new opportunities for you?
- » If your shareholders understood your activities over the past month, would they want to reinvest with you?
- » In what ways are you bringing more value to the life of your shareholders?

Word of the day: ***brinksmanship*** / Define ***brinksmanship***:

Use ***brinksmanship*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Insert Date if different from Saturday, January 9, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » Describe how you've used an accountability metric in your life.
- » In what ways could an accountability metric influence your freedom?
- » In what ways could an accountability metric influence your ability to overcome obstacles in the future?

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Weekend Recap

Use these pages to reflect on your progress during the previous week, and project what you'll accomplish in the next week. Consider the following questions as you memorialize your journey to success:

1. What books are you reading and why have you chosen to read those books?
2. What are you learning from these books?
3. How will the books you're reading contribute to your success?
4. What progress have you made toward your fitness goals?
5. In what ways are you tracking your diet, your spending habits, your daily progress?
6. What can you share about your spiritual growth, or contribution to your community?
7. In what ways are you growing your support network?

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Sunday, January 10, 2021 / Day 10 / 355 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Learn from Leaders

Leaders help us to grow, but only if we're willing to learn from them. Most leaders adhere to the principled path of living we describe in our journal. They define success. They create plans and document those plans. They build their tools and tactics and resources. And they measure their progress regularly. We can learn from the ways that they executed on their projects.

I grew up in Lake Forest Park, a small community on the north end of Lake Washington. By the time I graduated from high school, some of the friends I had chosen were making bad decisions. As a result of the influence those people had over me, I started to make bad decisions. Within a few years, I would have to start climbing out from a lengthy prison term.

By reading the story of Socrates, I started to think differently. I had to choose the leaders from whom I would learn. Rather than learning from people that were making bad decisions, I made a conscious choice to learn from leaders that I wanted to **emulate**.

Like people from all around the world, I admired Nelson Mandela. As I was starting to serve my sentence, he walked out after 27 years in prison. In my case, the sentence followed the bad decisions I made to sell cocaine. With Nelson Mandela, the prison term followed the injustice of racist policies that existed in South Africa. A biography on Mandela, *A Long Walk to Freedom*, taught me a great deal about coping with adversity.

Similarly, I read *Man's Search for Meaning* by Dr. Viktor Frankl. Nazi guards captured Dr. Frankl along with his family, The guards transported them on a crowded train to a concentration camp, and they killed his family members as he stood by helplessly. Then, the guards locked Dr. Frankl in the camp with expectations that he would serve the Nazi regime. He never knew from one day to the next whether he would live or die. Despite such horrific conditions, Dr. Frankl learned that he could create meaning in his life by being focusing on problems that were bigger than any one individual.

Complaining could make a man weak. But Nelson Mandela and Dr. Viktor Frankl helped me to understand that we could empower ourselves by working to serve others.

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Despite being incarcerated for 27 years, Nelson Mandela emerged without a scintilla of bitterness or hatred. Instead, he devoted his life to improving his community. Similarly, Dr. Frankl left the horrific conditions of Nazi concentration camps to create the concept of “logotherapy,” which helped people to lead meaningful and contributing lives.

Those men provided a model of excellence when it came to personal leadership. I learned a great deal from them. Like many other leaders, they showed us the way to overcome the challenges we face. But as one artist taught me, it’s one thing to know the way. It’s another matter entirely to walk the way.

We’re all on our journey through life. And we all face struggles and challenges. The quarter-century that I served in prison was only one part of the trip. Since my release, in August of 2013, I’ve met many people who live in prisons of their own making. They may have never stepped foot inside of an institution, but their mindset blocks them from building a more fulfilling life.

We’re all tasked with the responsibility of charting our way through life’s journey. When I started to find better leaders, I began to make better decisions. Those decisions opened new opportunities. I’m convinced that anyone learns from good leaders. For that reason, we should choose our leaders wisely.

- » Name three leaders that you admire.
- » What are the characteristics you admire about those leaders?
- » What decisions did those leaders make along their journey?
- » What lessons from those leaders can you apply to your life?
- » Describe how decisions you made last week harmonize with the kinds of decisions those kinds of leaders make.
- » How would the leaders you’ve identified adjust to the circumstances you’re in now?

Word of the day: ***emulate*** / Define ***emulate***:

Use ***emulate*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Sunday, January 10, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » Describe how you've used an accountability metric in your life.
- » In what ways could an accountability metric influence your freedom?
- » In what ways could an accountability metric influence your ability to overcome obstacles in the future?

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Monday, January 11, 2021 / Day 11 / 354 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Check Your Attitude

One leader wrote a great quote about attitude. I don't remember the leader, but I remember the quote. The leader said that nothing could help the many who has a bad attitude. Similarly, nothing can stop the man who has the right attitude. The attitude we bring to any task will make all the difference concerning what we achieve in life.

I started serving my sentence at the dawn of the computer generation. Bill Gates, a co-founder of Microsoft, spoke about his vision. He said that he wanted to build a society where every house and every business would have a personal computer. Since he had the right attitude, he could create plans, strategies, and tactics to make his dream a reality. Today I have more than six computers in my house, and I'm always connected to the Internet.

Anticipating that I would serve multiple decades in prison, I worried that not knowing about computers would put me at a real disadvantage. Wanting to do everything possible to overcome, I found a job in the prison that would require me to use a computer. The supervisor who gave me the job admired my attitude. When I laid out the adjustment plan that had been guiding me through prison, he said that he would support me. After I completed my assigned duties, he gave me a **surreptitious** authorization to use the computer to complete my schoolwork.

For three years, I used a computer every day. The computer did not have too many applications, but I learned how to use a word processor, and I learned how to use an electronic spreadsheet. Every day I set a goal of writing at least 1,000 words. Through that practice, I learned about computers, and I also developed more confidence as a writer.

Then, without notice, my supervisor transferred to another area of the prison. The new supervisor did not support the idea of me using a computer. Upon learning that I'd been doing my schoolwork on the computer, he transferred my work assignment. Although the supervisor had the title of supervisor of education, he specifically told me that he did not

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think people in prison should be going to college. He certainly did not want to support the effort.

Although nearly three decades have passed since that encounter, I remember the disappointment. When I lost access to that computer, I lost a massive part of my adjustment. I had learned how to write on a keyboard. Using a pen and a piece of paper did not feel natural. It was harder. I had to adjust.

To make that adjustment, I had to check my attitude. I couldn't allow the disappointment to suffocate my hope. I had to create a new mindset. I remember forcing myself to write sentences and paragraphs. Before the computer, all authors wrote by hand. They had to learn.

Similarly, I would have to learn. It would be work. Complaining about losing access would not empower me in any way. But if I could learn to feel comfortable writing by hand, I could develop a new skill that would help me overcome the challenges I expected to face in the future. Making that adjustment became a character-building exercise—another opportunity to show that neither external circumstances nor the decisions of others will define who or what I am.

That example from decades ago taught me a lesson. I could not control what others do, but I could always control how I would respond.

- » In what ways has your attitude influenced your response to a difficult situation?
- » Provide an example of how a good attitude helped you overcome a problem.
- » Provide an example of how you've seen a bad attitude aggravate a problematic situation.
- » Think of an objective way to gauge whether you have a positive attitude.
- » How would those who know you best describe your attitude about the situation you're in now?

Word of the day: ***surreptitious*** / Define ***surreptitious***:

Use ***surreptitious*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Monday, January 11, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What is your process to check your attitude?
- » Describe strategies you use to change your state of mind?
- » In what ways do you overcome negativity?

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Tuesday, January 12, 2021 / Day 12 / 353 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Keep Your Head in the Game

People who overcome challenges know how to focus precisely on what they want to achieve. When they make a 100 percent commitment, they cut off distractions. Their commitment influences the friends they choose, the activities they pursue. You have to go all-in when it comes to working toward your best outcomes.

In federal prison, the Executive Assistant reports to the Warden. The Executive Assistant is one of the few staff members that is authorized to communicate with the media. I remember an interaction I had with the Executive Assistant at the penitentiary that confined me at the start of my journey.

As I recall, her name was Ms. Sheffield. I approached her one day to inquire if it would be okay if I reached out to the media. She told me that I was within my rights to connect with journalists. With her permission, I started writing to radio stations. I wanted to speak with a news announcer, hoping that I could build awareness for the first book that I wrote from inside of a prison. Surprisingly, I got an invitation to participate in a talk radio program.

A few days after I completed the interview, a lieutenant at the prison paged me to his office. He told me that he was going to lock me in the special housing unit. I asked him why. He said I wasn't allowed to be giving radio interviews from his institution. I told him that Ms. Sheffield authorized it. He looked shocked. The lieutenant let me leave until he spoke with her directly.

The following morning, Ms. Sheffield *accosted* me at the office where I had secured a job. She scolded me for causing her trouble. I reminded her that she authorized me to speak with the media. Ms. Sheffield said that she didn't expect that a journalist would want to talk with me. Then she told me that if I ever wanted to reach out to a journalist again, I should request through her office.

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When I sat at my desk, my work supervisor told me to be careful. She said that by drawing so much attention to myself, I could potentially be setting myself up for problems. I told her that my primary concern was preparing for success upon release.

I wasn't trying to create problems for myself in prison. Yet I understood that if I wanted to build a career upon release, I'd have to take measurable steps. Developing a broad support network would be an essential part of my plan. If I could generate media awareness, I explained, that would allow me to communicate with thousands of people at one time. That strategy, I explained, could lead to a broader support network.

She admonished me, telling me to be aware of the risks. Staff members could bring problems that disrupt my adjustment, she said.

Although I headed her warning, I understood how to set priorities. Without a doubt, there would be risks to the strategy I pursued. A "model inmate" served time quietly, avoiding attention that could annoy staff members. Yet rather than striving to live as a model inmate, I set a goal on preparing myself in every possible way. When I got out of prison, I intended to succeed. That meant I had to keep my head in the game at all times, always searching for an opportunity to grow or accelerate preparations for success.

- » In what ways are you keeping aware of opportunities to grow?
- » In what ways does your behavior show that you're striving to overcome the challenges of confinement?
- » In what ways do people that succeed after confinement behave differently from people that face further challenges after incarceration?

Word of the day: **accost** / Define **accost**:

Use **accost** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Wednesday, January 13, 2021 / Day 13 / 352 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Make Adjustments

What do companies do when ventures they launched don't work out? They adjust! That's the power of using accountability metrics. Leaders will always review and assess their performance. If the business model succeeds, they accelerate. If the business model fails to deliver, they determine what changes they can make along the way. In business and life, those who know how to adjust better progress along their pathway to success.

When he was 19, authorities arrested Weldon Long for armed robbery. He served several years in prison. During that time in prison, Weldon adjusted to the ways of the penitentiary. In other words, Weldon didn't think at all about preparing for success upon release. Instead, he adapted to the penitentiary.

Weldon concluded his sentence and returned to society after his first term. Employers would not hire him. He reverted to criminal behavior. Sadly, a conviction and a new prison term awaited him. He served several more years inside of the Colorado prison system.

After concluding his second term in prison, Weldon struggled again. He couldn't find a job. Within a year, new criminal conduct led to a 10-year prison term. While locked in a federal detention center, waiting to begin his third prison term, Weldon's father passed away.

Losing his father crushed Weldon's spirit. The personal tragedy influenced his perception of life. He used that difficult to adjust.

Weldon felt **despondent** for the loss of his father. Regretting that he failed to prove worthy of his father, he chose to change his life. His dad knew him as a drug addict and a petty criminal. In his father's memory, Weldon committed to using his third term in prison to change. Weldon earned a bachelor's degree. Then he earned a master's degree. He became an author, sharing the steps he took to begin preparing for success while he served ten years in federal prison.

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Weldon concluded his third prison term, but society didn't welcome him. Without a job, he was homeless. Six months passed before he could land a job. With his commitment to succeed, Weldon kept on his path. He talked his way into a commission-only job selling air conditioning equipment. He got the job on a Friday, and he spent the entire weekend watching videos on YouTube to learn about air conditioners.

During his first month on the job, Weldon sold \$140,000 worth of air conditioners. By the end of the year, he was the top salesperson in the company. He performed so well that he decided to launch his own company. And over the first five years, his company sold more than \$20 million worth of air conditioners. Then Weldon sold his company to a competitor.

After selling his company, Weldon approached the most significant air conditioning manufacturers. He asked executives at those companies if they ever wondered how someone that came out of nowhere built a company that sold \$20 million worth of their equipment. The executives told Weldon that they were curious. He said the executives that he used to be addicted to drugs, and that he used to be in prison. The skills he learned to overcome those character deficiencies were the same skills that would help a person become a high-performing sales professional. Weldon offered to use training to help other sales professionals reach their highest potential.

That conversation led to Weldon's new company. He helps Fortune 500 companies train their sales teams. The irony, Weldon said, was that those companies would not hire him for minimum wage because of his felony background. Yet they'll sign six-figure contracts to hire his corporate training company.

When a person adjusts to changing circumstances, a person creates new growth opportunities!

- » How does your behavior today differ from your routine before you faced the challenge?
- » In what ways have you adjusted your behavior since beginning your pathway to success?
- » What adjustments could you make to accelerate progress?

Word of the day: **despondent** / Define **despondent**:

Use **despondent** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Insert Date if different from Wednesday, January 13, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What adjustments have you seen others make to transform their life for the better?
- » How do the choices you're making today reflect what you've learned from bad experiences?
- » In what ways will adjustments you've made influence your prospects for success?

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Thursday, January 14, 2021 / Day 14 / 351 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Mental Health

Maintaining mental health is like maintaining physical fitness. If we're living in challenging times, we've got to muster the strength to overcome. Pursuing deliberate strategies help us to restore our self-esteem, our self-respect, and our confidence.

It's never easy to live apart from the people we love and the people who love us. As weeks turn into months, months turn into years, and years turn into decades, the time can take a toll on our mental health. During the 9,500 days that I served, I experienced many of those dark moments. Staying active proved enormously helpful.

I felt the toughest times in prison when I did not know what awaited me. Before my sentencing, for example, I had a physical reaction to the stress. Boils broke out on my body. The searing pain kept me awake at night. In my mind, I felt tormented with worry about what would happen to my life. There were many times when I wanted to give up after a judge sentenced me to 45 years, strangely, as strange as it seems, I started to feel more energetic.

Why?

Well, even though the sentence would translate into multiple decades in prison, at least I had certainty. I felt like I had hit bottom. The time had come to start taking measurable steps toward growing stronger.

By reading books about leadership, I learned that I could grow stronger by starting to define the best possible outcomes. Instead of sinking into a **morass** of sadness, I could start building the ladder that would lead me out. Anyone can do the same. At any given time, we can look ahead. We can train our minds to visualize what we'd like to become. We can start taking incremental action steps that will lead us out of the difficult challenges that are hurting us.

I found strength by pushing myself—but doing something that I didn't want to do. I forced myself to go to bed early. I trained my mind to wake before 5:00 am. I developed

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exercises that would lead to better physical health. And better physical health led to better mental health. And better mental health led to more confidence that I could influence the life I would result in the days, weeks, months, years, and decades to come.

One of the most excellent tools was journaling. By writing out what I wanted to achieve, I felt as if I were drawing a line in the sand. I shared my journals with others, showing the dreams that I intended to build. Those dreams would take years to achieve.

For that reason, I broke them down into smaller goals. If I knew what I wanted to accomplish in ten years, I could ascertain the progress I should make within the first five years. By continuing this practice, I would know what pace I would need to make every year. For that reason, I began the disciplined practice of writing out quarterly journals. A person that uses the discipline of quarterly goals acts as a CEO of his or her own life. Just like the CEO of a publicly-traded company has to release quarterly reports, I wanted to do the same.

The quarterly reports I created proved enormously beneficial in helping me build mental health. Even during the darkest days of my imprisonment, I could work toward the light. And that made all of the difference.

- » How does your mind respond when you exercise your body?
- » What is your state of mind when you achieve a goal?
- » In what ways does self-discipline influence how you feel about yourself?
- » What are the most effective strategies you've used to overcome despair?

Word of the day: ***morass*** / Define ***morass***:

Use ***morass*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Friday, January 15, 2021 / Day 15 / 350 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Physical Fitness

President John Kennedy told us that physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body. Fitness also provides the basis for dynamic and creative intellectual activity. If our body feels lethargic and bloated, our mind doesn't operate at the highest capacity. To reach our highest potential, we've got treat our body as if it's "our temple," as leaders have advised for centuries.

With decades to serve, I adjusted my fitness strategies depending upon my environment and the stage of my sentence. As time passed, and situations changed, I changed my fitness routine.

While in the county jail, I couldn't access a recreation yard. During those 11 months, I lived in a pod, locked in a cell, or a "day room." Those circumstances didn't prevent me from working out alone, doing pushups, squats, knee bends, running in place. I learned to live in jail, to grow despite the restrictions imposed upon me by the jail.

After the U.S. Marshals transferred me from the jail to federal prison, I saw the exercise yard. The yard felt liberating. We had free weights and bars. A running track circulated fields for softball games, tennis, and basketball courts. The prison provided everything a person needed to get into phenomenal shape.

The fitness resources alone would not get anyone into physical shape. Each person had to do the work. Some people trained as if they were Olympian athletes. Other people didn't train at all. They got fat, lazy.

I had turned 24 by the time I got to the penitentiary. Staying fit would become an essential part of my exercise routine. Exercise would strengthen me for the long climb through 9,500 days that I had to serve.

For the first several years, I trained with weights. Like others in prison, I pushed myself with heavy weights, measuring progress on the bench press and squat. After I turned 30, I wanted to change the routine. Anticipating that prisons would hold me until I was 49, I

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switched from weight training to running as my primary exercise. For strength, I did push-ups and some bar work.

When I crossed into my 40s, I increased my running distances. When I passed into my mid-to-late 40s, I began running marathon distances. As with other areas of my life, I defined success at the start of the year, declaring how many miles I would run and how many pushups I would do. I kept an ongoing journal. That disciplined effort kept me on pace to improve. I didn't run fast. I ran long. Running marathons helped me to build the endurance it would take to persevere as I climbed through the final years of my sentence. When I walked out of prison, in 2013, fitness remained a part of my life. I couldn't devote the same amount of time as when I served the sentence, but every day I would step on the scale. Every day I would hold myself accountable and live by the goals that I set.

A commitment to physical fitness helped me through 26 years in prison, and that continue continues to help me today.

- » What does a commitment to physical fitness mean to you?
- » In what ways does your commitment to fitness contribute to your mindset?
- » How can you measure your level of commitment to fitness?
- » How has your commitment to fitness changed from three years ago?

Word of the day: **lethargic** / Define **lethargic**:

Use **lethargic** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Friday, January 15, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What will your commitment to fitness look like in five years?
- » How do people respond to your commitment to fitness?
- » What would an employer say about your commitment to fitness?

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Saturday, January 16, 2021 / Day 16 / 349 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Persistence

Calvin Coolidge, the 30th president of the United States, spoke about persistence. He said that nothing could ever take its place. Talent cannot take the place of persistence, pointing out that unsuccessful men with talent were all around us. Similarly, genius doesn't replace talent, as there are many people with a genius IQ that don't amount to much. Education doesn't equal the power of persistence, either. We know many people with advanced college degrees that fail to achieve happiness or fulfillment. Persistence and determination, on the other hand, have helped many people with struggles overcome and succeed.

Tulio Cardozo went to prison for a drug-related crime. While incarcerated, he committed to change his life. He hated being in prison, and he knew that he never wanted to return. As I recall, he told me that he served seven years in the California State Prison system.

Within days of my transfer to a halfway house in San Francisco, I met Tulio. Chris Redlitz, co-founder of The Last Mile introduced me to Tulio. In 2012, when I met Tulio, The Last Mile, an incredible nonprofit organization was dedicated to helping people in prison develop entrepreneurial skills. Today it helps people in prison develop computer skills. Tulio worked at The Last Mile, and Chris thought he would be helpful to me. We've been close friends ever since.

When I went to prison in 1987, the Internet did not exist. I'd never sent an email, never used a cell phone. To build my business, I knew that I would need to learn a great deal in a short amount of time. Chris Redlitz told me that Tulio would be able to help me learn. He was right.

I asked Tulio how he became a computer *maven* in such a short amount of time. He had only been released from prison a short time before me. Since he told me that he served a lengthy sentence and that he had been involved with drugs before his incarceration, Tulio's knowledge about computers, networks, and web pages surprised me. Tulio told me that

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he trained himself to code computers while he was in prison—even though he did not have access to a computer.

When I asked how he learned, Tulio told me that he learned by reading. He ordered books from the library to become familiar with the language of computers. He trained himself to memorize the commands to write computer code. He could write complex code, and then he would study the code to make sure that he understood every character on the page without having to reference his notes.

Over the years, he became familiar with understanding the backend of technology, even though he could not access a computer. To me, it sounded like learning how to play tennis by reading about tennis. A person may not be able to master tennis without holding a racquet, but persistent reading may accelerate a person’s prospect to improve.

Tulio’s persistence advanced certainly advanced his prospects for success. Despite getting out of prison during the great recession, he secured opportunities to earn an income right away. I’m grateful for all that he taught me about computers and also for providing a great example of how persistence can prepare a person in prison for success.

- » In what ways have your actions from last week shown your persistence?
- » In what ways do your activities relate to the way that you have defined success?

Word of the day: **maven** / Define **maven**:

Use **maven** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Saturday, January 16, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What steps have you taken to document your persistence?
- » How would you assess the importance of persistence to your pursuit of success?
- » Describe the tool you're using to measure your progress.

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Weekend Recap

Use these pages to reflect on your progress during the previous week, and project what you'll accomplish in the next week. Consider the following questions as you memorialize your journey to success:

1. What books are you reading and why have you chosen to read those books?
2. What are you learning from these books?
3. How will the books you're reading contribute to your success?
4. What progress have you made toward your fitness goals?
5. In what ways are you tracking your diet, your spending habits, your daily progress?
6. What can you share about your spiritual growth, or contribution to your community?
7. In what ways are you growing your support network?

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Sunday, January 17, 2021 / Day 17 / 348 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Community Awareness

Tom Peters wrote many books that described how to build great companies great communities. He taught that community organizing is all about building grassroots support. It's about identifying the people around you with whom you can create a common, passionate cause. Building great communities empowers us to ignore conventional wisdom and to live by very different rules.

Every day we make choices. Good choices accelerate us on the path toward what we're striving to become. Other choices keep us stuck in our current situation. Bad decisions make things worse for us. As a long-term prisoner, I knew that I needed to work toward making things better—for my community and myself.

To start, I had to think about the community I served.

Like thousands of other people, I hated being in prison. No one wants to live separately from the family. As Americans, we don't like having to live with so many rules that government agencies impose. Prison rules limit the progress we can make. Simultaneously, the prison community expects people to serve time in ways that restrict growth or productivity. Further, many people in society make it clear that they want to **ostracize** anyone with a criminal background.

With a commitment to making things better, I had to think about the community. By introspecting, I could question strategies that prepare for success despite the obstacles.

I looked to mentors like Mahatma Gandhi and Marcus Aurelius. By reading books about their lives, I learned that all of us had the power to make positive changes—even if we're living in struggle. Gandhi lived in oppression. Yet he always said that he wanted to live as the change that he wanted to see in the world. Marcus Aurelius grew up in an impoverished orphanage. Yet by building a positive mindset, he learned how to improve his community. He rose to become one of the most influential people in the Roman empire.

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When we change the way we think, we start the process of changing our community. We create an inspiring story that other people can support. Through those efforts, we build healthier communities.

We have to start with an awareness of what’s going on around us. The more we’re aware of our current surroundings, the better we can prepare ourselves to engineer a change. That means we need to invest time and energy to understand the position of other people. Stephen Covey, an influential American author, wrote that we should first seek to understand others before we try to make those people understand us. When we know the systems in place, we can begin preparing pathways to change and improve.

As we advance, something magical happens. People in the broader community become aware of us.

Throughout my journey in prison, opportunities opened because I sowed good seeds to grow a community and support network. By seeking to understand the community and working to make the broader community aware of the efforts I made to improve, I returned to society strong, with my dignity intact.

If you’re going through a challenging time, consider strategies to build a stronger community to help you.

- » How would you describe your community?
- » In what ways have you worked to improve your community?
- » What other communities could you nurture to improve prospects for your success?
- » What strategies could make you a better candidate for success in your community?

Word of the day: ***ostracize*** / Define ***ostracize***:

Use ***ostracize*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Sunday, January 17, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What resources can you create to improve your community?
- » In what ways are you working to make your community aware of your contributions?
- » How will your community become stronger because of your efforts?

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Monday, January 18, 2021 / Day 18 / 347 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Stay Intentional

While climbing through challenging situations, we've got to keep our head in the game and stay intentional. Opportunities might open. If they don't align with what matters most to us, we need to pass. We have to weigh the opportunity costs that accompany every decision. This article reveals how those thoughts helped me focus on the end game.

Many people spend time in prison gambling. The monotony pushes them into activities that might bring some excitement. To escape the boredom, they immerse themselves in sports, card games, or other activities that make the time a little bit easier.

But making things more relaxed while in prison isn't always the best adjustment pattern.

I listened to people that returned to prison after being released. One person, Red, approached the end of a 10-year sentence when I started serving my term. He told me that the best way to serve time would be to forget about the world outside and focus on the easiest routine possible.

Since we lived on the same tier, I got to know Red's simple routine. He worked in the prison factory sowing mailbags. After work, he played poker and drank hooch. Red told me that he started serving time in his early 20s, and he looked forward to getting out.

Within 18 months of being released after serving a 10-year sentence, Red faced new criminal charges for robbery. He returned to prison with a 20-year sentence. When I asked him what went wrong, he told me about the challenges he faced. Regardless of how many applications he put in for employment, no one would call him back. The probation officer that supervised him, he said, kept harassing him because he didn't have a job.

After several months, Red said that he got a gun and committed an armed robbery. From his perspective, he would either rob enough money to get his life together, or he

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would return to prison. Prison, he said, was a lot easier than trying to make in society with a criminal record.

People with stories like Red’s story fill our nation’s prisons. The longer people stay in “corrections,” the more they get accustomed to the prison environment. People learn skills and adjustment patterns for prison. Yet those skills and adjustment patterns don’t always prepare them for the challenges they’ll face upon release.

To overcome the *indignities* of imprisonment, a person needs to develop critical thinking skills. We must weigh the opportunity costs of every decision. The more intentional we are, the stronger we will be to resist activities that don’t relate to our success. In Red’s case, he was “intentional” about serving an easy time in prison. By making it comfortable in prison, he made it harder to adjust in society. A person has to define success. If we measure success as an “easy” prison term, we’ll make decisions accordingly. If we want to prepare for the challenges that Red endured, we’ll pursue an adjustment strategy that strengthens our prospects for success upon release.

- » In what ways do the decisions you’re making today show that you’re intentional about pursuing success?
- » How can you build a stronger record of accomplishments to show that you’re intentional?
- » In what ways would a strong record of being intentional influence the prospective employers that may consider you as a viable candidate?
- » How would an “intentional” adjustment pattern influence your prospects for success?

Word of the day: *indignity* / Define *indignity*:

Use *indignity* in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Monday, January 18, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » In what ways would your intentional decision-making strategy inspire people to believe in you?
- » In what ways does a leader you admire show that he makes intentional decisions?
- » How would making intentional decisions lead to new opportunities?

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Tuesday, January 19, 2021 / Day 19 / 346 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Staying Active

Exercise changes your body. More than that, it changes your mind. And when it changes your mind, it changes your attitude. By changing your attitude, exercise changes your mood. Make fitness a part of your daily ritual, just like brushing your teeth. If you choose to exercise every day, you'll feel stronger every day. And feeling stronger will your commitment to overcome struggle.

As evidenced by the bad decisions of my youth, I lacked discipline as a young man. Prison changed my mindset. I learned the importance of being active. Staying active helped to boost my self-esteem and get me on track toward a better life.

Staying active, I'm convinced, can help anyone in a struggle. I served about 12 months in a county jail before the U.S. Marshals transferred me to a U.S. penitentiary. While in jail, we were locked in a pod without fresh air. Once I got to a prison, I could step outside and enjoy a recreation yard. Still in my early 20s, I kept active with weight training exercises.

By working out every day, I had something to work toward. The other guys and I always worked toward goals, aspiring to build both strength and size. We measured ourselves with the bench press, always aspiring to build up to three plates on the bar, pressing 315 pounds. Others in the penitentiary had Herculean strength, capable of pressing four plates, or 405 pounds for multiple repetitions.

Time changed my routine. By the time I reached my early 30s, I had switched up my exercise routine. Instead of devoting so much energy to weights, I started to incorporate more running and bar work into the routine. Running helped me to feel active, free. I could be alone, listening to music or talk radio as I ran loops around the track. I started to increase my distances, advancing from five miles to ten miles to 20 miles. Those runs **fortified** my spirit, empowering me to make it through the span of a long sentence.

By the time I moved into my mid-40s, authorities had transferred me to a minimum-security camp. I made friends with Greg, who was new to the prison system. Before surrendering to the camp, the stress of going through the criminal justice system traumatized him. He gained 100 pounds. Greg and I began running together. The encouragement

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helped him run a five-mile distance for the first time in his life. A few months later, we ran ten miles.

While talking one day, Greg told me that he'd like to run a marathon distance. I invited him to run a marathon with me that weekend. He laughed, telling me that people had to train to run a marathon distance. That may be the case for people who did not serve time in prison. As people in prison, I suggested, we could chart our course. That weekend, we ran 15 miles together. The run went so well that we agreed to run 26.2 miles the following weekend.

Up until that time, in the spring of 2011, I'd never run a marathon distance. I'd run 20 miles on several occasions, but never 26.2 miles. But running that distance with Greg brought me a sense of liberty. Staying active strengthened my mind as I worked through the final phase of my sentence. After we completed the first marathon, I started running much longer distances. I ran every day, typically logging between 300 and 400 miles of running each month. In my final month before authorities released me to a halfway house, I ran 700 miles. Staying active, I've found could help me build strength.

- » How do you view the power of staying active?
- » In what ways would staying active influence your mindset?
- » How do you measure your activity level?
- » What would the term "being intellectually active" mean to you?

Word of the day: **fortify** / Define **fortify**:

Use **fortify** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Tuesday, January 19, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » How do other people in your support network view your activity level?
- » How would you rate your level of activity?
- » In what ways does staying active influence your confidence or self-esteem?

July, 2021						
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Wednesday, January 20, 2021 / Day 20 / 345 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Gauge Commitment

Mario Andretti, the famous race car driver, wrote about the power of commitment. “Desire is the key to motivation, but it’s determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal—a commitment to excellence—that will enable you to attain the success that you seek.

Fables of war give us stories that reveal the importance of commitment. Although I don’t recall the author, I remember reading about a conqueror from the ancient world. After the leader’s ships landed at the enemy’s shore, and all of the warriors **disembarked**, the commander ordered his chief to burn all of the ships. He wanted his soldiers to see that they would fight and win, or they would die. They were committed, without an exit plan.

In starting a lengthy prison term, I felt as if I were in a war of my own. My enemy was not another person, but the predicament that I had to conquer. I made a 100% commitment to succeed. We all have to gauge our commitment. When we make that commitment, we start by understanding what success means.

We don’t all define success in the same way. As a young man, I understood that if nothing changed, I would be in prison for 26 years. I also realized that the longer a person stayed in prison, the less likely that person would be to succeed upon release. Society would have a preconceived idea about the person’s character and abilities. As a result, fewer opportunities would open. With fewer opportunities opening, people getting out of prison would be more vulnerable to problems with the law. I could see that with the high recidivism rates. Statistics showed that more than six out of every ten people returned to confinement after their release.

I made a 100% commitment to prepare for success. Like a general that burned his ships, I cut ties to any activity and to any person that could threaten my prospects for success. I kept journals to measure progress every day. I stayed intentional about developing skills that could help me overcome the war I had with recidivism rates.

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This strategy required that I think document a solid plan that would help me overcome. I anticipated the people that would influence my future. At some point, a probation officer would affect how much liberty I had. An employer would determine whether my prison term should block me from a job or a career path. A lender may use my criminal history to gauge whether to provide me with capital.

By understanding these challenges, I could prepare. I concentrated on fundamentals, like developing communication skills and developing critical thinking skills. Recording all of my decisions would help me build a record. By creating a record, I anticipated that I would overcome people’s objections or preconceived notions about my level of commitment. That strategy helped me to build confidence and self-esteem. Commitment enabled me to gauge the opportunity costs associated with every decision.

During the final decade of my imprisonment, I taught many classes in the prisons that held me. I’d always ask the men in the room how many would return to prison after release. Not a single hand went up. With further questioning and prompting, one person would inevitably say, “I’m going to try to do the right thing when I get out. But if things don’t work out, I’m going to do what a man has to do.” In my mind, such a statement reflected the opposite of a 100% commitment to success. That type of mindset contributed to high rates of failure for people that emerge from prison.

- » How would you gauge your commitment to success?
- » What actions are you taking to show your commitment?
- » In what ways will your commitment level influence how others respond to you?
- » In what ways do your daily activities reveal your commitment to excellence?

Word of the day: **disembark** / Define **disembark**:

Use **disembark** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Insert Date if different from Wednesday, January 20, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » When it comes to your adjustment pattern, what does excellence look like for you?
- » What tools have you developed to record your pursuit of excellence?
- » How does your commitment to excellence influence your mindset?

July, 2021						
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Thursday, January 21, 2021 / Day 21 / 344 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Strengthen Connections

Networking is an investment in your future. It doesn't matter if you're in a difficult situation like a prison, or if you're living with any type of struggle. By building strong relationships with influential people, a person creates more value. Strive to bring more people into your life that share the same values and goals as you. This networking strategy will open new opportunities to help you climb from struggle to prosperity.

In an earlier entry, I wrote about **tripartite** goals to prepare for success. One prong required that I bring ten people that I did not know into my support network. I had to create a strategy to initiate and strengthen connections with people that did not know me.

Engineering a pathway to build a strong support network from inside prison required an excellent strategy. Not everyone chooses the same strategy. Some people prefer anonymity.

For example, I recently spoke with a business executive that received a 42-month sentence. He solicited advice on how he could use the time inside to prepare in ways that would help him overcome the challenges he expected to face when he came. I recommended that he begin sowing seeds to repair his reputation. After all, he will finish his sentence and go back into the business world.

He didn't agree. He hoped for a new beginning. He wanted to forget about the debacles that led to his imprisonment. When the sentence ended, he didn't want any ties to the decisions that led him to prison.

Everyone living in struggle has to make his or her own choice on how to climb out to a better life. I chose transparency. By documenting everything, I believed that I could influence the way that others perceived me. From my perspective, if I were going to ask someone to believe in me and open opportunities, I had a duty and a responsibility to communicate honestly about the bad decisions of my youth. If I revealed the bad choices of my past, I could take the next steps. I could show them the documented strategy I created to reconcile with society.

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Again, not everyone agreed with this approach. We all define success differently. Yet we all must decide on how we're going to overcome. We're in the era of Google. If we don't document a strategy, we may have made a decision that leads to a harsher adjustment. I chose to strengthen connections.

To strengthen connections, I worked hard to prove worthy. During the first years, I worked to earn university degrees. Since I was in school, I could talk about working toward something positive, something that others could respect. When my schoolwork advanced, I began publishing papers. Through those efforts, I exposed my ideas and observations to other readers, opening opportunities to connect with others. Then I nurtured those connections.

This strategy influenced my return to society. While I concluded the final year of my sentence inside of a halfway house in San Francisco, I got an invitation from the California State University, San Francisco. When I visited the university, it was the first time that I stepped foot on a university campus. After I gave a presentation, the team asked if I wanted a job. I didn't know what they expected. They told me that they wanted me to be a professor.

How did that happen? The seeds that I started sow early in the journey led to connections that I didn't even know. As it turned out, the head of the criminal justice department told me that he had read books I wrote when he was in graduate school.

Sow good seeds now to build connections that will open opportunities in your future.

- » Describe the most important people in your support network.
- » What steps are you taking to strengthen those connections?
- » In what ways do those people support the efforts you're making to succeed?
- » What characteristics would you like to see in the people that make up your support group?

Word of the day: **tripartite** / Define **tripartite**:

Use **tripartite** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Thursday, January 21, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What steps are you taking to build more support?
- » What opportunities would you like people in your support group to open?
- » What steps did you take to broaden your support group during the past year?

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Friday, January 22, 2021 / Day 22 / 343 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Being Aware

Awareness requires us to live in the world as it exists rather than as we want it to be. To succeed requires that we know where we stand. Then, we must make decisions that will lead us in the direction of what we aspire to become. Through that deliberate process, we make others aware of our commitment. Those people then become vested in our commitment, helping us along the way.

There is an old saying we attribute to President Abraham Lincoln. He said that if he had six hours to chop down a tree, he would spend the first four hours sharpening the ax. That message tells us the importance of preparation. Regardless of how strong a person may be, if he doesn't grind his ax, he will not succeed in chopping down the tree.

We have to prepare if we want to succeed. And our preparations will change at different stages of the journey. The early preparations should put us on a pathway to new opportunities and higher levels of success.

In the beginning of my prison term, I knew that I wanted to emerge successfully. The preparations along the way would change as the years passed. During the first decade, for example, I chose to focus on developing my academic credentials. I believed that by earning university degrees and by publishing papers, I would have an easier time bringing new people into my life. I hoped to bring societal leaders into my life, people that could help me to open new opportunities.

I had to think about what type of people would be most likely to support a person in prison. I like to use the analogy of being the CEO of my life. As the CEO, I would need a board of directors. The board of directors that I chose would be in a position to help me succeed. It would be my responsibility to provide the board with tools and resources they could use to open such opportunities. I had to be intentional about the people I would invite to be a part of my board. People from academia, I anticipated, may be more willing to become a part of my life than other people.

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In the first decade, while working to earn my university degrees, I nurtured relationships with leading academics. If I found a professor that wrote about prison, I reached out. I offered to provide them with insight. By giving them value that might contribute to their **erudition**, I hoped to build a reciprocal relationship. Through such efforts, I developed friendships with some of America’s leading penologists. They would visit me in prison. They would advocate for me when I had to overcome challenges with prison officials. That strategy served me well during the first decade of my imprisonment.

During the second of my confinement, my focus changed. Administrators had blocked my access to a doctoral program that I had begun at the University of Connecticut. Since administrators prevented me from earning a doctorate, I transitioned to preparing for other challenges that I would face upon release. I began writing for publication. Then I started building businesses that would lead to financial resources.

The more resources I developed, the stronger I became. Opportunities opened during the third decade of my imprisonment that would not have opened if I didn’t architect a strategy during the first months and years of my captivity. We’ve got to stay aware of opportunities to create and seize. That strategy will make others aware of our commitment to excellence and accelerate new opportunities to grow.

- » What perception would a stranger have of you today?
- » What seeds are you sowing to influence how others perceive you?
- » What opportunities exist for you to influence prospects for your success?
- » In what ways are you assessing the value of activities you’re pursuing today?

Word of the day: **erudition** / Define **erudition**:

Use **erudition** in a sentence:

April, 2021						
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Be the CEO of your life:

Insert Date if different from Friday, January 22, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » How are the activities you're pursuing today relevant to how others will perceive you?
- » What new opportunities will open in the years to come because of the activities you're pursuing today?
- » Share the thought process that led to your adjustment strategy?

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Saturday, January 23, 2021 / Day 23 / 342 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Adjust as Necessary

Life doesn't always go our way. We create plans. We can engineer those plans well, with the best intentions. They can be strategic and deliberate. Then, external forces can change the environment. When those changes come, we're responsible for how we respond. We can complain with the "it's-not-my-fault-mentality" or we can adjust and succeed despite the changes we encounter.

In August of 2012, authorities let me transfer from the federal prison in Atwater, California, to a halfway house in San Francisco. I had 9,135 days of prison behind me. I had another year to serve in the halfway house. After 9,500 days of living as a prisoner, I would transition to Supervised Release for seven years, then Parole for 19 years, then to Special Parole for another three years.

Those were the complications that followed the bad decisions of my youth.

Plans I made at the start of my sentenced helped me climb through the journey. Decisions I made throughout the journey helped me to build confidence and strength. I felt ready to grow and prosper. In my late 40s, I had spent more of my life in prison than in society. I had a master's degree, publishing credentials, and an insane work ethic. As my wife drove me to the halfway house, I reiterated a goal that I'd been telling her.

"Within five years, we'll have our first million dollars in assets."

If I had not sown the seeds early in my journey, such a goal would be ridiculous. I'd never held a job. My credit score was 0-0-0. Since neither the Internet nor smartphones existed before my imprisonment, I'd never sent an email or watched a YouTube video. Nevertheless, the preparations I'd made gave me confidence to succeed.

Within the first month of being in the halfway house, I made my first real estate acquisition. How? I used the same skills and commitment that powered me through prison. We create our opportunities with the stories we tell. Our experiences along the journey tell our stories for us. The more deliberate we are with our planning, the more likely we become to succeed.

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Within two years, I had the first \$1 million in assets. Within five years, I had \$5 million in assets and \$3 million in equity. Then, external forces brought an **abrupt** change to my circumstances. I invested \$1.4 million to become a limited partner in an overseas land development project. That investment represented less than 30% of the assets that I'd acquired since being released from prison. I planned to build a business called Prison to Paradise, and convert my investment into a project that would yield more than \$10 million.

Then, three months after I made the \$1.4 million investment, the Federal Trade Commission launched an unexpected lawsuit against the general partner of the real estate development. That lawsuit led to an asset freeze. In 2020, that lawsuit led to a settlement. It cost me \$5 million in assets and \$3 million in equity.

I made plans. External forces intervened. I had to adjust. By following the same principles that carried me through the journey, I began to rebuild.

Complaining or living as a victim does not yield results. Adjusting to changed circumstances helps us recover and grow with new plans and new execution strategies.

- » What unexpected changes have you encountered?
- » In what ways did you adjust to the change?
- » In what ways does your adjustment to changed circumstances reveal your commitment to success?
- » In what ways does your response to changed circumstances align with the way that you define success?

Word of the day: **abrupt** / Define **abrupt**:

Use **abrupt** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Saturday, January 23, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » In what ways would a setback to your plans influence your confidence?
- » Provide an example of how your adjustment to a setback resulted in more growth.
- » How can you use your adjustment to a setback as a resource?

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Weekend Recap

Use these pages to reflect on your progress during the previous week, and project what you'll accomplish in the next week. Consider the following questions as you memorialize your journey to success:

1. What books are you reading and why have you chosen to read those books?
2. What are you learning from these books?
3. How will the books you're reading contribute to your success?
4. What progress have you made toward your fitness goals?
5. In what ways are you tracking your diet, your spending habits, your daily progress?
6. What can you share about your spiritual growth, or contribution to your community?
7. In what ways are you growing your support network?

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Sunday, January 24, 2021 / Day 24 / 341 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Celebrate Achievements

According to Napoleon Hill, author of Think and Grow Rich, desire is the starting point of all achievement. It isn't hope. It's not a wish. Rather a keen, pulsating desire transcends everything. If we desire to succeed, we find our way. We engineer our path through all obstacles. Neither hoping for success, nor wishing for success will get us to where we want to go. We've got to desire to succeed. Then we can put in the work to get make it happen.

Here's a memorable story about celebrating achievements that may help someone climbing through a challenge in pursuit of success.

In 1992, I earned a bachelor's degree from Mercer University. In 1995, Hofstra University awarded my master's degree. In 1996, a series of wardens put a stop to my pursuit of a doctorate.

I needed something to carry me through the remaining time that I had to serve. I began to immerse myself with studies of the stock market. I ordered books, and I ordered newspapers, I ordered magazines. Every day I learned.

The more I read about the Internet, the more convinced I became that companies using the Internet could change the world. The more I read about the Internet, the more convinced I became that this new medium of communication would become essential to society than the television, the radio, and the telephone.

In 1998, I crossed into my 12th year of imprisonment. An opportunity opened for me to earn \$2,000 from a writing project. That \$2,000 represented the first money I had earned since my arrest in 1987. My sister asked if I wanted her to save the \$2,000 for me.

Rather than saving, I wanted to invest. For the first time since my imprisonment, I had sufficient capital to open a brokerage account. With my sister's help, I opened a trading account with an online brokerage company. By opening a margin account, I could borrow money from the brokerage house to increase my purchase of stock. Borrowing on margin allowed me to purchase \$3,000 worth of stock even though I only had \$2,000.

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I bought stock in Yahoo!, one of the leading Internet companies of the late 1990s. The stock rose in a **hyperbolic** arc. Every week the stock's value increased by several points. As the stock price rose, my equity level increased. When my equity increased, my buying power increased. I purchased more shares. That strategy resulted in my original investment of \$3,000 (my \$2,000 in cash, plus the \$1,000 I borrowed on margin) growing. As my equity increased, I borrowed more money to buy more shares. That strategy led to my portfolio growing in value by tens of thousands, then by hundreds of thousands within a relatively short time.

Rather than celebrating the small achievements and taking a pause, I continued to increase my exposure. The entire story is available in *Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term*. The short version is that at one point, in April of 1999, the equity had grown to more than \$1 million in value.

At the time, I was halfway through my prison term. Rather than capturing those resources with a sale, I held onto the stock. When the Internet bubble burst, the portfolio dropped more than \$600,000 in value within two days.

I sold the position. After paying all short-term capital-gain taxes and costs associated with the sale, I walked away with about \$100,000. Rather than celebrating the gain, for months I lamented that I did not sell sooner.

Later, I learned the importance of celebrating small achievements as we keep the bigger picture in perspective. I encourage others to learn how to celebrate small successes, especially when climbing through a struggle.

- » Describe some small achievements that have led to larger opportunities.
- » In what ways did you prepare for those small achievements?
- » How did you celebrate your incremental achievements?
- » In what ways do you communicate your small achievements to others in your network?

Word of the day: **hyperbolic** / Define **hyperbolic**:

Use **hyperbolic** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Monday, January 25, 2021 / Day 25 / 340 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Show Authenticity

Jay-Z is one of the most influential artists of the modern era. When he spoke about writing music, he spoke about writing with emotion, integrity, and authenticity. You can feel when something is authentic, he said, and you can feel when it's not. By living authentically, we build trust. People know when we're being authentic, and they know when we're not.

In 2005, staff members locked me in segregation. An officer charged me violating the prison's disciplinary code for "running a business" from prison. I authored many books while incarcerated. When those books *elicited* media attention, I frequently had to take a trip to the Special Housing Unit. When I was in the SHU, I remember the captain questioning me about my writing in prison.

I understood the potential risks and rewards of writing and publishing books while incarcerated. The work could bring unwanted attention from staff members. They preferred that people served time without doing anything that was out of the ordinary—like writing books. A model inmate would have a job in prison, avoid disciplinary problems, serve a sentence, and get out. Yet statistics show the challenges that people face after prison. Rather than being a model inmate, I aspired to emerge from prison successfully. That goal required a different adjustment strategy.

After concluding my sentence, in 2013, I began building business opportunities—some of those opportunities related to the work that I completed while serving my sentence. I wrote books, courses, and created other projects with hopes of teaching and inspiring people in jail and prison. Those activities led to speaking engagements. In 2016, I spoke at a judicial conference with more than 1,000 people in attendance. Besides state and federal judges, there were many leaders from state and federal prison systems in the room. One of those people was then a warden in a federal prison; previously, he was the captain of the prison at Lompoc.

The keynote speech that I delivered focused on the importance of providing people in prison with positive role models. By offering resources that would build hope for people in

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prison, I felt confident that more people would use their time inside to prepare for lives of meaning, relevance, and contribution. After the presentation, the warden approached me, asking if I remember him. I remembered. We had many conversations while I was locked in the SHU at Lompoc.

He told me that my presentation made a favorable impression on him. He invited me to visit the federal penitentiary in Atwater to make a presentation. I agreed to make the presentation. But I suggested that we could do so much more. Rather than merely giving a motivating speech, I asked for an opportunity to create a program that would teach and inspire people inside. He agreed to let me make a presentation to his executive staff.

Following that meeting with the warden, I wrote a new softcover book called *Success After Prison*, and I created the Prison Professors Mastermind course. That course included ten lessons, a series of self-directed, open-ended questions, and accompanying videos. I prepared all of that information with hopes of teaching and inspiring people in jail and prison.

People in prison responded to the course because they could see the authenticity. As a result, I've built a business around the product, generating hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenues. When we're authentic, we create opportunities for lasting value because people can see the truth in the messaging.

- » What do your current activities show about your commitment to authenticity?
- » If a potential mentor saw your activities over the past week, what would they think about your commitment to success?
- » In what ways are you documenting your pursuit of success?
- » How will the documentation you're preparing relate to the career you want to build in your future?

Word of the day: ***elicit*** / Define ***elicit***:

Use ***elicit*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Insert Date if different from Monday, January 25, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » In what ways does your effort to document your authenticity differentiate you from others?
- » What more can you do to record your commitment to success?
- » How could you use your documented pursuit of success as a resource to open new opportunities?

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By leaving the prison with the mannerisms of the penitentiary, I thought I would have a harder time opening the opportunities that would lead to success. I had to visualize what I could do with the resources around me to overcome. Rather than making a name for myself in the penitentiary, I wanted to connect with leaders in society. Those people, I believed, could lead me to a pathway for new opportunities.

As a result of that visualization, I used to write unsolicited letters to leaders. If I read an article in a newspaper about someone that I believed could advance my cause, I would try to connect with them. For example, I read an article in the Wall Street Journal about the need for more prisons and longer sentences. Professor John DiIulio, of Princeton University, wrote that we needed longer sentences. I disagreed and wrote a letter to him.

I wrote hundreds of letters to people that did not know me. Some of those letters resulted in me finding mentors. By writing to John DiIulio, I opened a line of communication with one of the most influential penologists in the nation. We began a correspondence. In my eighth year of imprisonment, he coordinated a field trip for a group of his students from Princeton to visit the prison where I was held, in McKean, Pennsylvania. I had an opportunity to teach a group of Princeton students from the warden's conference room. I tell that story in my book, *Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Sentence*.

When we visualize positive outcomes, we can take action steps that make the seemingly impossible possible.

- » What do you visualize as the best possible outcome for your life one year from today?
- » What do you visualize as the best possible outcome for your life five years from today?
- » What do you visualize as the best possible outcome for your life ten years from today?
- » In what ways do the visualizations you have for your life at different stages relate?

Word of the day: ***evoke*** / Define ***evoke***:

Use ***evoke*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Tuesday, January 19, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » Had you begun this process of visualizations years ago, how would the strategy have influenced decisions you made along the way?
- » In what ways does visualizing your outcome influence your adjustment strategy?
- » What mechanism do you use to memorialize the way you visualize your outcome?

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Wednesday, January 27, 2021 / Day 27 / 338 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Be Intentional

Wayne Dyer, an American author and psychologist wrote about the power of intention. His quote: “The power of intention is the power to manifest, to create, to live a life of unlimited abundance, and to attract into your life the right people at the right moments.”

We may be living in challenging times right now, but that doesn’t stop us from working toward something better. To work toward something better, we’ve got to take the necessary steps. When speaking, I like to use the analogy of planting an oak tree.

I don’t know who came up with the analogy, but someone asked about the best time to plant an oak tree. In responding to the question, people guessed. They didn’t know the answer. Some said morning, some said night. Some said winter, some said fall. The author had a different idea in mind.

“The best time to plant an oak tree is 20 years ago. The second-best time is today.”

We all can look back 20 years ago. Had we been more intentional with the seeds we planted 20 years ago, we likely would have had different outcomes. I got that message very early on my journey. When I began reading philosophy, I could *introspect* more effectively. I started to question how the friends I chose, the attention I paid to leaders, the choices I made influenced my journey through life. Those thoughts led me to start thinking differently, more intentionally.

To continue with the oak tree analogy, we can think about other steps we must accomplish when planting seeds. When we plant a seed, we can take further action. We can nurture the seed by tilling the soil or feeding the ground with nutrients that will facilitate the growth of the seed into a sprout, and the sprout into a strong tree. Experts sometimes tell us that fertilizer provides the best type of nutrient. One source of fertilizer comes from livestock manure.

In other words, before the seed grows through the ground and becomes a tree, it has to grow through a lot of manure. And that same concept applies to us. If we want to rise from

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the challenges we're currently experiencing, we must prepare ourselves to grow through a lot of manure.

I think it all comes down to how badly we want to succeed. If we dislike our current situation, then we've got to pursue a change intentionally, understanding how to connect the dots with incremental changes.

My obligation to the Bureau of Prisons began on August 11, 1987, and it did not conclude until August 12, 2013. Once I understood the importance of being intentional about my decisions, I could always weigh the opportunity costs of my choices. I would ask how one decision could lead to a new opportunity. If the opportunity advanced my prospects for success, as I defined success, I would pursue the opportunity. If an activity could threaten my progress, I could choose a different path.

By making intentional decisions, we all can move closer to the pathway of success. Sometimes that pathway can require decades. Yet every decision along the way opens opportunities or presents threats. Choose wisely. Prepare yourself to grow through manure as you pursue excellence, knowing that you must work toward many little wins to get the big wins.

- » What decisions did you make as a child that led to where you are today?
- » What decisions did you make during your school years that led to where you are today?
- » What decisions did you make in your career that led to where you are today?
- » What decisions did you make last year that influenced your life today?

Word of the day: ***introspect*** / Define ***introspect***:

Use ***introspect*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Wednesday, January 27, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » What decisions can you make to influence where you will be next year?
- » What decisions can you make to influence where you will be in five years?
- » What decisions can you make to influence where you will be in ten years?

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Thursday, January 28, 2021 / Day 28 / 337 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Create Meaning

Viktor Frankl's celebrated work, Man's Search for Meaning, helped me many people through challenging times. I read about him during that awkward transition between the date of my conviction, and the time of my sentence. One of his quotes inspired me: "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we're challenged to change ourselves."

Here is the situation. I was in my 25th year of imprisonment, only a few months away before authorities would allow my transfer to a halfway house in San Francisco. Preparing for the career I intended to launch when I got out, and I used those final months in prison to interview other prisoners. I was collecting information to write new chapters for a manuscript. I intended to title the new book: White Collar.

By 2012, I had written several manuscripts. The first manuscripts were for an academic audience. I wrote About Prison and Profiles from Prison for publishing houses that sold to universities. Then, I wrote Inside: Life Behind Bars in America. Then, with my wife's help, I launched a publishing company. It was easy to do. Instead of having to deal with the long wait of publishing houses, I could publish my work. I wrote books to teach and inspire people that were going into prison.

I was writing White Collar for a purpose. I intended to build a consulting business. I would use stories from White Collar to help businesses understand how easily decisions they made could lead to government investigations and criminal charges. Through that effort, I met Andris Pukke. He was serving a 15-month sentence for obstruction of justice. After listening to his story, I asked if he would allow me to write a chapter about his progress. The interview led to a ghostwriting project.

Andris founded a company called Ameridebt while he was a student at the University of Maryland. He grew the company to more than 250,000 customers, and it became insanely profitable. The Federal Trade Commission sued Andris. Believing that he did not violate any fair-trade laws, Andris fought the FTC until the government froze his money.

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He settled for \$170 million. I met him in prison because the government later indicted him for obstruction of justice.

When Andris and I walked the track together, he told me his story. That’s where I first learned about a new company that he had launched, called Sanctuary Belize. He owned 14,000 acres on the ocean in Belize. He turned it into a tropical paradise, with 1,000 homesites in the waterfront community. From my perspective, he struck me as an excellent businessman, someone who could teach me a great deal.

As a result of writing the manuscript about Andris, we became good friends. When I got out of prison, he offered me a job. I tried working with his team, but I didn’t get along with his head of sales. Although I kept a desk and office space at his company, I used my time to launch Prison Professors—as I felt more passionately about improving outcomes of America’s criminal justice system. Simultaneously, I began my career in real estate.

Several years later, in 2018, Andris offered an opportunity to invest in a new development. To make a long story short, I invested \$1.4 million into a large-scale real estate project he intended to build in Costa Rica.

Two months after I provided him with capital, the FTC sued Andris again. As a result of that lawsuit, the government froze the \$1.4 million I invested. On the advice of counsel, I had to sue Andris’s company. When I sued the company, the FTC retaliated by suing me. According to the government lawyers, since I met Andris in prison, I either knew or should have known that he was violating consumer-protection laws.

Those consequences don’t follow for everyone that serves multiple decades in prison, but it’s what I experienced. After litigating for a year, I had to make a decision. Should I walk away from \$5 million in assets that I had built during my first five years of liberty? Or should I fight the government to get all of my money back?

Those are the questions that help us determine meaning in our life. In my new book, I’ll reveal all the details of that investment **debacle**.

Word of the day: **debacle** / Define **debacle**:

Use **debacle** in a sentence:

April, 2021						
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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Thursday, January 28, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » Have you identified the most meaningful aspects of your life?
- » In what ways do the decisions you've made over the past week show what you value?
- » What steps do you take to create meaning?
- » What can threaten the things in life that you place the most meaning upon?
- » How to you communicate what is meaningful to you?
- » In what ways have you changed your value systems over the past five years?
- » In what ways do you anticipate your values will change as you grow older?

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Friday, January 29, 2021 / Day 29 / 336 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Contribute

The great inventor, Jonas Salk wrote: “I look upon ourselves as partners in all of this, and that each of us contributes and does what he can do best. And so I see not a top rung and a bottom rung—I see all this horizontally—and I see this as part of a matrix. And I see every human being as having a purpose, a destiny, if you like—the destiny that exists in each of us—and find ways and means to provide such opportunities for everyone.”

When we’re feeling **oppressed**, beaten, or forgotten, we’re challenged with figuring out ways to create meaning in our life. Contributing to the lives of others proved an effective strategy that worked for me.

Like anyone else going through challenging times, I wanted to transcend my struggles. I couldn’t do anything about the bad decisions I made as a younger man. They led authorities to charge me with federal crimes and to a judge sentencing me to 45 years. Somehow, I had to find a way to stay disciplined and motivated while climbing through that term.

By contributing to the lives of people around me, and the broader community beyond prison walls, I felt as if I were empowering myself. That work gave me a reason to get up early in the morning. Contributing to the lives of others—or at least participating in activities that led me to believe I made a positive contribution—helped me to build self-esteem and self-respect. Those activities led to more confidence. The time I devoted to the project didn’t promise to get me out of prison any sooner. Yet the investment I made to contribute gave me hope.

Rather than merely “serving time,” I felt as if I were a part of something more. I believed that the thousands of hours I devoted to personal development would open new opportunities. Those new opportunities brought meaning to my life.

The more I read about leaders, the more convinced I became that a strategy of “contributing” could help me overcome the indignities of imprisonment. As with any project, I had to take incremental steps. By advancing in small ways, opportunities would open for

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more significant contributions. I could sow seeds early to become part of the fabric of society, even if I lived inside of prison boundaries.

Reading *The Republic* and *A Treasury of Philosophy* opened my eyes to the power of contribution. Those books, and other stories on leadership, helped me to see that by contributing to the lives of others, I could create more meaning. That feeling helped me to suppress external forces like a lengthy prison term, or discouragement from others. As Mahatma Gandhi wrote, through contributions I could work toward becoming the change that I wanted to see in the world. That concept helped me through prison. It influenced my adjustment.

Not all people in prison get that message on the importance of living a contributing life. Many get influenced by a herd mentality. The herd can put people on a pathway of hate and negativity. I've never seen anything positive that came from hatred. Although my adjustment didn't lead to my getting out of prison one day sooner, the adjustment pattern helped me feel productive, and it opened opportunities throughout the journey.

I can easily connect the dots and see how a hopeful adjustment contributed to my journey. By being proactive, I persuaded universities to let me work toward earning academic credentials. Studying in a university opened opportunities for me to connect with mentors. Those mentors introduced me to publishing opportunities. With publishing opportunities, I built a more robust support network. People began to see me as a contributing member of society—even while I served a 45-year sentence. As a result, income opportunities opened. I got married in prison. When I got out, I could create income streams.

If you're going through challenging times, think about ways that you can contribute to your community. Those contributions will help you build self-esteem and to restore confidence. As you grow, you'll find that by helping others, you help yourself.

- » In what ways does making contributions influence your mindset?
- » In what ways can a life of contribution influence opportunities for you?

Word of the day: ***oppress*** / Define ***oppress***:

Use ***oppress*** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Insert Date if different from Friday, January 29, 2021: _____

More critical-thinking questions to consider:

- » How have you contributed to building stronger communities over the past year?
- » What steps are you taking to memorialize your contributions to society?
- » In what ways do you anticipate your contributions to society influencing your prospects for success?
- » What rewards follow for your contributions to society?
- » How will your future employers or business partners respond to the contributions you've made to the building of a stronger community?

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Saturday, January 30, 2021 / Day 30 / 335 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Build Coalitions

*Michelle Alexander authored a book that brought more awareness to the injustices of mass incarceration. In her book, *The New Jim Crow*, she wrote: “At the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, activists and others began to turn their attention to economic problems...The shift in focus served to align the goals of the Civil Rights Movement with key political goals of poor and working-class whites, who were also demanding economic reforms.” Strong coalitions are necessary to bring positive changes that topple injustice.*

As someone who lived as a long-term prisoner for more than a quarter-century, I learned to appreciate the power of building coalitions. That strategy brought me strength, helped me to build confidence, and it helped me respond to some of the challenges of confinement. It’s also helped me to create business opportunities since my release.

Anyone can use the strategy of building coalitions. Building an alliance is like building a team. If we want to tackle or overcome a problem, we’ve got to think about all of the people that can help us. We need the right people in the right positions. If we’re responsible for architecting the coalition, we’ve got to create the tools that will help our team members work toward the outcome we want.

As an example, I’ll tell you the elaborate strategy I used to architect a transfer from a high-security US penitentiary to a medium-security correctional institution. In *Earning Freedom*, I provide the details, but this thumbnail sketch may give insight you can use to engineer a coalition to help you.

Early in my term, I set a goal of bringing mentors into my life. To launch that strategy, I thought about people that could teach me and also people that could help me build advocacy campaigns. People that worked in academia, I believed, might be more inclined to participate in my coalition.

Bruce McPherson, a professor from Illinois, became one of the first mentors to come into my life. He used to visit me in the Atlanta penitentiary a few times a year. We devel-

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oped a friendship. I wrote to him every week to apprise Bruce of the work that I was doing to prepare for success upon release. He helped me a great deal and he came to trust in me.

After several years, I wanted to engineer a transfer from a high-security prison to a medium-security prison. I had to find a prison where I could make the most progress. I grew up in Seattle. The prison I chose, McKean, Pennsylvania, was outside of my region. I needed an elaborate strategy and a strong coalition to get the outcome I wanted. That strategy of building a coalition that could help me get the result I wanted included the following steps:

- » Earn academic credentials,
- » Use those academic credentials to bring powerful coalition members onto my team,
- » Provide those coalition members with a strategy to work toward getting the outcome I wanted,
- » Get the coalition member to coauthor an article with me in a peer-reviewed journal,
- » Use that peer-reviewed journal article to influence the appropriate member in the Bureau of Prisons Central Office,
- » Getting the right coalition members to work with the appropriate people in the Bureau of Prisons at both the Central Office and in the appropriate regional offices.
- » Get the right coalition member to visit the staff at the prison where I wanted to transfer,
- » Getting the right coalition member to show support and help facilitate the transfer to the medium-security prison in Pennsylvania.

In *Earning Freedom*, readers can get the entire story. They will see how building a coalition from prison opened many, many opportunities that I could leverage to build higher levels of success.

Word of the day: **topple** / Define **topple**:

Use **topple** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

Document Your Strategy / Create Resources / Measure Progress / Adjust

Weekend Recap

Use these pages to reflect on your progress during the previous week, and project what you'll accomplish in the next week. Consider the following questions as you memorialize your journey to success:

1. What books are you reading and why have you chosen to read those books?
2. What are you learning from these books?
3. How will the books you're reading contribute to your success?
4. What progress have you made toward your fitness goals?
5. In what ways are you tracking your diet, your spending habits, your daily progress?
6. What can you share about your spiritual growth, or contribution to your community?
7. In what ways are you growing your support network?

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Sunday, January 31, 2021 / Day 31 / 334 Days Remaining
Daily Discussion: Don't Procrastinate

Reading Benjamin Franklin's Almanac inspired me when I served my sentence. He quoted a proverb: "For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the message was lost. For want of a message, the battle was lost. For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost. And all for the want of a horseshoe nail." Reading that quote helped me to appreciate the importance of time, and the danger of procrastination.

On my first day in the penitentiary, I went to the library. I understood that, if nothing changed, decades would pass before my release. I hoped for a change. But hope wouldn't be a good strategy. I needed to begin planting seeds for a better life for a more productive life.

In the library, I found a book that offered information about colleges and universities. I graduated from high school with mediocre grades. In retrospect, I think that I earned a stable C- average while in high school. Between the time I graduated high school, in 1982, and the time of my arrest, in 1987, I hadn't read a single book.

Pursuing an education would become a part of my strategy. I began writing letters to colleges and universities. Those letters explained my *quandary*. I had been a horrible student in high school, I broke the law, I had decades to serve in prison, and I didn't have any money. But I wanted to earn a university degree. I asked for help.

If we're living in challenging times, we should never be afraid to ask for help. When asking for support, we should be willing to prove worthy of the help we want to receive. The letters I wrote to colleges and universities expressed my hopes of being able to study. Many of the colleges ignored the letters I sent. It's possible that the letters did not get to the right person. Some people wrote me back and told me that without funding, I could not study. But Ohio University, and then Mercer University, allowed me to begin a program that would lead to my first university degree.

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Receiving the coursework and accompanying books liberated me in a sense. In an instant, I wasn't only a prisoner. I became a student. As a student, I intended to apply myself in ways that I had never done before. The schoolwork gave me a reason to wake early in the morning. I wanted to earn my degree at the soonest possible time, and I wanted to earn grades that distinguish me as a student.

Other people in prison thought I was nuts. They asked why I would devote so much time to studying when I had to serve a 45-year sentence. From their perspective, I should take it slow and stretch out the time I would serve. There would not be any sense in graduating early if I would still have decades in prison to serve.

I disagreed.

The sooner I could earn my first university degree, the more skills I would develop. I could then leverage those skills and the academic credential to open new opportunities. The new opportunities would not have been available to me unless I had first completed the college degree. If I lost those opportunities, I knew the fault would be mine.

We've got sow seeds today for the success that we want to become in the days, weeks, months, years, and decades ahead.

- » What does procrastination mean to you?
- » In what was does procrastination influence prospects for success?
- » In what ways would procrastination influence your ability to reach your highest potential?
- » As you reflect on your life, in what ways have you succumbed to procrastination or conquered it?

Word of the day: **quandary** / Define **quandary**:

Use **quandary** in a sentence:

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Be the CEO of your life:

