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Ten Steps to Prepare for Success from Jail or Prison



www.PrisonProfessors.com

Team@PrisonProfessors.com / Call or Text: 949-205-6056

July, 2020

Dear Educational or Program Administrator:

Our team at Prison Professors offers daily, digital content to help your team teach and inspire people in jail or prison. Participants learn how to develop stronger critical-thinking skills and stronger communication skills.

Those who participate in our programming become more likely to engage in other positive programming that leads to successful outcomes. Simultaneously, participants develop stronger critical-thinking skills that help them avoid disruptive behavior.

The following website provides free access for teachers or administrators in jails and prison if they want to sample our introductory program (no credit card required):

Ten Steps to Prepare for Success from Jail or Prison

- Visit: PrisonProfessors.com/Reentry-programs
- <https://prisonprofessors.com/reentry-programs/>



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Reentry Programs

Digital Courses for Jails and Prisons

Free Sample for Jail and Prison Administrators

We create new content every day to
help administrators teach people in

Improve **Risk-Assessment** Scores

What You Can Expect:

Once you register, you will establish a User ID and Password. Then you can access our cloud-based system at your leisure. You will be able to access our videos and courses. Through this test, you will see how and why Prison Professors contributes to institutional safety by inspiring more people to adjust in ways that prepare for success. An additional benefit is that, as a digital program, you eliminate possibilities for the introduction of contraband.

What's Included?

You're now holding a sample copy of the workbook for our introductory course. We call our basic, 20-hour program: "Ten Steps to Prepare for Success from Jail or Prison." This course includes modules with downloadable PDF Coursework / Video Files / Audio Files / Exit Exam / Certificate

1. Defining Success with Values: Two Hour Lesson
2. Identifying Goals: Two Hour Lesson
3. Showing the Right Attitude: Two Hour Lesson
4. Articulating Aspirations: Two Hour Lesson
5. Taking Action: Two Hour Lesson
6. Building Accountability Metrics: Two Hour Lesson
7. Being Aware: Two Hour Lesson
8. Being Authentic: Two Hour Lesson
9. Celebrating Achievements: Two Hour Lesson
10. Showing Appreciation: Two Hour Lesson

Our exit exam is a proprietary 100-point, questionnaire to help participants assess their readiness for a successful return to society.

We produce new digital content—including video and audio files—every day to teach and inspire people serving sentences in jails or prisons.

Clients We've Served:

If you want to speak with other administrators that have purchased licensing agreements from us, we offer the following customers as a source of validation:

- Andre Matevousian,
 - ADX and Complex Warden, Federal Correctional Complex, Florence, CO.
- William Van Horn,
 - Reentry Coordinator, United States Penitentiary, Atwater, California
- Jennifer Kenan,
 - Specialty Treatment Specialist, United States Penitentiary, Thomson, IL.
- Brant Choate,
 - Director of Rehabilitation, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
- Dorian Johnson,
 - Director for Adult Programs, Mecklenburg County Jail

Pricing:

After administrators complete a free test of our introductory course. We offer the following per-institution pricing schedule, current as of July 1, 2020:

- No charge to test the 20-hour Introductory course for free trial
- After free trial: 20-hour Course: \$350, including all PDF Course Material
- Daily-Update Subscription: \$300 per month for new daily videos to teach and inspire
- Optional: Softcover workbooks at 40% discount: \$15 each
- Optional: Softcover supplementary books at 20% discount: \$20 each
- Intermediate and Advance Courses: \$25/hour for 10-hour courses on the following subjects (\$250 per course):
 - Using social media to build income streams upon release
 - Creating YouTube channels
 - Understanding investments: Real estate / stock market / small business
 - Becoming an author
 - Developing the CEO Mindset
- Call us at 949-205-6056 for quantity discounts.

How to Access Prison Professors courses:

To use the Prison Professors course, participants must be able to access a monitor to watch the videos. They should also be able to access the PDF downloads, which are included. An alternative would be to purchase the accompanying softcover workbooks.

- Use the cloud-based system to access the course from any device with Internet access
 - Portable hard drive, available for additional charge to cover production costs
 - DVD, available for additional charge to cover production costs

Defining Success with Values (Module 1):

This module would help participants grasp the importance of looking beyond their current station in life so they could see what they want to achieve. We'd work on introspection, assessing how past decisions led to current challenges. Then, we would visualize and express what we're aspiring to achieve.

- Takeaway would be for students to identify success in their lives.

Identifying Goals (Module 2):

This module works on the concept of setting SMART goals. Participants learn the importance of getting very specific with goals. Regardless of where they are, or what they're enduring, a participant can rely upon goals to build discipline and motivation.

- Takeaway would be for students to articulate goals that relate to their values.

Showing the Right Attitude (Module 3):

Participants must show their commitment to succeed, as they've defined success with their values and goals. To the extent that they can work toward a 100% commitment, they show that they have the right attitude.

- Takeaway would be for students to show that they're making a high-level commitment to succeed.

Articulating Aspirations (Module 4):

Participants will learn how to express what they're working toward. This module helps them visualize what they're striving to achieve. It helps them keep focus as they work through challenges and struggles of confinement.

- Takeaway would be for students to articulate the reason or purpose for the decisions they're making today.

Taking Action (Module 5):

With this module, participants learn the power of urgency. When they procrastinate, they miss opportunities. If they want to succeed, they must take advantage of all resources, including time. Every decision comes with an opportunity cost, so they must decide wisely.

- Takeaway will be for students to understand to place a higher value on using time efficiently.

Building Accountability Metrics (Module 6):

Despite being incarcerated, people should still learn to hold themselves accountable. This module will teach the power of journaling and creating accountability metrics. They will learn why such tactics lead to better outcomes.

- Takeaway will be for participants to show the accountability metrics they've created.

Being Aware (Module 7):

This module will show participants how to spot opportunities around them. Further, the module will teach participants how to make others aware of their efforts to prepare for success.

- Takeaway will be for participants to appreciate the importance of keeping their responsibility for success top-of-mind.

Being Authentic (Module 8):

This module teaches participants how to keep their thoughts, their words, and their actions in harmony. To overcome the stigma of confinement, a person must show the pathway to resilience. This module shows them how.

- Takeaway will be for students to build a record that makes their commitment to values and goals self-evident.

Celebrating Achievements (Module 9):

This module helps participants learn how to feel joy in the incremental steps necessary on the journey to success. We teach the power of little steps, helping them understand that with each micro achievement, we put ourselves on the pathway to higher levels of success.

- Takeaway will be for students to derive a sense of accomplishment with each small accomplishment that advances their prospects for success.

Showing Appreciation (Module 10):

This module teaches participants that we advance the cycle of success when we show our gratitude for the blessings that come our way--and we can even find blessings in a jail cell if we make values-based, goal-oriented decisions.

- Takeaway will be for participants to recognize their role in building stronger communities.

Intermediate and Advanced Courses:

We produce new content every day. We deliver all courses in 10-hour increments. Each course comes with video tutorials that teach concepts to help people use their time in jails and prison wisely. Our courses show people how the decisions they make today influence prospects for success upon release.

Contact our team to learn about our selection of intermediate and advanced courses, including:

- How to improve communication skills
- How to improve critical-thinking skills
- How to convert a personal journal into a digital asset

- How to create an email sequence for business and career development
- How to form a business
- How to understand and build credit
- How to create an online profile for my career
- How to create a Linked In profile
- How to create a video file and publish on YouTube
- How to create an audio file and publish on iTunes
- How to create a brand of digital assets
- How to create a digital course
- How to create a personal branding campaign
- How to create a digital marketing campaign
- How to publish on Amazon
- How to create a digital content strategy
- How to create an income from a computer
- How to understand valuations in the stock market

Measuring Success:

Each course includes an entrance exam and an exit exam that would measure how the participant scored, using the following variables:

- Unprepared: Less than 60 percent
- Prepared: 60 to 85 percent
- Exceptionally Prepared: Higher than 85 percent

We offer a certificate template that facilitators may give to students that complete each course successfully.

Institutional Needs:

To offer Prison Professors courses, participants should be able to watch videos on a monitor, or listen to audio podcasts. Staff members may either print supplementary

reading materials, or show them on a video monitor so that participants can record responses to questions that follow each module.

Books:

We recommend that institutions offer the following books, authored by Michael Santos. Each paperback book has a retail price of \$25.00. We provide a 20% discount for jails and prisons:

Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term

- This story offers insight into critical thinking, showing people the importance of making values-based, goal-oriented decisions. This story reveals how the author used such principles to stay motivated and disciplined through 26 years in prison. The book chronicles the author's journey from the day of his arrest in 1987 through the day of his release in 2013.

Prison: My 8,344th Day

- This book reveals the importance of making good decisions every day. It is the story of a single day during the author's 23rd year of imprisonment. The author explains how and why decisions in jail and prison prepared him for success upon release. Readers will learn the value of critical thinking, and develop an appreciation for how their decisions today influence prospects for success in the months, years, and decades ahead.

Triumph: The Straight-A Guide

- This book reveals the framework the author used to make decisions while serving time in jails and prisons of every security level. It provides the backdrop for each of the courses that we offer and create. Readers will develop a better sense for making values-based, goal-oriented decisions inside of a prison or jail setting. They will learn how to make the most of all resources available.

Success After Prison

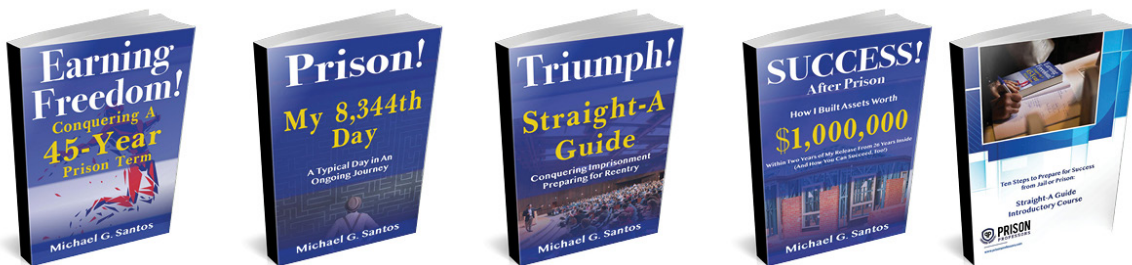
- This book shows readers the relationship between decisions made while in prison, and the prospects for success after release from prison. It both teaches and inspires people, helping them see how their work today can open job and

business opportunities upon release. The book shows people the relevance of participating in educational courses and avoiding problems while incarcerated.

Unique Value Proposition:

- Our video / audio files feature formerly incarcerated people that will authenticate how their decisions while in custody influenced prospects for success upon release.
- Our video / audio files offer insight on income opportunities upon release, with interviews of successful entrepreneurs who advise people how to use time in custody to prepare for lawful employment upon release.
- Our coursework does not threaten security, as there is no possibility for introduction of contraband.
- We're available for interactive coursework through Zoom classes.

Participants may submit questions through staff members, and our team films videos to respond.



Pricing:

After administrators complete a free test of our introductory course. We offer the following per-institution pricing schedule, current as of July 1, 2020:

- No charge to test the 20-hour Introductory course for free trial
- After free trial: 20-hour Course: \$350, including all PDF Course Material
- Daily-Update Subscription: \$300 per month for new daily videos to teach and inspire
- Optional: Softcover workbooks at 40% discount: \$15 each
- Optional: Softcover supplementary books at 20% discount: \$20 each
- Call us at 949-205-6056 for quantity discounts.

OUR OTHER BOOKS

Inside: Life Behind Bars in America
St. Martin's Press

About Prison
Cengage Publishing

Profiles From Prison
Greenwood Praeger

Prison! My 8,344th Day
PrisonProfessors.com

*Earning Freedom:
Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term*
PrisonProfessors.com

*Success! The Straight-A Guide
for At-Risk Youth and Young Offenders*
PrisonProfessors.com

Success After Prison
PrisonProfessors.com

Contact:
PrisonProfessors.com
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949-205-6056

ISBN: 9798663968904

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**

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 success. 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, The Ufkes Group

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

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, UC 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

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Pursue your steps in a deliberate and disciplined manner.

Module 7: Awareness—Call 949-205-6056 to get complete workbook

Keep your head in the game and help others know about your progress.

Module 8: Authenticity—Call 949-205-6056 to get complete workbook

Develop the CEO mindset.

Module 9: Achievement—Call 949-205-6056 to get complete workbook

Celebrate every achievement, no matter how small.

Module 10: Appreciation—Call 949-205-6056 to get complete workbook

Live with gratitude for the blessings you've received.

Module 1: Values

**Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.**

Mahatma Gandhi

How do law-enforcement officials define you? How do you define yourself? If you would like to influence the way that other people perceive you, then this lesson on values will help.

Through this course, you will learn the value of asking questions. That strategy helped me immensely. By asking good questions, we strengthen ourselves. We learn how to think in ways that improve the outcomes of our lives. Questions help us define our values, or what we consider to be central to our lives. When we identify values, we can begin to make more deliberate choices that lead to success—as we define success.

In the opening lesson, I wrote about starting my term in prison. To teach this course, I need to share what I learned. And I need to show how I learned.

My name is Michael Santos:

As I sat in my jail cell in 1987, I knew that I wanted to change. My crimes exposed me to a possible life term, and I would not be eligible for parole. I knew that I would serve at least a decade, and probably longer.

Since this was my first time in jail, I didn't know what to expect. Other people in jail offered me advice on how to get through the time. Yet they'd been to jail many times before, so I didn't consider them as reliable sources for what I wanted to achieve.

Regardless of my sentence length, I wanted to leave prison differently from when I came in. I wanted to influence the way others thought about me—in a positive way. A jury convicted me, and a judge would sentence me. I wouldn't be able to reverse that reality.

Still, if I could influence my future, I believed that I could bring meaning and relevance to my life.

When I found a *Treasury of Philosophy* in the jail's book cart, it was a pivotal moment in my life. The stories I read taught me how to think differently. Lessons in that book taught me how to build strength out of weakness. When I found the story of Socrates, I identified with him. His imprisonment made me feel connected. But Socrates thought differently from me. He wrote about having responsibility as a citizen, and I never thought about such concepts.

Socrates' thought process influenced my perceptions. Prior to reading his story, I didn't think about my responsibilities as a citizen.

I came across that philosophy book when I was about a year into my sentence. I was still a pre-trial detainee. Authorities arrested me on August 11, 1987. As I wrote previously, I only cared about getting out. My attorney described a big difference between an indictment and a conviction. I wanted to believe the lawyer. But I didn't know what I would do if authorities released me. I didn't care. I simply wanted out of my jail cell.

Reading about Socrates changed my thinking. While lying on that concrete rack in the Pierce County Jail, I stared at the ceiling of my cell. Outside, I could hear the television blaring. Other prisoners slammed cards or dominoes on the tables in the jail's day room. Passing time with card games and television didn't interest me. I needed to prepare, to make sure each day was productive.

In my search for answers, some kind of roadmap to success, I read deeper into that philosophy book.

I needed a dictionary while I read. Before prison, I didn't study. I pursued a fast lifestyle, not books. School never held my attention. Reading through that philosophy book made me realize how poorly prepared I was for any type of challenge. As a prisoner, I knew that I couldn't completely avoid confrontations. Yet, I questioned whether I could make choices to minimize my exposure to problems.

The wisdom of philosophy suggested that I should introspect. But I didn't even know the meaning of "introspect."

Introspection:

When I looked up the definition of “introspection” in the dictionary, I developed a better understanding of the word and its meaning. Philosophers said that wise men considered the motives that drove them. They took deliberate action in pursuit of success—as they defined success.

That advice made sense to me. If a person knew how to define success, it would seem that he would have a better chance of succeeding.

The more I reflected and the further back I examined my life, the more I realized I had to change. Before prison, I didn’t think about how my decisions would influence the rest of my life. The friends I chose were like me, living for the moment. I never thought about success.

Introspection from my jail cell brought clarity. By looking back, I could see how decisions early in my life influenced the choices I made. Ever since I could remember, I looked for the easy way. I reflected on my years in school—I didn’t pay attention in classes. I wasn’t a disciplined athlete. Whenever I saw opportunities, I acted impulsively, without thinking about what consequences would follow. I didn’t hesitate to lie or cheat if I felt that lying or cheating would advance my interests.

The more I reflected on my past decisions, the more disgusted I became. Those thoughts and decisions led me to become a shallow, undisciplined young man who was in trouble.

In contrast, I thought about people I admired. They behaved differently from me. Instead of being driven by greed or a fast life, other people aspired to develop good character. They didn’t act in ways that would harm their reputation.

My reputation was shot. The more I thought about my life in the past, the more I realized the impact it would have on my future. I would have to serve many, many years in prison. Then, when I returned to society, people would always judge me. They would see me as a convicted felon, or a man who served a lengthy term in prison.

I wanted to influence how others perceived me. I wanted to be positive.

Advice from Confinement

By introspecting, I began to question whether I could do anything to change the course of my future. I considered past decisions and I projected to what I wanted to become. In the jail environment, I heard two messages from staff members:

- » *You've got nothing comin'.*
- » *Don't do the crime if you can't do the time.*

From the other people in jail, I heard a variety of messages:

- » *The best way to serve time is to forget about the outside world.*
- » *Focus on your reputation inside.*
- » *The only thing it takes to survive in prison is a ball of hate in your stomach and a knife.*

That advice didn't bring much hope. I needed hope. I needed to believe I could accomplish something during my imprisonment. Accomplishments could redeem the bad decisions from my early 20s.

Reading Socrates taught me that I should ask questions. While locked in the jail cell, I didn't have anyone to ask. That didn't stop me from thinking about seeds I could sow to influence others—people I didn't yet know, and people that didn't know me.

Could I take steps to influence people to see me as something different from my criminal behavior?

That was a yes or no question.

Either I held the power to transform my life or I didn't. The more I thought about the question, the more hope I developed. My answer was yes, and I understood that decisions I made while serving time could influence the life that I would lead upon release. Still, I wanted more clarity. During those early stages of my journey, I didn't have any way of knowing the direction my path would take me.

- » *I didn't know what sentence my judge would impose.*

- » *I didn't know where I would serve my time.*
- » *I didn't know the people I would meet in jail or prison.*
- » *I didn't know anything about the culture of confinement.*
- » *I didn't know how I would support myself.*
- » *And I didn't know what else I didn't know.*

There were a lot of unknowns. But I knew that I wanted to come back to society unscathed from prison.

- » *How could someone in jail, or someone serving decades in prison, prepare for a successful return to society?*

That question led me to further thoughts. I stared at the concrete block wall. The questions I wrestled with over and over in my mind brought clarity. From that internal quest for answers, I learned how introspection could empower me.

We all have that power.

Masterminds define insanity as doing the same thing over and over but expecting a different result. As I lay in my cell, I knew that I wanted a different life. If I continued to associate with people that broke the law, I would always have problems with the law. I began to think of what I could do to change the course of my life to one that reflected my new purpose.

Restoring Strength:

Thinking about my past helped. First, I thought about all the decisions that led to my troubles with the law. Then I thought about what I could do to create more meaning. I learned to think about the future that I wanted to create.

I thought about people I would meet. I didn't know whom I would meet. But I knew that other people would influence my ability to lead a full life after prison.

A probation officer would supervise me after release.

- » *Could I take steps now to influence that future probation officer?*

I didn't have much in the way of work experience before prison. Yet I would have to persuade an employer to hire me.

- » *Could I influence the ways that future employers would judge me?*

I didn't have any money and I would need people or companies to extend credit.

- » *Could I take steps while in prison to make it easier to obtain credit when I got out?*

- » *How could I use the time inside to solve problems I would face after release?*

Avatars:

My questions turned to the people I would meet in the future. Eventually, I gave a name to those people. I called them my "avatars." I considered an avatar as the ideal type of person I would want to support me. I'll describe more about avatars in future lessons.

- » *Could my adjustment in prison influence my avatars?*

That was another yes or no question. It led to a new question:

- » *What would law-abiding citizens expect from me?*

As you can see, each question I asked opened more questions. I had to think about my responses. And I had to assess whether my responses, decisions, and actions would bring me closer to success upon release.

If people were going to open opportunities for me in the future, they would expect me to show that I'm different. They would want me to do more than serve time. Serving time didn't present any particular challenge. Calendar pages would turn without any influence on my part.

You may have heard an old saying. A judge sentenced a man to serve 20 years.

The defendant felt weak. "But judge, I can't do all that time."

“Well, do what you can,” the judge responded.

I knew my judge would sentence me to a lengthy prison term. My conviction carried a mandatory-minimum sentence of 10 years. But the law allowed for my judge to sentence me to life without parole.

I didn’t know anything I could do to influence my sentence length. But I could make choices to influence my prospects for success. My adjustment in prison could put me in the pathway of opportunities. Or my adjustment could threaten progress.

Crafting a Plan:

The judge would impose a sentence, but there would be more to the process. I could wait for my sentence to end. Yet waiting for calendar pages to turn wouldn’t prepare me to overcome challenges. I would face many challenges in prison. I would face more challenges after release. As mentioned above, I thought about:

My future probation officer and how I could persuade him to grant me a higher degree of liberty.

My future employer and how I could persuade him to look beyond my criminal record and allow me to work toward a career.

Future lenders and what they would expect me to achieve for them to do business with me.

Those questions led me to think more about the people I’d meet in the future. They led me to flesh out my avatars.

- » *Who were they?*
- » *What kinds of friends did they have?*
- » *What perceptions would they have about someone who served a lengthy term in prison?*
- » *How could I persuade those people to see me differently from what my criminal convictions suggested?*

Thinking about the future brought more clarity.

Successful people taught that thinking about problems led to solutions. Then they created plans that would lead to a successful outcome. By learning from successful people, anyone could create a plan. People in prison could create adjustment strategies. That new “philosophy” helped me believe that I could do more than serve time. I could take measurable steps to improve the outcome of my prison experience.

Anyone could do the same.

If I wanted a second chance at life, I would need to do my part. If I didn’t work hard to build a credible record, people would always judge me. I wanted to show how I matured into more than the 20-year old kid who sold cocaine. I couldn’t keep blaming others for the problems I created. To build a better future, I had to solve problems.

» *What problems would I face in the future?*

I knew that I’d leave prison without any clothes.

I knew that I’d leave prison without any money.

I knew that I’d leave prison without a vehicle.

I knew that I’d leave prison without any credit.

I knew that I’d leave prison without any work history.

I knew that I’d leave prison without much in the way of resources that other people took for granted.

» *How could a person in jail or prison prepare in ways to overcome those hurdles?*

If I didn’t take steps to solve those problems, my return to society would present many, many challenges. Those challenges, I realized, could complicate my future. They may have been more challenging than serving the lengthy term I was certain to receive.

This type of questioning, introspection, and self-examination led to the values that would define my life. In time, I came away with an answer.

If I were going to emerge from prison with my dignity intact, unscathed by the prison experience, I needed to live a values-based, principled life. My values would reflect my commitment to success. As Gandhi said, habits become values and values become destiny.

Even though I was in prison, I could define value categories. I could pledge to live by those value categories. Those value categories could influence every decision I made going forward.

Prior to learning about values, I didn't have any direction. I hated being in prison and I wanted out. But I didn't know how to create a path that would lead me out. I felt like a puppet. The prosecutor, my judge, and the prison system pulled the strings of my life.

From masterminds, I learned that I could seize control of my thoughts and behaviors. I could define values. Then I could make decisions and take steps to show others that I was worthy of a second chance. I wanted to influence the way others perceived me. I didn't try to fit in with the prison culture or with the expectations of others. Instead, I set my values in accordance with the people—my avatars—that I expected to influence in the future.

I didn't know my avatars by name. But I had some ideas of what they would expect from me. Those ideas influenced the value categories by which I would live.

Once I made a commitment to live a values-based life, I took the first step toward a deliberate course of action. I knew that I was locked in prison. And I knew that I wanted to return to society strong. To accomplish that goal, I charted out the course that would put me in the best possible position upon release.

I committed to live in accordance with the same value categories that governed the lives of law-abiding citizens, my avatars.

What would law-abiding citizens expect from me?

Masterminds taught me to introspect. Doing the work of introspection convinced me that I could influence a better future. By living a values-based life, people would be more inclined to work with me. Instead of “giving” me a second chance, they would see that I earned a second chance.

Those thoughts led me to identify three value categories. They would be consistent with the values of my avatars. They included commitments to:

- » *Pursue an education,*
- » *Contribute to society,*
- » *Build a support network.*

The Straight-A Guide course should generate and reinforce hope for participants. A person living in struggle can introspect and examine past decisions. Looking at past decisions can lead the individual to ask Socratic questions in the search for a better life.

- » *What past influences led to your thoughts about all that you value in life?*
- » *How did those thoughts influence the way you communicated?*
- » *In what ways did your communications lead to your actions?*
- » *How did your decisions and actions become your habits?*
- » *Would others define you by your habits?*
- » *In what ways did those habits influence your values, or where you are now?*

Regardless of where you are now, you can make decisions to influence a better future. If you want a better future, start now by defining your values. To the extent that you align those values with the future you want to create, you live like a mastermind.

Basic Questions:

1. *What are Socratic questions?*
2. *What does it mean to introspect?*
 - » *To rest.*
 - » *To think about past decisions.*
 - » *To plan for a better future.*
3. *What steps can you take to influence positively the ways that others perceive you?*
 - » *People will always think the worst and there's nothing I can do about it.*

- » *I can wait until I get out of prison because nothing matters in here.*
- » *I can build a record of accomplishments.*
- 4. *When is the best time to prepare for challenges you will face upon release?*
 - » *I can start preparing for release right now.*
 - » *I will enroll in pre-release classes when the prison lets me.*
 - » *I'm just going to focus on doing time now and I'll focus on release when I get out.*
- 5. *What steps can you take to influence others so they see you positively, even though you may be in a challenge right now?*
 - » *I can't do anything about the way others see me.*
 - » *I can build a record that will influence the way that others perceive me.*
- 6. *Which of the following decisions be more likely to influence a prospective employer to hire you in your future?*
 - » *I could make sure he knew I was a shot caller.*
 - » *I could show that I was great at playing cards.*
 - » *I could describe steps I took to prepare for success upon release.*

Personal Development Exercises:

- » *Pursue these personal-development exercises independently, or in a group break-out session. Respond to the questions and discuss with your group.*
1. *How do you think law-enforcement officials define people who have been in custody?*
 2. *How do you define yourself?*

3. *What steps could someone in custody take to influence people in the future so that they would not only consider the criminal charge?*
4. *How could someone serving decades in prison prepare for a successful return to society?*
5. *What steps could someone in custody take to influence a future probation officer?*
6. *What steps could someone in custody influence perceptions of future employers?*
7. *What steps could someone in custody take to open credit lines upon release?*
8. *What steps could a person in custody take to prepare for challenges after release?*
9. *How could behavior while in custody influence a person's avatars?*
10. *Who are your avatars?*
11. *What kinds of friends do your avatars have?*
12. *What perceptions would your avatars have about someone who served a lengthy term in prison?*
13. *How could you persuade your avatars to see you differently from what your criminal convictions suggest?*
14. *What problems do you anticipate facing in the future?*
15. *How could a person in custody overcome those hurdles?*
16. *What influences led to your current station in life?*
17. *How did those thoughts influence the way you communicated?*
18. *In what ways did your communications lead to your actions?*
19. *How did your decisions and actions become your habits?*

20. *Would others define you by your habits?*

21. *In what ways did those habits influence your values, or where you are now?*

Module Activities

- » *Vocabulary Exercise: In each chapter, write down 10 words you did not know. Use a dictionary to look up each word and write the definition next to the word. Practice saying each word out loud, correctly.*

Critical Thinking Exercise

Return to the module and read the sentences and paragraph sections where you looked up words. Think about what you learned by looking up the words.

- » *Does understanding what the words mean bring you a new understanding of the meaning in what you're reading?*
- » *As your understand of vocabulary increases, are you relating to the course content differently?*
- » *Next to each word, write down what you learned from reading deliberately.*

Module Two: Goals

**What you get
By achieving your goals
is not as important as what you
become by pursuing your goals.
Henry David Thoreau**

What did you do yesterday? How did your decisions move you closer to the person you intend to become?

I ask myself those questions every day. My answers align with my values, and that strengthens me. Others who ask that question can make better decisions, too. Leaders teach that we should pursue a deliberate path. We should take action steps. The steps should take us closer to the success we want to achieve. Regardless of where we are today, we can grow. We can take incremental steps. Those steps lead us closer to success, even if we're living with struggles.

Anyone can work to build a meaningful life. My adjustment through 26 years in prison led to a life of fulfillment. In August of 2013, I finished my term. I continued living deliberately, using mastermind strategies. Instead of experiencing unemployment or struggle when I got out, I had income opportunities after release. As I've stated before and I'll say again, I never ask anyone to do anything that I didn't do, and that I'm not still doing. Since mastermind strategies led to a positive outcome for me, I'm convinced they can work for others as well.

The Straight-A Guide course begins with a commitment to values and goals. First, we need to define our values. Then we advance to the lesson on goals. This course will show how making values-based and goal-oriented choices will help you.

REVIEW:

The previous lesson discussed values. I described the thought process that led to my three value categories. To recap, I made a commitment to spend every day working to:

- » *educate myself,*
- » *contribute to society, and*
- » *build a support network.*

Those value categories felt consistent with how I defined success. My avatars would recognize and respect those value categories. I wanted to walk into any group of law-abiding citizens and fit in. Whether I stood in a bank, a prospective employer's office, or a business, I wanted people to accept me. If I didn't tell anyone, no one would know that I served a day in prison. If I succeeded, I would find support and opportunity.

The strategy of working to educate myself, to contribute to society, and to building a support network helped me frame decisions. Avatars would believe in my future if I lived by those values. Defining values would help me build a better life.

The strategy would help me while I was in prison.

It would also help when I got out.

For example, a prison official could help me. A case manager may recommend me for lower security. A lieutenant may refrain from citing me with an infraction. A Warden may consider a special request. Those leaders could make life harder or easier. My values-based adjustment could influence those people in a positive way.

Likewise, values-based decisions would influence my future. A probation officer may consider my adjustment. An employer would want to know why I'm a worthy candidate for a job. People that approved loan requests would want an explanation of my criminal background. I considered all of those people my avatars. My values would influence their perceptions and my prospects for success.

I wanted to influence my avatars. If I could make a favorable impression on others, I could open better opportunities. To succeed, I used values to guide my adjustment. I didn't concern myself with anything else. Many people in prison expressed different values. They focused on their time inside.

- » *How are values influencing your life today?*
- » *How will people you meet in the future relate to your values?*

As mentioned earlier, people in prison like to offer advice. They have clear ideas on how to serve time. Some people in prison mistakenly believe that they can't influence life "outside." As a result, their decisions inside suggest that they want to ease the adjustment of life in jail or prison. They believe that focusing on what's going on in the world makes time inside more difficult. The general mentality inside jails and prisons is to forget about the world outside. Those determined to succeed develop the strength to resist the urge of falling in with the jail or prison mentality.

When I was in school, before I went to prison, I didn't think like a leader. I didn't give much thought to my future. Since I wasn't thinking about my future, the decisions I made didn't matter. That disconnected thinking led me into problems. I didn't think about how my decisions and actions influenced the lives of others. Instead of thinking about my role as a citizen, I focused on myself. That thinking pattern led to bad actions. Those actions led to my prison term. This was a very "un-mastermind" way of making decisions.

Making a Change:

I wanted a different life. During the many months of my pretrial detention, I saw and heard a lot. Hundreds of prisoners told me their stories. Many described serving time previously. They faced problems after release.

Ironically, men spoke as if serving multiple terms gave them credibility. They were prison leaders, dispensing advice. Certainly, they had solid images as stand-up convicts. People in the jail "respected" them. Those cellblock leaders decided which television shows to watch. They had their own seats in common areas. They lived as stand-up convicts, leaders in the system. The path to being a stand-up convict differs from the path to prepare for success upon release.

» *How would my avatars respond to someone that built a reputation as a stand-up convict?*

Continually asking myself that question guided my behavior.

My judge was about to sentence me to a lengthy term. The mandatory-minimum was 10 years. But my judge had discretion to impose a life sentence.

Regardless of what sentence he imposed, my adjustment inside would influence my future. He could sentence me to life. I could still work to influence a better outcome. I wanted to leave with my dignity intact, at the earliest time.

My definition for success always remained in the forefront of my mind. When I walked out, I wanted to be ready. My three value categories defined me, and every decision I made was aligned with that pursuit.

» *What defines you?*

SETTING GOALS:

By setting clear goals, I could show my commitment to the three value categories. Achieving goals would influence perceptions of my avatars. Both the values and goals worked together. A values-based, goal-oriented adjustment would prepare me for success.

Pursuing a reputation as a stand-up convict was another option. Such a value would require different goals. Those goals may not have a positive influence on my success once I got out.

Defining a Stand-up Convict:

During the awkward months in pre-trial detention, I listened to others. People spoke about the importance of a prison reputation. Decisions could either put me on a track to succeed or lead to cycles of failure. Shot callers in jail described a lot of failure outside. They described transient lives after release from earlier terms. In other words:

- » *They didn't have credit.*
- » *They didn't own a home.*
- » *Their most prized possession was a vehicle.*
- » *They didn't have financial resources.*
- » *They didn't have stable careers.*
- » *They couldn't buy commissary.*
- » *They didn't have stable relationships.*

- » *They didn't have close or supportive families.*
- » *They described problems with substance abuse or other addictions.*
- » *They described ongoing problems while on supervised release.*
- » *Their family members had problems with the criminal justice system.*

If I heard that story from one prisoner, I may have dismissed it. Yet, after I'd been in custody for several months I heard the same story from prison leaders. I saw a pattern. An adjustment in prison influenced life after release. Men who valued a prison reputation had low prospects for success after release.

A jury convicted me. Prisons would confine me for a long time. I couldn't change that fact. But I could change how I got out. The value categories would guide my adjustment. I would:

- » *Focus on Education*
- » *Focus on Contributing to Society*
- » *And Focus on Building a Support Network*

What clear goals would show a commitment to those values? Would clear goals put me in a better position to succeed?

I wanted to succeed in prison and beyond.

If you're living in struggle, how can you use these lessons to change your life today?

What relationship do you see between your circle of friends, and your prospects for success as you defined success with your values?

Transparency:

Establishing value categories influenced my choices. I wanted to go on record with my choices. Others should know of my commitment to transform. I wanted to mark the date when I would grow from criminal to a law-abiding citizen. With that end in mind, I wrote a letter to a journalist at the local newspaper.

In the letter, I wrote how I regretted selling cocaine. I couldn't change the past. But I pledged to educate myself. I would find ways to contribute to society. And I would build a strong, positive support network. That would be my strategy to prepare for success.

I invited the journalist to visit me in jail.

That letter was a first step in my quest to make things right. By writing the letter, I made it clear that I wanted to atone. I planted a seed for a new and bright future. The record would show the exact time that I made a conscious, deliberate choice to change.

The journalist interviewed me in a small jail conference room. The week before sentencing, the newspaper published the article. It was a front-page story, profiling how I said I would change. I was on the record, pledging to spend every day working:

- » *To educate myself,*
- » *To contribute to society,*
- » *And to build a support network.*

I wanted to live by those value categories. By going on the record, I started moving closer to liberty.

The Sentencing Hearing:

I expected the prosecutor to oppose my request for mercy. Instead, he would argue that I was only sorry because I got caught. His job was to request a tough sentence. He would say that I wasn't remorseful for the crimes that I had committed.

Exposure to Socrates and philosophy changed the way that I looked at the world. Earlier, I lived by a bad philosophy. I wanted to make things right. The newspaper article demonstrated my remorse and my changed thinking.

On the day of my sentencing, jailers came to my cell before dawn. I heard the sound of keys approaching. I changed from my jail jumpsuit into my court clothes. Regardless of what term I received, I had my value categories. They would serve as a guide. They would help me build a path home.

Decades have passed since the day of my sentencing. But I remember the prosecutor's words. He told the judge:

If Michael Santos spends every day of his life working to reconcile with society, and if he lives to be 300 years old, our community will still be at significant net loss because of his crimes.

The judge assessed the arguments. He sentenced me to 45 years.

Strangely, I felt okay with the sentence. Under the 1987 law, I could earn "good time credits." By avoiding disciplinary problems, I could finish my sentence in 26 years. Still, 26 years felt like a long time. It was longer than I'd been alive.

We can put that term in perspective. Imagine a young man going into prison today. Project 26 years into the future. How could a young man who began serving that sentence sustain a high level of energy and discipline while climbing through the peaks and valleys of the journey? Could I learn from masterminds how to answer to that question?

Yes!

We should aspire to learn and teach lessons that lead to lives of fulfillment and avoid further altercations with the criminal justice system.

A values-based, goal-oriented adjustment strategy brings energy and discipline.

Clear goals reflect our commitment to the values we set. Experts who wrote about goals suggest that they should adhere to the acronym: "SMART."

- » **S:** *A goal should be specific.*
- » **M:** *A goal should be measurable.*
- » **A:** *A goal should be action-oriented.*
- » **R:** *A goal should be realistic.*
- » **T:** *A goal should be time-based.*

By setting SMART goals, I could work toward success. I defined success with my values. Those goals would help me break up the time. With the decades I expected to serve,

I needed goals. Instead of dwelling on time, I focused on moving through goals. One goal would lead to the next. Achieving goals felt like building a ladder. I could climb a ladder to liberty, to success.

Can you see how using SMART goals can help you?

To set SMART goals within each value category, I thought about my avatars. They included:

My future probation officer.

My future employer.

My future creditors.

My future business partners.

What steps could I begin taking in jail and prison to influence those avatars in a positive way? Thinking about that question led me to set the following clearly defined goals:

To measure whether I lived in accordance with my commitment to educate myself, I needed:

» *To earn a university degree within my first 10 years.*

To measure whether I lived in accordance with my commitment to contribute to society, I needed:

» *To publish something within 10 years.*

To measure whether I lived in accordance with my commitment to build a support network, I needed:

» *To bring 10 people into my support network within 10 years.*

During my first 10 years in prison, I would achieve the three goals. I didn't yet know how. Nevertheless, the goals became my guide. By achieving the goals within 10 years, I advanced prospects for success. Then I could set new goals. Setting my initial series of goals brought strength. I started on a path of recreating myself. My transformation from a reckless youth into the man I aspired to become had begun.

Basic Questions:

- I. *What role do values play in an adjustment strategy?*
 - » *A. They impress our teachers and case managers.*
 - » *B. They show how we define ourselves and profess to live.*
 - » *C. They get us into better living conditions.*
 - » *D. They make us more money.*

2. *When preparing for success, does it make more sense to focus on today's reputation or focus on preparing for challenges of the future?*
 - » *A. We can't control the future so it's best to focus on today.*
 - » *B. No one cares what we do today or tomorrow, so focus on today's reputation.*
 - » *C. It makes total sense to sow small seeds that empower us to overcome challenges of the future.*
 - » *D. Success is driven by luck and who a person knows, and no one change that fact.*

3. *Which response to a question about a criminal background is more likely to make a favorable impression on a prospective employer?*
 - » *A. I was a shot caller in prison.*
 - » *B. I ran the card table.*
 - » *C. From reading 25 books on leadership, I developed insight that will bring more value to your company.*

- » *D. I didn't do it because someone set me up, so my criminal background shouldn't matter.*
- 4. *What would you accomplish by affirming your commitment to change?*
 - » *A. More people would see me as being responsible.*
 - » *B. People would judge me because of the steps I've been taking to grow.*
 - » *C. People would be more inclined to open opportunities for me.*
 - » *D. All of the above.*
- 5. *Is the statement "I'm going to be successful." a SMART Goal?*
 - » *A. Yes, because it's good to be successful..*
 - » *B. No, for the following reasons: the goal doesn't define success, the goal doesn't measure success, and the goal doesn't have a time component.*

Personal Development Exercises:

- » *Pursue these personal-development exercises independently, or in a group break-out session. Respond to the questions and discuss with your group.*
1. *What did you do yesterday?*
 2. *How did your decisions move you closer to the person you intend to become?*
 3. *How are values influencing your life today?*
 4. *How will people you meet in the future relate to your values?*
 5. *Who is your avatar?*

6. *What is your market?*
7. *How would your avatars respond to someone that built a reputation as a stand-up convict?*
8. *What defines you?*
9. *What clear goals would show a commitment to those values? Would clear goals put you in a better position to succeed?*
10. *If you're living in struggle, how can you use these lessons to change your life today?*
11. *What relationship do you see between your circle of friends, and your prospects for success as you defined success with your values?*
12. *Can you see how using SMART goals can help you?*

Module Activities

- » *Vocabulary Exercise: In each chapter, write down 10 words you did not know. Use a dictionary to look up each word and write the definition next to the word. Practice saying each word out loud, correctly.*

Critical Thinking Exercise

Return to the module and read the sentences and paragraph sections where you looked up words. Think about what you learned by looking up the words.

- » *Does understanding what the words mean bring you a new understanding of the meaning in what you're reading?*
- » *As your understand of vocabulary increases, are you relating to the course content differently?*
- » *Next to each word, write down what you learned from reading deliberately.*

Module 3: Attitude

**Nothing can stop the man
with the right mental attitude
from achieving his goal;
nothing on earth can help the
man with the wrong mental attitude.**

Thomas Jefferson

What does it mean to have the right mental attitude?

That's a question masterminds teach us to ask. We should think about how we define "the right mental attitude." Once we define the right mental attitude, we can begin to assess our individual mental attitude.

- » *Do you have an attitude that is set for success?*
- » *Are you doing everything within your power to prepare for success?*
- » *What more can you do to prepare for success?*

The initial lesson on values should help you define success. The second lesson on goals should put you on track to set and achieve SMART goals. Your goals will prove your commitment to success.

Remember that success comes in tiny steps, not all at once. Sometimes we're in difficult situations. Sometimes others attempt to pressure or influence us. They try to tell us what we can or cannot become. We determine whether we want to listen. Our values and goals should always keep us on the path to success.

Prepare to Grow Through Fertilizer:

First we must know how to define success—with our values. Then we must plant the seeds to success—with our goals. We nurture those seeds. We nourish the seeds with fertilizer. In time, as seasons pass, those seeds grow through the fertilizer. If we sow the right seeds, and if we nurture the seeds appropriately, they will produce crops in abundance. We can feed off of those crops for a lifetime.

I see three key points in the paragraph above.

We must plant the right seeds.

We must nourish and nurture the seeds over time.

The seeds must grow through the fertilizer to become healthy plants.

What does that mean? Well, remember that one of the most effective types of fertilizer is manure—a polite way of saying a word that I pledged not to use in this course. We’ve got to grow through the fertilizer (“sh*t”) in order to grow and build the future we want!

Straight-A Guide:

In this third lesson, we move beyond the prerequisites of values and goals to move into the “Straight-A Guide.” Before elaborating on the “Straight-A Guide,” I’ll tell you how and why I formed this tool. I had about 20, or 22 years of prison behind me. I didn’t know when I was going to get out. There were some complications because sentencing laws had changed since the time of my conviction. Release could come for me at 23 years, 24 years, 25 years, or 26 years. I wasn’t sure when I would get out.

Regardless of when I got out, I wanted to teach others the strategies that strengthened me, and I hoped to build a career around that vision. Strategies that masterminds taught powered me from the time I started in jail, and through the decades I served in prison. Those strategies could help others. The strategies could help students just as well as they could help people in jail or prison. They could help returning veterans that faced challenges in reacclimating to society, or people that were released from jail or prison.

The strategies help all people who choose to live a values-based, goal-oriented life. They help people who want to succeed. We simply must apply the strategies to every area of our life. We can apply the strategies to our fitness, our relationships, our finances, our careers, and to our community involvement.

I knew that I wanted to earn a living by creating products that would empower others. But that would require me to sow a lot of seeds. It would require me to grow through a lot of “fertilizer.” I didn’t quite know how I would start. I received that answer when a mentor came to visit me.

My mentor asked how I was going to teach. I told him that I would use the story of my journey, and the stories of other people. By sharing those stories, I could show how all peo-

ple that overcome struggle make small steps. Those small steps, if directed and deliberate, lead from struggle to success.

My mentor gave me some good advice. Besides stories, he said, I needed a simple tool that people could remember. After listening to his advice, I came up with the Straight-A Guide. The course's name would be easy to remember. As described earlier, to start on the Straight-A Guide, we must identify our values and goals. Those are the prerequisites. Then, each of the next lessons starts with the letter "A."

All masterminds start with the right attitude. Their attitudes align with how they define success. From mastermind thinking, I learned how to conquer struggle. It begins by defining our values. Then we set clear goals to make sure that we're not just talking about values—but living those values.

Once we identify our values and we set our goals, we move on to Attitude. Attitude is the first "A" in our Straight-A Guide.

Masterminds like Nelson Mandela, Viktor Frankl, Martin Luther King embody the power of having the right attitude. Nelson Mandela had the right attitude to make it through 27 years of prison in an unjust society. Viktor Frankl had the right attitude to make it through the challenges of a Nazi concentration camp. Martin Luther King had the right attitude to work toward restoring civil rights for all people. They defined the right attitude with a 100% commitment to success! With their attitude, they overcome monumental struggle.

Begin with the Right Attitude!

It isn't only world leaders that move through struggle with the right attitude. Business leaders like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Jack Welch prove that with the right attitude, we can create value from ideas. Steve Jobs built Apple, one of the most innovative companies in history. Bill Gates had the right attitude when he led his partners to start Microsoft and change the world with computer software. Jack Welch build General Electric with an attitude of building great companies that would lead innovation.

By sticking with the same lessons that drive masterminds, we all can succeed. Start with the right attitude.

Masterminds teach that success depends upon what we profess to hold important. When it comes to the individuals I named above, how would you define their values? If you don't know those historical figures, let me provide a brief description:

Nelson Mandela:

Authorities locked Nelson Mandela in prison for 27 years. He opposed the racist laws of South Africa. Those laws existed during the Apartheid era. Despite imprisonment for multiple decades, Mandela did not harbor any bitterness. He did not hate his oppressors after his release. Instead, Mandela worked to bring justice and peace. He became a leading world figure, personifying the best of human dignity.

Viktor Frankl

Nazis locked Dr. Frankl in a death camp. He watched as Nazis killed his family members. On any given day, Dr. Frankl knew the Nazis might murder him. He refused to show anger. He kept peace by devoting his life to helping others.

Martin Luther King

Authorities locked Dr. King in many jails. They opposed his efforts to expand civil rights for all people. He led the way to bringing awareness to injustice. Dr. King fought against inequality between races. He crusaded and united people of all races. People from around the world consider Martin Luther King a global leader. We celebrate his life as a historic American figure and role model.

Steve Jobs

You may not know Steve Jobs, but I'm sure you know his company. He and his partner started Apple Computer. Later, business decisions forced him out of Apple. Rather than being bitter at losing the company he started, Steve went on to start new companies. Then he returned to lead Apple. With the right attitude, he grew Apple into the most valuable company in the world.

Bill Gates

Bill Gates and his partner started Microsoft. Their company started with an idea. Bill wanted to make computers more practical. He believed that every business should have a computer, and every home should have a computer. With Microsoft, Bill turned those ideas

into a reality. In the process, he became the wealthiest man alive. And he pledged to use his wealth to improve the world for all people.

Jack Welch

Jack Welch studied chemical engineering in college. When he earned his final degree, he began building a career with General Electric. He rose quickly, eventually reaching the top position. Under Jack's leadership, the value of GE grew by more than 4,000 percent. Many people wrote books about his leadership philosophy, and about his commitment to success.

Learn from Leaders:

Leaders like those I mention above inspired me during my 26 years in prison. They clearly defined what they wanted to achieve. Mandela, Frankl, and King valued equality for all mankind. Jobs, Gates, and Welch placed a high value on creating value. When I write about learning from "masterminds," I'm writing about people like them. They define success. Then they engineer the path that moves them closer to success. The path never ends!

We should learn from masterminds. Their strategies can work for us. Notice how they identify values. They make their values public. They invite others to judge them by their authenticity, their integrity, and their commitment to those values.

Values and Goals in All Areas of Life:

The initial lessons on values and goals teach us how to excel in areas of our life that are important to us. But we can fail miserably when we don't use that approach in other areas of our life. For example, we frequently see the stories of celebrities who value their talent. They set goals of becoming the best in the world at what they do. Take Whitney Houston, for example. Clearly, she valued her talent as a singer. She didn't place as high of value in another area of her life—being clean and sober. Her life ended tragically from a drug overdose.

More recently, we can look at the case of Aaron Hernandez. He was a star athlete. He set goals to become the best at his craft. Yet when it came to other areas of his life, he failed. If being successful outside of football meant something to Aaron, he should have followed the same path. Clear values and goals would have helped. Aaron lost his way. He lost his career in professional sports when he committed a violent crime. He lost a criminal trial and a judge sentenced him to life in prison. Then he committed suicide while inside his jail cell.

Values and goals advance our prospects for success. To achieve a balanced sense of fulfillment, we should apply them to every area of life. Some areas where we can use values and goals as a guide to success include:

- » *Fitness*
- » *Health*
- » *Relationships*
- » *Education*
- » *Spirituality*
- » *Career Development*
- » *Family*
- » *Hobbies*
- » *Living clean and sober*
- » *Release preparation*

To the extent that we use values and goals, we grow closer to success. We can learn from masterminds like Mandela, Frankl, and King. We should make decisions like masterminds.

Values and Goals Guided Me Through Jail, through Prison, and Upon Release:

As I wrote previously, Socrates inspired me to change. After a jury convicted me, I thought about my past. I thought about how I got into the predicament I was in. I reflected on where I started to go wrong. I was locked in a jail cell, waiting for the judge to sentence me.

What could I do from inside of a jail cell to make things right? I may not get out of prison early. But what could I do to make things better when I got out? That question led to my three-part plan. I would work:

- » *To educate myself,*
- » *To contribute to society, and*
- » *To build a support network.*

I would not have come up with that three-part plan on my own. By reading about people who succeeded, I learned that I needed to define success. In my case, success meant I could return to society ready to stand on my own. I wanted to live and interact with people that didn't have problems with crime or prison. Those people were my avatars. They would want me to educate myself, to contribute, and to have a strong support network. As I wrote earlier, I didn't know those people. Someday I would meet them. I would want them to accept me as a good person. If I didn't make efforts while I was in prison, they would always wonder why I was in prison for so long. I had to take steps while in prison so that I could influence their perceptions of me in the future.

- » *Who is your Avatar?*

An "avatar," for me, was specific. When I got out, I knew that certain people would advance my prospects for success. And certain people would threaten my prospects for success. I needed to recognize the difference and connect with people that would help me succeed. Those people were my avatars. I used all of my time in prison to prepare in ways that would make it more likely for my avatars to support my efforts to succeed.

- » *I thought of my future probation officer.*
- » *I thought of my future employer or business partners.*
- » *I thought of my future creditors or investors.*

When I got out, a probation officer would oversee the level of liberty that I would have.

- » *What would my probation officer expect of me?*

Future employers would know about my criminal background and lengthy prison term.

- » *What would employers expect me to accomplish while I served my time?*

I needed to make changes that would counter the negative background from my early 20s.

Prospective creditors or investors would also know about my criminal background. What could I do to make things right with them? I would need to find creditors and investors when I got out. I wouldn't have a car, I wouldn't have a house, and I wouldn't have clothes when I got out. I knew that I would need help to get started.

Avatars could help me. While in custody, I built a record that would make it easier for avatars to believe in me.

» *Who is in Your Future?*

By thinking about avatars, I found my value categories. Then my judge slammed me with a 45-year sentence. I had to think further out. "Good time" credits would result in my being released after 26 years if I didn't have disciplinary problems. The release date was far away. I hadn't even been alive that long. I couldn't focus on the time I had to serve. Instead, I had to focus on the future I wanted to build.

» *Who is in your future?*

» *What can you do while you're in prison to prepare for your future?*

To sustain my level of energy and discipline, I had to take my mind off the time. I took the next step. I set clear goals that I could measure.

» *How to Become Successful?*

A great management guru, Peter Drucker, is famous for advising companies on how to become more successful. He spoke about the importance of measuring incremental success. By measuring each tiny step on the way to improvement, we could make further improvements.

I took that message to heart. By reading from leaders like Peter Drucker, I learned. I set clear metrics to define what it meant to make a commitment:

» *To educate myself,*

» *To contribute to society, and*

- » *To build a support network.*
- » *I needed to measure progress.*
- » *How could I measure a commitment “to educate myself?”*
- » *How could I measure a commitment “to contribute to society?”*
- » *How could I measure whether I worked “to build a support network?”*

Finding Your “Why” with Questions:

To answer those questions, I thought about my avatars. What would they expect? Then, I set a time limit. Since prison would be a big part of my life, I set a time horizon far into the future. I focused on the first 10 years. I could measure 10 years. What could I accomplish during the first 10 years? What would make a favorable impression on my avatars?

- » *In 10 years I made a commitment to earn an undergraduate degree. My avatars would see me as an educated man if I had a degree.*
- » *In 10 years I made a commitment to publish something My avatars would consider a “published author” as someone who made a contribution to society.*
- » *In 10 years I would persuade 10 people to have a vested interest in my success. Those 10 people would become my support network. If I built a support network, avatars would find it easier to believe in me.*

Guides through the Maze of Confinement:

Values and goals became my guide through prison. By adhering to them, I overcame struggle and achieved high levels of success.

If you set values and live by those values, you’re on the path. If you set goals that you can measure—with timelines—you advance prospects for success.

Use the Straight-A Guide to achieve new levels of performance.

An individual must have the right attitude to overcome. The right attitude leads to higher levels of success. Individuals may differ in how they define the right attitude. It's easy when we say that the right attitude means a 100% commitment to success, as defined by our values and goals.

Is success the same for everybody? No.

Success isn't the same for everyone because people set values differently. Some people value wealth. Some people value family. Some people value contribution to society. When we set our values, we take a step toward defining success. Our goals show our commitment to success.

Once we define success, and we show our commitment with goals, we can show that we have the right attitude. We can keep everything we say, everything we do, and everything we think in harmony with our values and goals. That's when we have the right attitude. That's when we follow the path of masterminds.

When you determine what you want, you have made the most important decision of your life. You have to know what you want in order to attain it.

—Douglas Lurton

Determine what you want! Use values and goals. Then, advance your prospects for success with the right attitude. Make a 100% commitment to make decisions that are consistent with your values and goals. I learned the value of this strategy from true masterminds like those listed earlier:

- » *Nelson Mandela*
- » *Viktor Frankl*
- » *Martin Luther King*
- » *Steve Jobs*
- » *Bill Gates*
- » *Jack Welch*

» *Can You Make a 100% Commitment to Success?*

To prepare for success when I left prison, I had the right attitude. While inside, I made a 100% commitment to success—by my definition. Does that mean I was a model inmate? Not necessarily. It means that I made decisions that were consistent with my values and goals.

I made decisions that would influence my avatars. That 100% commitment defined my pursuit of excellence. My attitude guided my decisions seven days each week. When people ask what I mean by seven days a week, I explain.

I mean seven days a week!

When people ask whether I obsessed over those goals on weekends or holidays, I explain with more clarity. I tell them I had the right attitude seven days a week. As long as weekends and holidays fell within a seven-day week, I adhered to the strategy.

I am not in prison anymore. But I still follow the strategy of having the right attitude. I make a 100% commitment to success because I know what I want to achieve. That strategy powered me through prison. I am convinced that it opens opportunities for me in society.

This principled, values-based, goal-oriented adjustment through prison helped. It allowed me to seize control of my adjustment. My attitude may not have influenced an earlier release date. But my attitude influenced how I passed through each day. By making a 100% commitment to my values and goals, I put myself on a path to receive support from “avatars.” The strategy made all the difference during my journey through prison. More importantly, the strategy empowered me to return to society precisely as I anticipated—with my dignity intact, and with opportunities for a life of fulfillment.

Live a life of fulfillment. Live in accordance with the principles of this Straight-A Guide course. It begins with Attitude.

Questions:

1. *Does having the right attitude mean that you’re adhering to some type of “model” behavior pattern?*
 - » *A. No. People can set their own values and goals. Their commitment to those values and goals determines whether they have the right attitude.*

- » *B. Yes. People with the right attitude always abide by rules.*
- 2. *How do we define whether we have the right attitude?*
 - » *A. The system defines our attitude?*
 - » *B. Family members define our attitude?*
 - » *C. Our level of commitment to values and goals defines our attitude.*
 - » *D. Our friends define our attitude.*
- 3. *When it comes to the right attitude, what do Steve Jobs and Martin Luther King have in common?*
 - » *A. They don't have anything in common.*
 - » *B. They both made a 100 percent commitment to success as defined by their values and goals.*
- 4. *Why does Doug Lurton say that knowing what you want is the most important decision in your life?*
 - » *A. You need to know what you want in order to attain it.*
 - » *B. If you don't know what you want, you can't make a 100 percent commitment to attaining it.*
 - » *C. By defining success in your life, you can engineer a path that will take you there.*
 - » *D. All of the above.*
- 5. *To determine whether you have the right attitude, you must first identify your values and goals.*
 - » *A. True*

» *B. False*

Personal Development Exercises:

» *Pursue these personal-development exercises independently, or in a group break-out session. Respond to the questions and discuss with your group.*

- I. Do you have an attitude that is set for success?*
- 2. Are you doing everything within your power to prepare for success?*
- 3. What more can you do to prepare for success?*
- 4. When it comes to the individuals I named above, how would you define their values?
Jobs, Gates, Welch*
- 5. What could I do from inside of a jail cell to make things right? I may not get out of prison early. But what could I do to make things better when I got out?*
- 6. What would my probation officer expect of me?*
- 7. What would employers expect me to accomplish while I served my time?*
- 8. What could I do to make things right with them?*
- 9. Who is in your future?*
- 10. What can you do while you're in prison to prepare for your future?*
- II. How could I measure a commitment "to educate myself?"*
- 12. How could I measure a commitment "to contribute to society?"*
- 13. How could I measure whether I worked "to build a support network?"*

14. *What could I accomplish during the first 10 years? What would make a favorable impression on my avatars?*

Module Activities

- » *Vocabulary Exercise: In each chapter, write down 10 words you did not know. Use a dictionary to look up each word and write the definition next to the word. Practice saying each word out loud, correctly.*

Critical Thinking Exercise

Return to the module and read the sentences and paragraph sections where you looked up words. Think about what you learned by looking up the words.

- » *Does understanding what the words mean bring you a new understanding of the meaning in what you're reading?*
- » *As your understand of vocabulary increases, are you relating to the course content differently?*
- » *Next to each word, write down what you learned from reading deliberately.*

Module Four: Aspiration

A noble man compares and estimates himself by an idea which is higher than himself. Such pursuits produce aspirations.

Marcus Aurelius

It's my hope that you're making progress with this introductory Straight-A Guide course. Staying focused while in school or while locked in custody isn't easy. We feel pressure. Still, if we remember how all decisions influence our prospects for success, we empower ourselves. Never forget that reality.

If I would have learned that concept when I before I went to jail, I may have made better decisions. Bad decisions led me to court proceedings, jail, and prison. The more I reflected on my life, however, the more I realized how early decisions set me on a bad path.

I chose to ignore my teachers. I chose to ignore my guidance counselors. I chose to ignore my parents. I chose friends who were bad influences on me. All of those choices led me into a life of crime by the time I turned 20. And by the time I turned 23, I started serving a 45-year prison term.

I should have made better choices as an adolescent and as a younger man. Fortunately, I started to make better decisions after a jury convicted me, while I was still in the county jail. From masterminds I learned how to make better choices. Because of the lessons that masterminds taught me, I had a better outcome when I finished serving 26 years.

How to Aspire:

From masterminds, I learned how to overcome adversity. Mastermind thinking taught me a strategy. We strengthen ourselves when we look beyond our current struggles. We have to see into the future, into what we're striving to become. We need to see and feel success. Success may be far away, but we pursue it with every choice we make.

Let me summarize what we learned from earlier lessons. Namely, masterminds teach us that we each define our own success.

We define success by stating our values.

We commit to values by setting clear goals.

We succeed by living with the right attitude. We define the right attitude with our 100% commitment to the values and goals we set.

If we can envision success, we can aspire and set aspirations.

An aspiration relieves pressure. An aspiration gives us a reason to complete lessons because we know those lessons lead to success. Our aspirations strengthen us and help us make it through challenges. They weaken the force of anything that is holding us back. We see the future that we aspire to create. Then we engineer a path from where we are to where we aspire to go.

» *Can you envision your future?*

» *How are your actions moving you closer to the success you aspire to achieve?*

Success is a journey. It's not a destination. The day we stop pursuing success, we wither. Values and goals evolve. In later lessons, I'll explain how values and goals evolved during my adjustment. The values and goals evolve, but they should always harmonize with our aspiration.

» *How will your values and goals evolve?*

» *As you advance through stages, what will change with your values and goals?*

The Labyrinth

When I was locked up, my aspiration served as a light. I had a long way to go but I could always see the light at the end. The light guided my decisions. I didn't have that light when I was a student in school, and I didn't have that light before my prison term started.

I made bad decisions when I was a teenager. At 20 I started selling cocaine. Bad decisions from my youth led me into a dark pit, or a labyrinth. Aspirations could have led me out.

I learned about labyrinths (pronounced lab-ir-inth) when I began reading the work of masterminds. While confined in the Pierce County Jail, waiting to get sentenced, I waited for the marshals to transport me to prison. I read a lot while I waited. One book I read included a story about a labyrinth.

Some readers may not grasp the definition of a labyrinth. I didn't. But the concept of finding my way out of the labyrinth inspired me. This concept can empower anyone who lives in struggle.

Socrates influenced me to change the way I thought. By continuing to read stories from authors that wrote about ancient Greece, I found a lot of stories to inspire me.

Greek Mythology

In Greek mythology, I read about Theseus. He was a mythological king, and his story gave me hope. The story introduced me to the concept of a "labyrinth."

Theseus had to save his community. A beast kept killing the youth. To solve the problem, Theseus needed to kill the beast. The beast lived at the bottom of a labyrinth. The labyrinth was an intricate maze buried deep underground.

Theseus knew that no one escaped the labyrinth. Either the beast devoured those that entered, or the individual got lost in the labyrinth and died.

Theseus valued his community.

To show his commitment to the community, he set a goal of killing the beast.

He aspired to make his community safe. He didn't want others to live with the threat of the beast.

To succeed, Theseus made a plan. Before entering the labyrinth, he armed himself with a sword. He would kill the beast with the sword. But killing the beast wouldn't be enough. He still needed to find his way out of the labyrinth. His plan would help.

Theseus tied a string to a post at the entrance of the maze. He tied the other end of the string to his ankle. After killing the beast, Theseus used the string to find his way back out.

Identifying with the Labyrinth

» *Can you relate to that story?*

When I was in my youth, school felt like a dark pit. I hated to get up in the morning. I didn't like learning. I didn't aspire to building a better life. Since I didn't have any aspira-

tions, I didn't have a reason for learning, school didn't inspire me. I made decisions that led me into prison. It was another dark pit.

Imprisonment is like a dark pit. Statistics show that most people struggle when they get out. The more time in prison, the less chance for a fulfilling life.

I wanted a fulfilling life, in prison and beyond. If I wanted a fulfilling life, I had to make the right choices. Every person has choices to make.

» *What do you want?*

» *When will you start pursuing what you want?*

Fitting in with the culture of school was one choice that I didn't make. In prison, I had to make choices about the new culture I was in. Prisoners offered advice on the best way to serve time. "Forget about the outside world and focus on life inside."

I had to think about what would follow that choice.

» *What do you think would follow for those that make a choice of adjusting to the prison culture?*

I can give you an example. Think of a shot caller in prison. The choice to live as a shot caller brings consequences. The shot caller may control the television set. He may control where people sit in common areas.

Think about what follows for someone who pursues that adjustment pattern. They can expect the following:

» *They face problems with staff.*

» *They spend time in SHU.*

» *SHU time can also mean a longer stay in prison.*

» *SHU time means less access to opportunities to prepare for success.*

» *Lower preparations for success can mean fewer opportunities for employment after release.*

- » *Fewer opportunities for jobs means a harder time generating resources.*
- » *Without resources, it's harder to gain traction in society.*
- » *Without traction, it's harder to resume stability.*
- » *Without stability, more problems with the law follow.*
- » *Problems can lead to more time in prison.*
- » *The cycle of failure would continue.*

Without a doubt, I wanted a different outcome. I set values and goals to define success. My attitude showed a 100 percent commitment to staying out of prison. My aspiration kept me on course.

Aspirations:

Masterminds teach that we always aspire to success. When we see success, we begin to advance. Pursue the deliberate path, even if you're locked in a cell. Leaders like Mandela, Gandhi, Frankl, and Martin Luther King aspired to end social injustice. They took clear steps to succeed. Even while living in struggle, they knew what steps to take. Leaders like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Jack Welch aspired to build businesses that would ease life for millions of people. They knew what they wanted. They set a path to succeed. They inspired others to follow their path.

Students can choose to prepare for the careers that they want to lead. Or they can make choices like I made. Either way, they make a choice. And choices have consequences.

Similarly, prisoners can choose to focus on their life prison, or they can choose to prepare for success. Consider likely outcomes. Those projected outcomes may lead to better decisions.

Aspirations Means Looking Ahead

At the start of my sentence, I thought about the best possible outcome. I had to look far ahead, decades ahead. Unless I made changes, my return to society would bring many struggles:

- » *I would not have a work history.*
- » *I would not have financial resources.*
- » *I would not know anyone other than people who were in prison with me.*
- » *I would not have any credit.*
- » *I would not have any clothes.*
- » *I would not have a place to live.*
- » *I would not have resources saved for retirement.*
- » *I would not have a car.*

Those thoughts could weigh me down. Fortunately, I found courage and hope in stories like Theseus in the labyrinth. All I needed was a string. A string could guide me from the depths of my labyrinth to the brightness of a better world. I would have liked to have found that string when I was in school.

Values, goals, and my attitude would become my string. My aspiration would be the new life I would lead. First, I had to kill the beast that devours so many people that serve time in prison.

10-Year Aspirations:

Another Greek myth inspired me. I read Homer's Odyssey. The story describes Odysseus, a man separated from his family and home after fighting a war. Despite his separation, he never lost sight of home. He aspired to return home. Odysseus spent 10 years fighting battle after battle. His aspiration sustained him, and he made a 100% commitment to succeed. Odysseus knew what he wanted. He had the right attitude! That attitude brought him closer to his aspiration. After 10 years, he succeeded, returning home.

Homer's Odyssey inspired me to set a 10-year plan. I didn't expect to return home in 10 years. But if I stayed true to my values and goals, I would be farther ahead. I knew that every decision I made during the first 10 years of my time in prison would have an influence on my life.

- » *Where will you be in 10 years?*
- » *Will you be closer to your aspiration?*

When I learned about aspirations, I was at the start of my journey inside. I couldn't think of 26 years in prison. I hadn't even lived that long. To put the term in perspective, project into the future by 26 years. It's a challenge to sustain a high level of discipline and energy through all of that time. As a strategy, I followed the path of Theseus and Odysseus. I set an aspiration I could grasp. I set my initial aspiration for 10 years. During that first decade, I knew what I would need to achieve. I could see success.

And what was it?

- » *Within 10 years I would have at least one university degree.*
- » *Within 10 years I would find someplace to publish an article, chapter, or book.*
- » *Within 10 years I would start my support network by bringing 10 new people into my life.*

Those aspirations strengthened me. I could see success. I could measure progress on the journey of success. I didn't obsess over matters beyond my control, like my sentence length. Instead, I focused on aspirations. By advancing, I restored strength and confidence that I could succeed.

Restoring Strength and Dignity:

Don't live like a prisoner. Don't let calendar pages anchor you in a pool of hopeless thoughts. Don't dwell on the past, or on parts of life that you can't control. Focus on what you have the power to change. Live in the world as it exists, not as we want it to be. Each day brings an opportunity to work toward something better. Make decisions that show you want to climb out from the labyrinth of confinement.

Through each of my 9,500 days in prison, I considered my values and goals. Adhering to them positioned me for the best possible outcome. If I ignored those values and goals, I became vulnerable. Decisions could easily derail my progress. After all, I lived in prison. I would remain in prison for years, for decades. People around me could be volatile. Fights would erupt over trivial issues. Television programming, noise, personal space, or perceived respect could bring problems. I couldn't ignore those realities. Instead, I needed a strategy to succeed in spite of those threats that could block progress.

Good decisions in prison could lead me closer to my aspiration. Bad decisions could threaten progress. This insight helped me assess bad ideas that I heard from others. Bad ideas can derail people in prison. For example, consider how some people in prison interpret the meaning of "respect."

Respect or Fear?

As a young person in prison, I heard many experienced prisoners talking about respect. Stump, for example, spoke about "respect" in prison. He said that anyone could get respect as long as he was willing to pay the price. The price, Stump said, was to respond immediately with lethal violence at any sign of "disrespect." Others would "respect" a man, he said, if they knew that he would retaliate to any type of disrespect with a knife.

Stump's perspective was consistent with the prison culture. Yet that perspective differed from my avatar's concept of respect. I didn't aspire to become "the man" in prison. Instead, I aspired to success when I returned to society.

With success in mind, I had a reason to avoid problems. I wanted to sidestep the cycles of failure that others faced when they finished their time in prison. My avatars defined respect differently from Stump and others in prison.

I wanted respect from my avatars, and I made decisions that were consistent with my aspiration.

Who Will Facilitate Your Success?

My avatars would not respect me if I pursued a path that included violence. They would "fear" people that responded to problems with violence. They would want that person to stay in prison.

My 100% commitment to living a values-based, goal-oriented life influenced my decisions and my adjustment. My aspiration influenced every step I took. It influenced every decision I made. I made decisions that would minimize exposure to problems.

What does it mean to avoid problems and pursue success?

- » *I avoided hustles.*
- » *I avoided television rooms.*
- » *I didn't participate in team sports or table games.*
- » *I selected jobs that would allow me to work toward goals that I set.*
- » *I was deliberate with regard to my conversations, the words that I used, and the activities that I pursued.*

Every step felt like I was crossing a high wire. Each step forward would lead to my aspiration. One false step could lead to my fall. Holding a clear aspiration gave me reasons to continue the journey to success, as I defined success.

Your library may include a copy of my book, *Success After Prison*. I wrote that book to share what I have been up to since I finished my term. As I wrote in an earlier lesson, my wife picked me up at USP Atwater in August of 2012. She had to transfer me to a halfway house in San Francisco. I was supposed to serve my final year in the halfway house. While driving to San Francisco, I told my wife that I was going to follow the same strategy that got me through prison. I had values and goals in place. But they evolved from the values and goals that I set when I started my term. The decisions I made in prison put me in a different place. I had an education, as evidenced by the bachelor's and master's degree that I earned. I contributed to society, as evidenced by the many books that I published. I had thousands of people in my support network.

When my wife drove me from the prison in Atwater to San Francisco, I told her of my new aspiration. Within five years of my release, I told her that I would control more than \$1 million in assets. If I achieved that goal, I told her that I could inspire more people to follow the Straight-A Guide. Success follows for anyone that adheres to that goal.

In *Success After Prison* I describe how I built a portfolio of assets worth far more than \$1 million. I can tell you for certain that my decisions in prison influenced the possibility for that success.

» *Decisions you're making today influence your future.*

Basic Questions:

1. *1. Your behavior today will influence your prospects for success.*

» *A. True*

» *B. False*

2. *Can you make decisions today that will advance your income prospects?*

» *A. Yes*

» *B. No*

3. *Do the friends you choose influence your chances for success?*

» *A. Yes*

» *B. No*

4. *Would the people you love and the people who love you prefer that you focus on a preparing for success, or on being a badass?*

» *A. They want me to succeed.*

» *B. They want me to be a badass.*

5. *5. Can you seize opportunities in your life right now that would show your commitment to preparing for success?*

» A. Yes

» B. No

Personal Development Exercises:

» *Pursue these personal-development exercises independently, or in a group breakout session. Respond to the questions and discuss with your group.*

1. *Can you envision your future?*
2. *How are your actions moving you closer to the success you aspire to achieve?*
3. *How will your values and goals evolve?*
4. *As you advance through stages, what will change with your values and goals?*
5. *What kind of maze are you in?*
6. *What steps are you taking to find your way out?*
7. *What do you want? When will you start pursuing what you want?*
8. *What follows for people who choose to forget about the future, and focus on the present moment?*
9. *Where will you be in 10 years? Will you be closer to your aspiration?*

Module Activities

- » *Vocabulary Exercise: In each chapter, write down 10 words you did not know. Use a dictionary to look up each word and write the definition next to the word. Practice saying each word out loud, correctly.*

Critical Thinking Exercise

Return to the module and read the sentences and paragraph sections where you looked up words. Think about what you learned by looking up the words.

- » *Does understanding what the words mean bring you a new understanding of the meaning in what you're reading?*
- » *As your understand of vocabulary increases, are you relating to the course content differently?*
- » *Next to each word, write down what you learned from reading deliberately.*

Module 5: Action

**Successful people maintain a positive focus
in life no matter what is going on around them.
They stay focused on their past successes rather than their past failures.
They also look to next action steps they need to take to get them closer
to the fulfillment of their goals.
They refuse to be distracted by obstacles that life presents.
Jack Canfield**

We must pass through hard tasks on the success journey. I didn't understand that during my school years. I could have made better decisions as a young man, taking action steps that would lead me on to the fulfillment of my goals and success. Unfortunately, I didn't learn that lesson until I was in prison.

People in prison face many obstacles and hard tasks. An example of a hard task may include spending weeks or months in SHU. The time alone limits us. While locked in a cell, we may not be able to attend programs. We cannot connect with family as easily. We are isolated from human connection. I spent months in the SHU when I was in prison. To keep productive, I took small action steps. With small action steps, I could move closer to success.

Regardless of where you are, keep moving toward success, as you define it with your values. Expect to pass through tough times today and in your future. Remember that they are part of the success journey. There is always more struggle to come. You've got to grow through the fertilizer for your seed to blossom into a solid tree.

To build strength while in struggle, I use the Straight-A Guide. It's like a compass. I use the compass to stay on course.

Mindset of Success:

I start with introspection, thinking about my past. Those thoughts remind me of the values that define who I am. My goals show a commitment to success. With the right mindset, I strengthen my attitude. I can see what I'm trying to achieve, my aspiration. This strategy helps me take the next action step. That is the mindset of success.

I had to use this mindset-of-success strategy when I launched a healthcare business with my wife. I started on this path years ago. The healthcare industry appealed to me because of the growing need. Every person needs healthcare. The aging baby boomer group means that the industry will grow. I wanted to build a business that served and eased life for elderly people.

I faced challenges as a convicted felon. To overcome my felony background, I needed to persuade licensing authorities to give me an exemption. Sometimes I faced resistance. To get through, I revisited all the action steps I had to take when I was in prison. When I thought about each action-step I took along the way, I connected the dots.

Success comes when we take small action steps. I climb hills to get where I want to go. I jump over gaps. I wake early in the morning and I work late into the night. The small action steps bring me closer to success. When I think back, I can see the power and influence of early decisions. I read the story of Socrates when I was locked in a cell. That story changed the way I thought and put. I began thinking of avatars. The avatars helped me think about values and goals. That process gave me the right attitude and it gave me an aspiration. Action steps led me into the right programs. By finishing programs, I built my skillset. Each action step helped me get through prison. When I got out, I was in a better position to succeed.

The action steps you take today will make a difference in your life, regardless of where you are. Begin taking action steps today that will ease success as you pursue your aspirations.

That is the mindset of success!

Masterminds teach the power of values-based, goal-oriented choices. We become more than past bad choices and more than tough times of the moment. As mentioned previously, some of the Masterminds who taught me include:

- » *Socrates*
- » *Nelson Mandela*
- » *Viktor Frankl*
- » *Mahatma Gandhi*
- » *Martin Luther King*

- » *Malcolm X*
- » *Steve Jobs*
- » *Bill Gates*
- » *Jack Welch*
- » *Michael Jordan*
- » *Who are the Masterminds that you're learning from today?*

Leaders reflect on the past. Thoughts of the past remind them of how to move through tough times. Their thoughts of the past give them strength to take the next step. They see how small steps lead them out of struggle. They never stop taking actions.

We learn from leaders. Their clues teach us how to make progress. Learn from the clues they leave us:

- » *Leaders know how to state their values.*
- » *Leaders set goals.*
- » *Leaders live with the right attitude.*
- » *Leaders have high aspirations.*
- » *Leaders change the world. They may live in struggle today. They choose to prepare, and they achieve new heights. They make life better with every decision, with every thought, and with every action step they take.*

Make Good Choices:

We start by defining success with our values. The values lead us to set clear goals. We keep the right attitude because we want our aspiration to be more than a dream. We take action steps to connect dots, to move toward success.

Without action steps, it's all just "happy talk." We hear a lot of happy talk from people that fail to take action. It's the "I'll-be" syndrome, evidenced by statements such as:

I'll drive a new Benz some day.

I'll live in a penthouse after this.

I'll make big money in the future.

Aspirations can include expensive cars, homes, and high incomes. But we have to do more than talk. We must take action. If we don't take action, we're only dreamers that live in a fantasy. In prison, I interacted with many people that waited for calendar pages to turn, but they didn't take action. They didn't pursue the small steps that are necessary to succeed. We need to take action to advance. We can always take a new action step. They lead us from tough times to success.

Incremental Action Steps

I learned from Marshall Goldsmith, a teacher. He is one of the top business coaches in America. I read his influential business book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. Besides writing books and articles for business, Dr. Goldsmith has a career of being a coach to CEOs. People on the path to becoming CEOs want to learn from him. They want to know about the best action steps they can take.

Since leaders hired Dr. Goldsmith to learn about action steps, I knew that I could learn from him. In his book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, I read about steps I could take in prison. He didn't write the book for prisoners, but the message was the same for anyone that wants to change.

Take Deliberate Action Steps!

Action steps bring you close to the people you want to influence.

If you want to influence people that can hire you, take action steps. Start by thinking about what they expect.

That process led me to think about avatars. Who were my avatars? They were people who could help me build a life after 26 years in prison. My avatars included:

My future probation officer,

My future employer or business partners,

My future creditors who could provide resources I would need to start a new life.

Think about the people you want to impress. Who should believe in you? Make them your “avatars.” Take action steps to prove worthy of their trust. That strategy worked well for me. If you take action steps, you can walk through tough times.

The action steps will change as time passes. Master a lesson at one level. You then climb to the next level. Growth comes with small action steps. If you don’t take an action step today, you miss out on a new action step that you could take tomorrow.

What action step you can take today? Can you read? Can you learn? Can you write? Can you do pushups? Can you do leg lifts? Can you do crunches? Can you pray? Can you ask for help?

Align action steps with values and goals. What steps will lead you through current challenges? What steps will open opportunities for you on the other side of this challenge?

I made the choice to change after a jury found me guilty. As I rested on the concrete slab of my cell, I stared at the ceiling and the walls. I heard all the noise around me.

What could I do to change?

Asking that question was an action step.

The question led me to look for an answer.

I found a book and read about Socrates.

Reading was an action step.

By reading about a leader, I could start to think in different ways.

I thought about avatars, another action step.

By thinking about avatars, I could see the next action steps to take:

Avatars would want me to educate myself.

Avatars would want me to contribute to society.

Avatars would want me to build a support network.

Thinking about avatars led to my values: Education, contribution, and support. I set clear goals. I said I would achieve those goals during my first 10 years.

- » *I would earn a university degree.*
- » *I would find a way to publish*
- » *I would persuade 10 people to help me succeed.*

To achieve the goals, I would need to take small action steps. First, I had to find a school that would allow me to earn a degree. I didn't have any money. My record from high school was not good. But I had to start. I took the following action steps:

I found a dictionary

The book included names of universities and I wrote the names.

The book also gave the cities and zip codes for the schools.

I wrote a letter to each school as follows:

Please allow me to study toward degree. I made bad decisions and I'm serving a long prison term. I want to learn so I can give back to others. Please let me earn a degree. By learning and earning a credential, I'll grow as a human being. I don't have any money. But I make a 100% commitment to learn and grow. Please let me know if you can help.

Persistence:

To master struggle, regardless of what type of struggle, we need patience. We also need persistence. Since my struggles were in prison, I had to figure out ways to transcend the walls that separated me from the community. I wrote more than 100 letters. And I had to be patient and wait. I could wait months for a response. Sending a letter is one step. Sending 100 letters is 100 steps. If I sent one letter, I may not have found the right person. By sending more than 100 letters, I had a better chance. I had to keep taking action steps.

Be persistent with your action steps.

This strategy gave me strength. I did not wait for months to pass. I took small action steps each day. They would lead to my goal. I could not control whether a school would

respond. But I could control how many letters I wrote. By hand, I wrote letter after letter. I bought stamps and I wrote to as many schools as I could find. By copying, I could write about four letters per hour. In eight hours I could write about 30 letters. In two days I could send 60 letters. Then I could wait, or I could write more.

Those small action steps brought me closer to my goal. Ohio University accepted me. Once I started school, I felt a change. I wasn't only a prisoner. I was a student on my way to earning a university degree.

I wanted more than a credential. A degree was a piece of paper. More than the degree, I wanted to learn. By learning, I could persuade avatars to invest in me. They would see me as something more than the bad choices I made when I was 20. I took action steps from prison to influence avatars I would meet in the future.

Influenced by The Autobiography of Malcolm X:

I was a terrible student in high school. Before prison, I didn't know anything about Malcolm X. While scanning books in a prison library, I found The Autobiography of Malcolm X. I read the book for a reason. The biography included chapters about a man who transformed his life from inside a prison cell. I wanted to do the same.

From Malcom X, I learned more about small action steps. He wanted to learn. He thought about his past. He could connect the dots and see how he made bad decisions. He wanted to change and to give back to his community. He wanted to teach people how to get out of struggle. In order to teach, he had to learn. He started to read. He learned new words. His action steps showed his 100% commitment to reach his goals. The book showed each small action step Malcolm took to think differently. From inside of a jail cell, he took small action steps that led him to grow and mature. He became a leader.

Like Malcolm, I wanted to grow. I had to start in a jail cell. But I could take small action steps to learn. I could hold myself accountable. I could learn to read better, to write better, and to speak better. I could take action steps to influence my avatars. Others can learn from this path, too. We need to take action to change.

Action Plans Lead to Success:

Marshal Goldsmith taught the leaders that hired him to keep growing. We have to keep growing, too. If we take action steps today, we will grow. Our growth will put us in a position for new action steps. We cannot reach higher levels of growth tomorrow unless we take our first action steps today.

I am always looking back. When I reflect, I can see the pivotal points on my journey. In January of 2017, I persuaded an investor to partner with me. He provided me with \$1 million that I could use to purchase a new piece of real estate. In June of 2017, other investors provided me with an additional \$500,000 that I could use to expand the business I was building.

I finished my prison term in August of 2013. Only 41 months after finishing 26 years inside, I was growing my business. When did I begin sowing seeds that would lead investors to partner with me? How did I start?

I started with small, incremental action steps. The first step was reading a book in a jail cell. The book led me to think differently. I developed a mindset of success. I started to think about avatars. I took small steps that would show I wanted to earn their trust. I wrote to schools. I studied. I learned. I earned degrees. I wrote articles and chapters and books. By writing, I built a support network. My commitment to succeed gave me a reason to avoid problems in prison.

The small action steps I took in a jail cell put me on a path to success. Each step led me closer. I could pursue higher goals because I took small steps early. Now, when I face tough times, I look back. I see how small action steps got me through tough times before. The tough times are part of the journey. By focusing on success, I know that I can take another action step. Just as in the past, the action steps I take today will lead to new growth ahead.

As I look back now, I can see action steps let me pivot from struggle to prosperity:

- » *I earned a bachelor's degree in my fourth year.*
- » *I earned a master's degree in my seventh year.*
- » *I published my first article in my sixth year.*
- » *I published my first book in my 10th year.*
- » *By publishing, I built a massive support network.*
- » *The support network led to marrying the love of my life in prison.*
- » *Marriage allowed me to publish more, and the writing brought income.*

- » *Income from my writing supported my wife and she went to nursing school.*
- » *With my wife's degrees in nursing, I could learn about health care.*
- » *My track record led to job offers before I got out.*
- » *I became a professor at a university within three weeks of finishing my sentence.*
- » *I persuaded investors to partner with me.*
- » *Those relationships led to my building many different businesses.*

If I did not take small action steps in prison, I would not have had success. When I face tough times today, I reflect. By looking back, I see more clearly. I can see how choices I began making in jail led to a better adjustment in prison. And choices in prison put me on a path to succeed upon release. I kept taking action steps that led me away from trouble. When troubles followed me after my release, I used my Straight-A Guide to begin charting the course to recalibrate and succeed again.

- » *What action steps can you take today?*

Basic Questions:

I. I. Why does reflection lead to better decisions?

- » *A. Thinking about the good times helps us through the bad times.*
- » *B. By thinking about past decisions, we see a connection to where we are today and we see how to make decisions for a better future.*
- » *C. It's best to forget about the past because we can't do anything about it.*
- » *D. While in prison, don't think about the outside.*

2. *Which action step would lead you closer to preparing for a job:*
 - » *A. Playing on a softball team.*
 - » *B. Getting the best seat for television viewing.*
 - » *C. Reading nonfiction books that relate to the type of job I want.*
 - » *D. Hustling contraband.*

3. *Why do small action steps lead to new opportunities?*
 - » *A. They build better skills.*
 - » *B. They keep us on track to success.*
 - » *C. They help us avoid trouble.*
 - » *D. All of the above.*

4. *Who is responsible for steering us to action steps?*
 - » *A. The system should provide more programs.*
 - » *B. People should give us resources.*
 - » *C. The government should make things easier.*
 - » *D. We should create our own opportunities to grow.*

5. *When is the best time to start taking action steps that would lead to success?*
 - » *A. Think about your future when you're close to your future.*

- » *B. Tell others that you're going to succeed, but don't make any changes until later so no one will think you're soft.*
- » *C. Start taking action steps when the system starts giving you more incentives.*
- » *D. The best time to take action steps that lead to success is today.*

Personal Development Exercises:

- » *Pursue these personal-development exercises independently, or in a group breakout session. Respond to the questions and discuss with your group.*
1. *Who should believe in you?*
 2. *What action step you can take today?*
 3. *How can reading move you closer to success?*
 4. *What can you learn from where you are in life right now?*
 5. *In what way can improving your writing skills advance your prospects for success?*
 6. *How would doing pushups contribute to your success?*
 7. *How would prayer influence your success?*
 8. *Where can you sow seeds that will lead to help?*

Module Activities

- » *Vocabulary Exercise: In each chapter, write down 10 words you did not know. Use a dictionary to look up each word and write the definition next to the word. Practice saying each word out loud, correctly.*

Critical Thinking Exercise

Return to the module and read the sentences and paragraph sections where you looked up words. Think about what you learned by looking up the words.

- » *Does understanding what the words mean bring you a new understanding of the meaning in what you're reading?*
- » *As your understand of vocabulary increases, are you relating to the course content differently?*
- » *Next to each word, write down what you learned from reading deliberately.*

Please contact us to get a full sample workbook and our proprietary,
100-point self-assessment to test each participant's
readiness for success upon release.

Contact us today at 949-205-6056