



Straight-A Guide Newsletter #1: Embracing the Straight-A Guide!

October 26, 2011

Dear Straight-A Guide Participants:

We're hoping that you're making good use of the Straight-A Guide program. It's been a useful tool that has helped many individuals and we want to continue offering it to as many people in prison as possible. That's why we're asking that you share the literature with motivated individuals you know in prison who aspire to work in this self-directed program. We've designed it with hopes of helping prisoners develop values, skills, and resources that translate into success upon release. Yet with the costs of producing the literature, paying the postage, and maintaining the web profiles, the Michael G. Santos Foundation must allocate \$50 in expenditures to cover the costs associated with each participant. Since the foundation doesn't charge prisoners any money to participate, we're asking that all participants assist us by sharing their books with other prisoners who make a commitment to preparing for success upon release.

As a reminder, the program is much more than *the Straight-A Guide workbook*. In the books *Earning Freedom, Prison! My 8,344th Day*, and *Triumph! The Straight-A Guide to Conquering Imprisonment and Preparing for Reentry*, there was a central message. Conquering prison requires a deliberate approach. It doesn't happen by accident. Recidivism rates make this very clear. Indeed, statistics show that on average, more than one out of every two people in prison struggle upon their release. They face a hard time finding employment. They face a hard time connecting with a support group that can help their transition. They find themselves ill equipped to respond to the many questions that follow lengthy prison terms. We've designed The Straight-A Guide program for self-directed prisoners who want to confront such challenges head on, from positions of strength rather than weakness.

We consider it essential that each participant respond to each of the questions in the workbook. In so doing, the individual builds more than a resume. Instead, he provides his audience with an in-depth glimpse into his head, into his thought process, into the commitment he is making to create value in his life. To the extent that an individual commits to the template for success that we've designed with the Straight-A Guide, he will stand strong. He will refer those who doubt his commitment to success to his online profile at Straight-A-Guide.com.

In each of his books, Michael Santos wrote about how that exact proactive approach opened enormous opportunities for him throughout his lengthy term. He continues to use those strategies even now, as he moves through his final year of confinement in the Atwater federal prison camp. Whenever Michael reads of someone or comes into contact with anyone who might be sympathetic to the plights of prisoners, Michael reaches out with a communication. He is straightforward with the people he writes, explaining how hard he works to earn a place for himself in the world upon release and asks for their sponsorship or assistance. To validate his commitment, Michael refers people to his website as an offer to prove his authenticity. Those of

us at the foundation urge all participants to do the same. Build your online presence, then use it as a tool to open new opportunities.

Michael has begun a new strategy that each of you may consider. He writes an open letter to his prospective probation officer each month. Although Michael does not know who his probation officer is going to be, or even the jurisdiction where he will begin his life, what he does know is that a time will come when he has to sit across the table from his parole officer. Anticipating that time, Michael wants to put himself in the strongest possible position. Without a doubt, the probation officer will have reviewed the Presentence Investigation Report and any reports that the Bureau of Prisons has prepared. By writing the open letters for his probation officer each month, Michael makes a tangible effort to contribute to the narrative that the probation officer will consider. He publishes that open letter on his blog at the Straight-A-Guide.com website. Every participant should consider doing the same.

Each month going forward, I will write a newsletter with some ideas on how participants can make better use of their profile pages at the Straight-A-Guide.com. The important lesson for individuals to remember is that success upon release from prison will not materialize by accident. Individuals must anticipate the many obstacles they will face, and they should take proactive, measurable steps that lead to success. The online presence they build can help. To the extent that they focus on developing that profile, they will enhance their prospects for success.

I'm challenging you to work harder. Demonstrate your commitment to working toward success. Don't be full of the happy talk that pollutes every prison. Instead, set measurable goals and then crush expectations. I urge you to do so by working through our program at the Straight-A Guide. One promise I make is that it will never cost you a penny to participate, but if you work harder, you can play a role in building a meaningful program that not only helps you, but all participants. And as more prisoners prepare for success, we can bring awareness to this wretched system that stings so many with the plague of failure. We hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Justin Paperny
Executive Director
Michael G. Santos Foundation