



Straight-A Guide Newsletter #10: Living the Straight-A Guide

July 1, 2012

Dear Straight-A Guide Participants:

I received an email message from Michael. He wrote to tell me how he's using the Straight-A Guide to help him cross through what he describes as the most frustrating part of his lengthy prison experience. When he wrote me, Michael was completing his 9,103rd day of continuous confinement. He said that he was scheduled for his initial parole hearing on August 9, 2012, but he didn't know what would transpire after the hearing. He expected that he would be released before the holiday season, but not knowing when was causing him considerable anxiety. To cope, he wrote that he set a goal of running 500 miles during the month of July.

Running 500 miles would not be easy, but he made a 100 percent commitment toward achieving the goal. That commitment reflected his Attitude, which I recognized as the first "A" in the Straight-A Guide. He said that although he could not control or influence the decisions that authorities made with regard to his release, he could control the way he responded to uncertainty. Instead of thinking about getting out, he said that he was determined to run farther during the month of July than he had ever run in a single month before. Even though he was confined in the Central Valley of California, and July was the hottest month of the year, with long strings of days exceeding 100 degrees, he said that nothing was going to stop him from reaching his goal. That's a 100 percent commitment.

His Aspiration was very clear. He said that he was going to run 500 miles. That type of clarity, he wrote, made all the difference throughout his 25-year odyssey through federal prison. He didn't write that he was going to run a long ways. Instead, he wrote that he would achieve a very specific goal of running 500 miles. Those who read *Earning Freedom*, or any of the other books that are associated with the Straight-A Guide know that clearly defined goals were an integral component of Michael's adjustment from the time he entered the penitentiary. That strategy of setting clear goals carried him through the decades and he encouraged others to do the same.

But the attitude and aspiration were only the first two components of the Straight-A Guide. Michael had to take action. His letter to me indicated that he planned to run every day of the month and he expected to average more than 17 miles a day. He could hold himself accountable that way, always checking the data to see whether he was on track to succeed. He published his accountability log every day, and on the 12th day of the month, he had already reached 259 miles. By writing about it on his accountability log, he explained, others became aware of his commitment and wrote to encourage him. Their awareness inspired him and sustained his commitment. Each day, he celebrated his achievement of running by eating high-caloric food. On the day he wrote me, Michael said that he ate three pints of ice cream. He said that he was appreciative of those who encouraged him, and he was determined to continue because he didn't want to fail.

Like others who use the Straight-A Guide as a tool, Michael values its power. Without values, goals, and a system to overcome struggle, he wrote that he could easily lose his way during this frustrating final days, weeks, or months of his imprisonment. Although Michael doesn't know precisely how much longer he will serve, he pledged to spend the rest of his life working to bring awareness to the many people in prison who do not need incarceration. The more people who document the ways that they're using the Straight-A Guide to overcome struggle, the more data he will have to persuade others to change this wretched system that confines so many, needlessly separating too many prisoners for far too long from their family and loved ones.

I just wanted to share this information about Michael's continuing commitment to the Straight-A Guide, and encourage each of you to embrace the strategy to prepare for success upon release regardless of what obstacles you may face through the journey.

Sincerely,

Justin Paperny
Executive Director
Michael G. Santos Foundation