



Straight-A Guide Newsletter #5: Importance of Preparation

February 22, 2012

Dear Straight- A Guide Participants:

On Tuesday, 21 February, The Wall Street Journal reported that the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics showed signs that should concern all participants in our Straight-A Guide Program. The primary objective of the MGSF in offering the Straight-A Guide program to people in prison is to encourage them to take active roles in preparing for law-abiding, contributing lives upon release. Such preparations require us to live values-based, principled lives in accordance with what our program describes as attitude, aspiration, action, accountability, awareness, achievement, and appreciation. That disciplined path would help people in prison overcome the challenges that await their release.

The Labor Department's report revealed that jobs are hard to come by for unskilled workers who lack documented credentials. In fact, whereas the unemployment rate is dropping overall, it isn't falling for those who lack basic skills in reading and writing. Further, the Labor Department expects that gap to widen in the years to come because more jobs require higher levels of skill and education. Men with limited reading or math capabilities have trouble getting into job apprenticeship programs. Indeed, of the more than 1,000 jobs listed on a career website, only two didn't require a high school diploma. Of those two jobs, one was a hotel cleaning position, which paid only \$8.50 an hour.

Those who want to overcome the challenges of a difficult labor market should prepare themselves, and I'm convinced that the Straight-A Guide can help. Any individual who takes the time to document the preparations he makes to emerge from prison successfully strengthens his chances for triumphing over the challenges of securing gainful employment upon release. In fact, those who work read all of the literature and complete the Straight-A Guide Workbook go along way toward advancing their chances of finding support and even employment before they walk out of prison. The factor that determines success upon release hinges most on how well an individual prepares himself. At the MGSF, we are convinced that individuals who document their deliberate climb through the hardship of imprisonment advance their prospects for success. It worked for Michael and it can work for anyone who embraces the same strategy.

The beauty of documenting a path to liberty on the Straight-A Guide website is that it shows how an individual can "think different" from the herd mentality that exists in most prisons. Instead of waiting for the system of imprisonment to do something that will prepare an individual for success upon release, individuals on the Straight-A Guide prepare themselves. They read literature that inspires growth. They develop skills that employers

value. They build support networks that have a vested interest in the individual's success upon release.

As all of the literature in the Straight-A Guide suggests, each individual must hold himself accountable. Think of how you spent your time during the past week. On a scale of one to ten, what grade would you give yourself with regard to your preparations for release? If you were to repeat that adjustment pattern during each of the remaining weeks that you have to serve, how would your life be different upon release? Allow such questions to become your guide. They may help you focus, and they may help you keep in perspective the importance of preparing. Because the will to succeed isn't nearly as important as the will to prepare to succeed.

I encourage each of you who participate in the Straight-A Guide to continue. I'm doing my part out here to generate more sponsorship. All I ask is that you do your part in there, documenting your journey as you prepare to emerge from prison successfully.

I send my best wishes.

Sincerely,
Justin Paperny
Executive Director
Michael G. Santos Foundation