



**Ten Steps to Prepare for Success  
from Jail or Prison:**

## **Straight-A Guide Introductory Course**



**Module 10:  
Appreciation**

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## Module 10: Appreciation

**As we express our gratitude we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. Self-acknowledgement and appreciation are what give you the insights and awareness to move forward toward higher goals and accomplishments.**

**John F. Kennedy**

### Appreciation:

**W**e're in the final lesson of this introductory course to the Straight-A Guide. But the course isn't over. This course does not have an end. In fact, more than a course, the Straight-A Guide is a strategy. It's a strategy for participants that want to develop the mindset of success.

Our team at Prison Professors created this introductory course by revealing how the strategy that powered me through a lengthy prison term. I am hopeful that all participants find value in the message.

In earlier lessons, I wrote about how I would've liked to receive this message as a student. If I learned as a student, I would've made better decisions. I would've chosen better friends and role models. I would've made decisions that led to success rather than prison.

I offer that personal insight because I am authentic. I never ask anything to do or say anything that I did not do or say. Moving from failure to success begins with authenticity.

I would not be authentic if I didn't disclose my many failures from youth. I had many failures as a student. Ironically, I didn't develop the mindset of success until a jury convicted me. Soon after that conviction, a federal judge sentenced me to serve a 45-year prison term.

But it's never too early and it's never too late to develop the mindset of success. If you're a student, think about what steps you can take to be authentic. And think about steps you're taking to reflect on your appreciation for the blessings that have come your way.

If you're in struggle, in jail, in prison, or facing challenges in society, think about your past. Think about the steps that led to your current predicament. What steps can you take today to influence a better future?

### Learn from Masterminds:

I learned from many world leaders. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi inspired me, and I'm confident his message can inspire anyone. Regardless of where you are, Gandhi tells us

that we can create our happiness. To create happiness, we must keep our thoughts, our words, and our actions in harmony. As Gandhi did, we should strive to live as the change we want to see in the world.



I strive to be the change that I want to see in the world. To earn trust, I live authentically. I never ask anyone to do anything that I didn't do and that I don't continue to do. This path leads to "self-actualization." We self-actualize when we know that we're making progress. Our success becomes self-evident, as everyone knows that we've conquered a challenge. When we're successful, we show appreciation for the lessons we learned. We share those lessons with others so they can become successful, too.

Why?

I want people to avoid making decisions that can lead them to jail or prison. I want people who are in jail or prison to realize that they can start building a pathway that can lead to success stories. A success story means that a person isn't running from the law, or anyone else. A success story means that an individual can hold his head high, with his dignity intact. Those who pursue success realize the influence of every decision. They see the opportunities and threats, the strengths and weaknesses in every choice they make. Strategic thinking, or the mindset of success, leads to a more fulfilling outcome, regardless of where an individual begins.

Steve Jobs paraphrased the famous artist, Picasso. They said: Good artists copy ideas. Great artists steal ideas. To write the Straight-A Guide, I stole ideas from masterminds. Participants that want to develop the mindset of success may use the same strategies of stealing ideas from masterminds. Masterminds always:

- » *Identify values.*
- » *Set clear goals.*
- » *Pursue success with the right attitude.*
- » *Have aspirations for the success they want to become.*
- » *Take action steps.*
- » *Hold themselves accountable.*



- » *Stay aware of options, and make others aware of their commitment to success.*
- » *Celebrate every achievement along the way.*

Participants that adhere to the Straight-A Guide path become authentic. They don't say they want to be successful. Instead, they pursue success in a deliberate, scientific, methodical way.

Anyone can self-actualize, making success self-evident. We don't need anyone else to say we're successful. When we live in accordance with our values and goals, we experience success every day.

Like all people, we've made bad decisions in the past, and we've made good decisions in the past. At any given time, we can choose to learn from those decisions. We can choose how we define success. Then we can begin to make deliberate decisions. Our decisions and actions reflect our values and goals. They take us from where we are to where we want to go. We know we're successful when we're living a values-based, goal-oriented life.

Define your life with thoughts, words, and actions. Let those thoughts, words, and actions reflect your commitment to success. Reject the negativity of happy talk about success, it pollutes the environment.

## Being Authentic:

In this initial, introductory Straight-A Guide course, I teach strategies by sharing my own experiences. Future lessons share the story of other people that conquered struggle. They may have made bad decisions in school. They may have made bad decisions at different stages of their life. But they all chose to become a better. They all chose to draw a line in the sand. They all chose to conquer struggle, and they began by defining success.

They defined success with their values. They set clear goals to show their commitment to success. Then they adhered to principles of the Straight-A Guide. They had the right attitude. Their aspirations helped them to visualize success. They took incremental action steps and held themselves accountable. They became aware of opportunities to seize and others became aware of them. They celebrated small achievements. And they were authentic. No one could dispute his or her success.

Intermediate and advanced courses will teach concepts of personal leadership, critical thinking, and practical courses. All of them adhere to the same principled strategy of growth and success.

Videos that accompany this course profile other people that began to transform their life while they served time in jail. We'll offer additional videos with business leaders that discuss what they would lie to see from people who want to begin building careers—even if they have a criminal record.



## Shon Hopwood:

You can see an example of someone who adhered to the principles of the Straight-A guide by reading the story of Shon Hopwood. Shon authored *Law Man: My story of Robbing Banks, Winning Supreme Court Cases, and Finding Redemption*. His story shows that regardless of what bad decisions a person has made in the past, it's never too late to build a better future.

Shon's book reveals how he made bad decisions as a student. He chose friends that led him into trouble. While in his late teens, Shon experimented with drugs. He participated in armed bank robberies. He served longer than 10 years in federal prison.

While in custody, however, Shon made a choice to change. He chose to learn. He chose to become more than his past. As a consequence of Shon defining success differently, he learned the law. Then he started to help other people in prison. He made a 100% commitment to learn how to read the law and research the law. Shon took action by learning how to write persuasive legal arguments. He held himself accountable by devoting time each day to improve his skill. Anyone can choose to follow Shon's path.

Shon kept his head in the game. He stayed aware of opportunities in the law that he could use to help others. He celebrated achievements when others he helped won victories in court. He won cases in district courts, appellate courts, and the United States Supreme Court.

Because of Shon's commitment to success while serving 10 years in prison, opportunities opened for him. When he got out, he finished college. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation gave him a scholarship. He earned his law degree at the University of Washington Law School. With his law degree, he accepted his first job as a clerk for the DC Circuit Court of Appeals. Then Georgetown Law School made him a full-time associate law professor. Later, President Trump worked closely with Shon on criminal justice reform issues.





Shon's story shows how a person can choose to build a better life, even if a person is in custody. He is authentic and his success is self-evident. Shon shows his appreciation for the blessings that have come into his life. Each year, he volunteers hundreds of hours working to bring systemic improvements to social justice issues, including sentencing laws and the prison system.

## Walk the Way:

Anyone that adheres to principles of the Straight-A Guide can go from struggle to success. But as they say in *The Matrix* it's one thing to know the way. It's quite another thing to walk the way.

While in prison, neither Shon nor I knew what challenges we would face after release. We had ideas, but we didn't know. We needed to prepare. We needed to get ready to overcome challenges. We needed to define success with our values and we needed to set clear goals. Then we needed to follow the principled path of the Straight-A Guide.

We learned a great deal during the decades that we served in prison. By sharing those lessons, we hope to inspire others.

To overcome struggle, we must walk the way of masterminds.

## Not for Everyone:

As I present this final lesson on our introductory course, I'm reminded of an interview I read with the author James Patterson. Mr. Patterson has authored dozens of novels and he has sold millions of books. During an interview, a journalist asked Patterson to respond to critics. Some of those critics accused Patterson of not being a very literary stylist.

When the journalist asked the question, Patterson responded, "I'm not a very good literary stylist. He said: "There are millions of people that don't like how I write. Fortunately, a few million do."

As one of the best-selling authors of all time, Patterson didn't need other people to define his success. His success was self-evident. But there would always be people who disagreed with his approach. Those disagreements didn't matter. He defined his success and he pursued it.

Similarly, not everyone will agree with the Straight-A Guide message of hope and self-reliance. We want our readers to define their path to success. By following a principled path, we're confident that anyone can reach a higher potential.



## Getting Out of Prison:

I remember when my wife drove me from the prison in Atwater to the halfway house in San Francisco. I had 25 years of prison behind me, and one more year in a halfway house before I finished my obligation to the Bureau of Prisons. Then I would start my term on Supervised Release. My wife and I talked about the career I wanted to build. I told her what I'm telling you now.

I want to help people who live in struggle become more successful. It didn't matter if they were in school, in prison, or in struggle with other areas of their lives.

To earn trust from people, I needed proof. People had to believe the strategies I taught would lead to their success. I told my wife that I wanted to build assets. I made a commitment to build assets worth at least \$1 million within five years of release. By achieving that goal, I people would believe. They would believe that if they pursued this path, they could become more successful. I've been on this path—with a mindset of success—since I began my prison term. I'm still on it.

I connect with participants through words, photographs, and videos. Through those efforts, I strive to show my authenticity. But neither the digital assets, nor the live presentations, show how many hours I must devote to this effort each day. No one can see the incremental progress—or investment I must make—to create courses. I could not complete any of this work if I did not follow the Straight-A Guide path every day.

Think it through.

On the day that I left prison, I was behind with technology. When I went to prison, the Internet didn't exist. I never sent or received an email. I did not know how to create a video or publish it online. I didn't know how to use technology that would allow me to create products. I had to purchase computer equipment and software. Once I had the equipment, I needed to invest hundreds of hours to learn how to use it. Each day I invest time to learn.

I create products. Then I must find a market for those products. School and prison leaders are not so willing to purchase products from a man that served multiple decades in prison. After all, until the U.S. Parole Commission released me, I had to report my activi-



ties to a federal probation officer. Since I made principled decisions, I could do so with my dignity intact..

If you have access to books I wrote, you will see that I did not begin this path on a whim. I've been committed to sharing this message for decades. If you do not have access to the books, your family members can easily find them online. Those books will show my decisions through prison. They also will show strategies I used to overcome challenges since my release. I started to employ strategies and the mindset of success while I was at the start of my prison journey. I stayed with the strategy through the 9,500 days I lived as a prisoner. I used those strategies since my release from prison. And I continue to use the strategies today.

I hope you will see that by adhering to the Straight-A Guide principles, I'm authentic.

## **Authenticity and Appreciation:**

The Straight-A Guide expresses the importance of being authentic. When we appreciate the blessings that have come our way, we bring more blessings. Masterminds live in a state of gratitude.

Every day opens an opportunity for further growth and fulfillment. Masterminds plant seeds and they nurture gardens. Consider the metaphor. By enriching soil, caring for plants, removing weeds, and regular watering, gardens thrive.

Masterminds invest energy to build great gardens. They see the value of creating strong networks. To build stronger networks, they invest in others that prove worthy. Those investments bear fruit, bringing more value. People can show appreciation for blessings that come their way. They give time, energy, or resources. This brings their commitment to success full circle. As they create more success for more people, they live more fulfilling lives.

## **Map of Success:**

Masterminds give us their map. Observe and learn from their principled approach to life. We see how to chart our own course to success as we define success—with our values and goals.



Arriving at our success begins with our preparation. Commit by following the map. Think of this concept as if preparing for a transatlantic journey. Years may pass before we reach our destination. Yet we know the value of choices we make every day. Choices will either bring us closer to our destination or lead us farther away.



If we're beginning our journey on the other side of the world, and we want to come home, we need to consult this map. The map helps us stay the course. We know that we'll face storms of adversity along the way. By staying the course, we also know that we will reach our destination.

We define our destination with our values and goals. Follow lessons from the Straight-A Guide course. Each lesson has value, including this final lesson on "appreciation."

## Concept of Appreciation:

Struggles anywhere can lead to a culture of negativity. Negativity can pull a person under the current. At any given moment, storms threaten to sink our ship. To triumph over the pull that sinks so many, accept the principled path of masterminds. Use the strategy as a compass. To reach your destination, you must anticipate darkness. You'll face rough seas, even hurricanes. Use the strategies as your map and your compass. They will lead you to calmer seas and advance you along your course.

- » *Stay true to the values by which you profess to live.*
- » *Always set short and long term goals.*
- » *Proceed with your 100% commitment to success.*
- » *Never lose sight of your aspiration.*

Advance in pursuit of that aspiration as the days turn into weeks, the weeks into months, and the months into years.

- » *Seize every opportunity to take action.*
- » *Your action steps will open further opportunities for growth.*



- » *Hold yourself accountable.*
- » *Live transparently, inviting others to hold you accountable.*
- » *Keep your head in the game.*
- » *Become aware of new and exciting ways to accelerate your progress.*
- » *Others will become aware of your pursuit of excellence. They will invest in you.*
- » *Celebrate every achievement.*

## Be authentic.

Express gratitude and appreciation for the blessings that come your way.

Invest in community renewal, helping those around you to reach their highest potential.

This strategy will influence:

- » *The friends you choose.*
- » *The activities you pursue.*
- » *The mentors you bring into your life.*
- » *The way that people in authority treat you.*
- » *The gradual improvements in your living conditions.*
- » *The employment opportunities you open.*
- » *The language you use to communicate.*
- » *The time you devote to your fitness.*
- » *The books that you read.*

- » *The skills that you develop.*
- » *The relationship you build with your family and loved ones.*
- » *The resources you have to draw upon.*
- » *The way that you use those resources.*
- » *The support network that believes in you.*
- » *Your access to credit and investors.*
- » *Your access to business opportunities.*
- » *Your reputation.*



## Gambler or Investor:

Living in struggle may influence your perspective. I encourage you to introspect. Consider whether you want to live as a gambler or as an investor. Either way, you choose. A gambler may play the odds and live by chance. An investor thinks more strategically. An investor assesses the landscape and surroundings, then determines the best way to deploy resources.

Both gamblers and investors have opportunities to win. Those who think strategically succeed at a far higher level.

The greatest gamblers operate more like investors. They minimize chance by training to read signs and clues. They place their bets in accordance with a skill set that they develop over time.

What factors influence their decisions? They look at every data point that comes their way. With sports betting, they want to know big-picture issues like weather patterns and soil conditions. They also want to know minute issues, like rosters and injury lists and statistics of personal athletes. The more they know, they better they can place their bets.

Investors take the same approach. They consider as many data points as possible when making decisions. Investors evaluate price-earnings multiples. They look at year-



over-year sales growth. They want insight on equity returns. They weigh executive competency and many other factors. Data points make investors more confident to put money on the line.

Whether you choose to live as a gambler or an investor, make good decisions. Always acknowledge the stakes. Your life and your future are at stake. Assess your environment. See the big-picture and see the moment. Then set priorities that are consistent with your values and goals. Remember that the right decision at the wrong time is the wrong decision.

## Big Picture Perspective:

The big picture perspective for people in prison is ugly. Statistics show that seven out of every ten people in prison face challenges when they get out. They struggle to find employment. They face challenges in finding permanent housing. They may have troubles with substance abuse. Strategies in this course helped me overcome those problems. I'm convinced the strategies can help you. But you must decide.

At Prison Professors, we encourage you to learn from our other courses. We profile others who have gone through struggle. They've built lives of success. They followed a principled path that we strive to convey with our Straight-A Guide.

We wish you success!

## Basic Questions:

*I. I. What does it mean to be authentic?*

- » *A. To be a pet of the administration.*
- » *B. To be popular with your peers.*
- » *C. To keep everything you say, everything you think, and everything you do in harmony.*
- » *D. To have a job.*



2. *Why does being authentic lead others to trust in you and support your efforts?*
  - » *A. They see that you do what you say you're going to do.*
  - » *B. They see that your actions are consisted with your values and goals.*
  - » *C. They see that you don't ask anyone to do anything that you're not doing.*
  - » *D. All of the above.*
3. *3. Is the following statement true or false? People are more inclined to find others authentic if they document incremental achievements.*
  - » *A. True*
  - » *B. False*
4. *4. Why does it make sense to show appreciation for the blessings you receive?*
  - » *A. You may receive a certificate.*
  - » *B. You may receive an extra bowl of cereal.*
  - » *C. You may have your own seat reserved.*
  - » *D. You keep the cycle of growth going and contribute to a better community.*
5. *5. Is the following statement true or false? By helping others in your community, you simultaneously help yourself.*
  - » *A. True*
  - » *B. False*





## 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. *What steps can you take today to influence a better future?*
2. *What can you do create happiness?*
3. *How are you defining success today?*

## 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?*