



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

Straight-A Guide Introductory Course



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**Module 2:
Goals**

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 breakout 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?*
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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.*