



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

Straight-A Guide Introductory Course



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**Module 3:
Attitude**

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**Nothing can stop the man
with the right mental attitude
from achieving his goal;
nothing on earth can help the
man with the wrong mental attitude.**

Thomas Jefferson

What does it mean to have the right mental attitude?

That's a question masterminds teach us to ask. We should think about how we define "the right mental attitude." Once we define the right mental attitude, we can begin to assess our individual mental attitude.

- » *Do you have an attitude that is set for success?*
- » *Are you doing everything within your power to prepare for success?*
- » *What more can you do to prepare for success?*

The initial lesson on values should help you define success. The second lesson on goals should put you on track to set and achieve SMART goals. Your goals will prove your commitment to success.

Remember that success comes in tiny steps, not all at once. Sometimes we're in difficult situations. Sometimes others attempt to pressure or influence us. They try to tell us what we can or cannot become. We determine whether we want to listen. Our values and goals should always keep us on the path to success.

Prepare to Grow Through Fertilizer:

First we must know how to define success—with our values. Then we must plant the seeds to success—with our goals. We nurture those seeds. We nourish the seeds with fertilizer. In time, as seasons pass, those seeds grow through the fertilizer. If we sow the right seeds, and if we nurture the seeds appropriately, they will produce crops in abundance. We can feed off of those crops for a lifetime.

I see three key points in the paragraph above.

We must plant the right seeds.

We must nourish and nurture the seeds over time.

The seeds must grow through the fertilizer to become healthy plants.

What does that mean? Well, remember that one of the most effective types of fertilizer is manure—a polite way of saying a word that I pledged not to use in this course. We’ve got to grow through the fertilizer (“sh*t”) in order to grow and build the future we want!



Straight-A Guide:

In this third lesson, we move beyond the prerequisites of values and goals to move into the “Straight-A Guide.” Before elaborating on the “Straight-A Guide,” I’ll tell you how and why I formed this tool. I had about 20, or 22 years of prison behind me. I didn’t know when I was going to get out. There were some complications because sentencing laws had changed since the time of my conviction. Release could come for me at 23 years, 24 years, 25 years, or 26 years. I wasn’t sure when I would get out.

Regardless of when I got out, I wanted to teach others the strategies that strengthened me, and I hoped to build a career around that vision. Strategies that masterminds taught powered me from the time I started in jail, and through the decades I served in prison. Those strategies could help others. The strategies could help students just as well as they could help people in jail or prison. They could help returning veterans that faced challenges in reacclimating to society, or people that were released from jail or prison.

The strategies help all people who choose to live a values-based, goal-oriented life. They help people who want to succeed. We simply must apply the strategies to every area of our life. We can apply the strategies to our fitness, our relationships, our finances, our careers, and to our community involvement.

I knew that I wanted to earn a living by creating products that would empower others. But that would require me to sow a lot of seeds. It would require me to grow through a lot of “fertilizer.” I didn’t quite know how I would start. I received that answer when a mentor came to visit me.

My mentor asked how I was going to teach. I told him that I would use the story of my journey, and the stories of other people. By sharing those stories, I could show how all



people that overcome struggle make small steps. Those small steps, if directed and deliberate, lead from struggle to success.

My mentor gave me some good advice. Besides stories, he said, I needed a simple tool that people could remember. After listening to his advice, I came up with the Straight-A Guide. The course's name would be easy to remember. As described earlier, to start on the Straight-A Guide, we must identify our values and goals. Those are the prerequisites. Then, each of the next lessons starts with the letter "A."

All masterminds start with the right attitude. Their attitudes align with how they define success. From mastermind thinking, I learned how to conquer struggle. It begins by defining our values. Then we set clear goals to make sure that we're not just talking about values—but living those values.

Once we identify our values and we set our goals, we move on to Attitude. Attitude is the first "A" in our Straight-A Guide.

Masterminds like Nelson Mandela, Viktor Frankl, Martin Luther King embody the power of having the right attitude. Nelson Mandela had the right attitude to make it through 27 years of prison in an unjust society. Viktor Frankl had the right attitude to make it through the challenges of a Nazi concentration camp. Martin Luther King had the right attitude to work toward restoring civil rights for all people. They defined the right attitude with a 100% commitment to success! With their attitude, they overcome monumental struggle.

Begin with the Right Attitude!

It isn't only world leaders that move through struggle with the right attitude. Business leaders like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Jack Welch prove that with the right attitude, we can create value from ideas. Steve Jobs built Apple, one of the most innovative companies in history. Bill Gates had the right attitude when he led his partners to start Microsoft and change the world with computer software. Jack Welch built General Electric with an attitude of building great companies that would lead innovation.

By sticking with the same lessons that drive masterminds, we all can succeed. Start with the right attitude.

Masterminds teach that success depends upon what we profess to hold important. When it comes to the individuals I named above, how would you define their values? If you don't know those historical figures, let me provide a brief description:

Nelson Mandela:

Authorities locked Nelson Mandela in prison for 27 years. He opposed the racist laws of South Africa. Those laws existed during the Apartheid era. Despite imprisonment for multiple decades, Mandela did not harbor any bitterness. He did not hate his oppressors after his release. Instead, Mandela worked to bring justice and peace. He became a leading world figure, personifying the best of human dignity.



Viktor Frankl

Nazis locked Dr. Frankl in a death camp. He watched as Nazis killed his family members. On any given day, Dr. Frankl knew the Nazis might murder him. He refused to show anger. He kept peace by devoting his life to helping others.

Martin Luther King

Authorities locked Dr. King in many jails. They opposed his efforts to expand civil rights for all people. He led the way to bringing awareness to injustice. Dr. King fought against inequality between races. He crusaded and united people of all races. People from around the world consider Martin Luther King a global leader. We celebrate his life as a historic American figure and role model.

Steve Jobs

You may not know Steve Jobs, but I'm sure you know his company. He and his partner started Apple Computer. Later, business decisions forced him out of Apple. Rather than being bitter at losing the company he started, Steve went on to start new companies. They he returned to lead Apple. With the right attitude, he grew Apple into the most valuable company in the world.

Bill Gates

Bill Gates and his partner started Microsoft. Their company started with an idea. Bill wanted to make computers more practical. He believed that every business should have a computer, and every home should have a computer. With Microsoft, Bill turned those ideas into a reality. In the process, he became the wealthiest man alive. And he pledged to use his wealth to improve the world for all people.



Jack Welch

Jack Welch studied chemical engineering in college. When he earned his final degree, he began building a career with General Electric. He rose quickly, eventually reaching the top position. Under Jack's leadership, the value of GE grew by more than 4,000 percent. Many people wrote books about his leadership philosophy, and about his commitment to success.

Learn from Leaders:

Leaders like those I mention above inspired me during my 26 years in prison. They clearly defined what they wanted to achieve. Mandela, Frankl, and King valued equality for all mankind. Jobs, Gates, and Welch placed a high value on creating value. When I write about learning from “masterminds,” I’m writing about people like them. They define success. Then they engineer the path that moves them closer to success. The path never ends!

We should learn from masterminds. Their strategies can work for us. Notice how they identify values. They make their values public. They invite others to judge them by their authenticity, their integrity, and their commitment to those values.

Values and Goals in All Areas of Life:

The initial lessons on values and goals teach us how to excel in areas of our life that are important to us. But we can fail miserably when we don't use that approach in other areas of our life. For example, we frequently see the stories of celebrities who value their talent. They set goals of becoming the best in the world at what they do. Take Whitney Houston, for example. Clearly, she valued her talent as a singer. She didn't place as high of value in another area of her life—being clean and sober. Her life ended tragically from a drug overdose.

More recently, we can look at the case of Aaron Hernandez. He was a star athlete. He set goals to become the best at his craft. Yet when it came to other areas of his life, he failed. If being successful outside of football meant something to Aaron, he should have followed the same path. Clear values and goals would have helped. Aaron lost his way. He lost his career in professional sports when he committed a violent crime. He lost a criminal trial and a judge sentenced him to life in prison. Then he committed suicide while inside his jail cell.

Values and goals advance our prospects for success. To achieve a balanced sense of fulfillment, we should apply them to every area of life. Some areas where we can use values and goals as a guide to success include:



- » *Fitness*
- » *Health*
- » *Relationships*
- » *Education*
- » *Spirituality*
- » *Career Development*
- » *Family*
- » *Hobbies*
- » *Living clean and sober*
- » *Release preparation*

To the extent that we use values and goals, we grow closer to success. We can learn from masterminds like Mandela, Frankl, and King. We should make decisions like masterminds.

Values and Goals Guided Me Through Jail, through Prison, and Upon Release:

As I wrote previously, Socrates inspired me to change. After a jury convicted me, I thought about my past. I thought about how I got into the predicament I was in. I reflected on where I started to go wrong. I was locked in a jail cell, waiting for the judge to sentence me.

What could I do from inside of a jail cell to make things right? I may not get out of prison early. But what could I do to make things better when I got out? That question led to my three-part plan. I would work:

- » *To educate myself,*
- » *To contribute to society, and*



» *To build a support network.*

I would not have come up with that three-part plan on my own. By reading about people who succeeded, I learned that I needed to define success. In my case, success meant I could return to society ready to stand on my own. I wanted to live and interact with people that didn't have problems with crime or prison. Those people were my avatars. They would want me to educate myself, to contribute, and to have a strong support network. As I wrote earlier, I didn't know those people. Someday I would meet them. I would want them to accept me as a good person. If I didn't make efforts while I was in prison, they would always wonder why I was in prison for so long. I had to take steps while in prison so that I could influence their perceptions of me in the future.

» *Who is your Avatar?*

An "avatar," for me, was specific. When I got out, I knew that certain people would advance my prospects for success. And certain people would threaten my prospects for success. I needed to recognize the difference and connect with people that would help me succeed. Those people were my avatars. I used all of my time in prison to prepare in ways that would make it more likely for my avatars to support my efforts to succeed.

» *I thought of my future probation officer.*

» *I thought of my future employer or business partners.*

» *I thought of my future creditors or investors.*

When I got out, a probation officer would oversee the level of liberty that I would have.

» *What would my probation officer expect of me?*

Future employers would know about my criminal background and lengthy prison term.

» *What would employers expect me to accomplish while I served my time?*

I needed to make changes that would counter the negative background from my early 20s.

Prospective creditors or investors would also know about my criminal background. What could I do to make things right with them? I would need to find creditors and investors when I got out. I wouldn't have a car, I wouldn't have a house, and I wouldn't have clothes when I got out. I knew that I would need help to get started.



Avatars could help me. While in custody, I built a record that would make it easier for avatars to believe in me.

» *Who is in Your Future?*

By thinking about avatars, I found my value categories. Then my judge slammed me with a 45-year sentence. I had to think further out. “Good time” credits would result in my being released after 26 years if I didn't have disciplinary problems. The release date was far away. I hadn't even been alive that long. I couldn't focus on the time I had to serve. Instead, I had to focus on the future I wanted to build.

» *Who is in your future?*

» *What can you do while you're in prison to prepare for your future?*

To sustain my level of energy and discipline, I had to take my mind off the time. I took the next step. I set clear goals that I could measure.

» *How to Become Successful?*

A great management guru, Peter Drucker, is famous for advising companies on how to become more successful. He spoke about the importance of measuring incremental success. By measuring each tiny step on the way to improvement, we could make further improvements.

I took that message to heart. By reading from leaders like Peter Drucker, I learned. I set clear metrics to define what it meant to make a commitment:

» *To educate myself,*

» *To contribute to society, and*

» *To build a support network.*



- » *I needed to measure progress.*
- » *How could I measure a commitment “to educate myself?”*
- » *How could I measure a commitment “to contribute to society?”*
- » *How could I measure whether I worked “to build a support network?”*

Finding Your “Why” with Questions:

To answer those questions, I thought about my avatars. What would they expect? Then, I set a time limit. Since prison would be a big part of my life, I set a time horizon far into the future. I focused on the first 10 years. I could measure 10 years. What could I accomplish during the first 10 years? What would make a favorable impression on my avatars?

- » *In 10 years I made a commitment to earn an undergraduate degree. My avatars would see me as an educated man if I had a degree.*
- » *In 10 years I made a commitment to publish something My avatars would consider a “published author” as someone who made a contribution to society.*
- » *In 10 years I would persuade 10 people to have a vested interest in my success. Those 10 people would become my support network. If I built a support network, avatars would find it easier to believe in me.*

Guides through the Maze of Confinement:

Values and goals became my guide through prison. By adhering to them, I overcame struggle and achieved high levels of success.

If you set values and live by those values, you’re on the path. If you set goals that you can measure—with timelines—you advance prospects for success.

Use the Straight-A Guide to achieve new levels of performance.

An individual must have the right attitude to overcome. The right attitude leads to higher levels of success. Individuals may differ in how they define the right attitude. It’s

easy when we say that the right attitude means a 100% commitment to success, as defined by our values and goals.

Is success the same for everybody? No.

Success isn't the same for everyone because people set values differently. Some people value wealth. Some people value family. Some people value contribution to society. When we set our values, we take a step toward defining success. Our goals show our commitment to success.

Once we define success, and we show our commitment with goals, we can show that we have the right attitude. We can keep everything we say, everything we do, and everything we think in harmony with our values and goals. That's when we have the right attitude. That's when we follow the path of masterminds.

When you determine what you want, you have made the most important decision of your life. You have to know what you want in order to attain it.

—Douglas Lurton

Determine what you want! Use values and goals. Then, advance your prospects for success with the right attitude. Make a 100% commitment to make decisions that are consistent with your values and goals. I learned the value of this strategy from true masterminds like those listed earlier:

- » *Nelson Mandela*
- » *Viktor Frankl*
- » *Martin Luther King*
- » *Steve Jobs*
- » *Bill Gates*
- » *Jack Welch*





» *Can You Make a 100% Commitment to Success?*

To prepare for success when I left prison, I had the right attitude. While inside, I made a 100% commitment to success—by my definition. Does that mean I was a model inmate? Not necessarily. It means that I made decisions that were consistent with my values and goals.

I made decisions that would influence my avatars. That 100% commitment defined my pursuit of excellence. My attitude guided my decisions seven days each week. When people ask what I mean by seven days a week, I explain.

I mean seven days a week!

When people ask whether I obsessed over those goals on weekends or holidays, I explain with more clarity. I tell them I had the right attitude seven days a week. As long as weekends and holidays fell within a seven-day week, I adhered to the strategy.

I am not in prison anymore. But I still follow the strategy of having the right attitude. I make a 100% commitment to success because I know what I want to achieve. That strategy powered me through prison. I am convinced that it opens opportunities for me in society.

This principled, values-based, goal-oriented adjustment through prison helped. It allowed me to seize control of my adjustment. My attitude may not have influenced an earlier release date. But my attitude influenced how I passed through each day. By making a 100% commitment to my values and goals, I put myself on a path to receive support from “avatars.” The strategy made all the difference during my journey through prison. More importantly, the strategy empowered me to return to society precisely as I anticipated—with my dignity intact, and with opportunities for a life of fulfillment.

Live a life of fulfillment. Live in accordance with the principles of this Straight-A Guide course. It begins with Attitude.

Questions:

1. *Does having the right attitude mean that you’re adhering to some type of “model” behavior pattern?*

» *A. No. People can set their own values and goals. Their commitment to those values and goals determines whether they have the right attitude.*



- » *B. Yes. People with the right attitude always abide by rules.*
- 2. *How do we define whether we have the right attitude?*
 - » *A. The system defines our attitude?*
 - » *B. Family members define our attitude?*
 - » *C. Our level of commitment to values and goals defines our attitude.*
 - » *D. Our friends define our attitude.*
- 3. *When it comes to the right attitude, what do Steve Jobs and Martin Luther King have in common?*
 - » *A. They don't have anything in common.*
 - » *B. They both made a 100 percent commitment to success as defined by their values and goals.*
- 4. *Why does Doug Lurton say that knowing what you want is the most important decision in your life?*
 - » *A. You need to know what you want in order to attain it.*
 - » *B. If you don't know what you want, you can't make a 100 percent commitment to attaining it.*
 - » *C. By defining success in your life, you can engineer a path that will take you there.*
 - » *D. All of the above.*
- 5. *To determine whether you have the right attitude, you must first identify your values and goals.*
 - » *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.*

- I. Do you have an attitude that is set for success?*
- 2. Are you doing everything within your power to prepare for success?*
- 3. What more can you do to prepare for success?*
- 4. When it comes to the individuals I named above, how would you define their values? Jobs, Gates, Welch*
- 5. What could I do from inside of a jail cell to make things right? I may not get out of prison early. But what could I do to make things better when I got out?*
- 6. What would my probation officer expect of me?*
- 7. What would employers expect me to accomplish while I served my time?*
- 8. What could I do to make things right with them?*
- 9. Who is in your future?*
- 10. What can you do while you're in prison to prepare for your future?*
- II. How could I measure a commitment "to educate myself?"*
- 12. How could I measure a commitment "to contribute to society?"*
- 13. How could I measure whether I worked "to build a support network?"*
- 14. What could I accomplish during the first 10 years? What would make a favorable impression on my avatars?*

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.*