



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

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



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**Module 5  
Action**

## Module 5: Action

**Successful people maintain a positive focus in life no matter what is going on around them. They stay focused on their past successes rather than their past failures. They also look to next action steps they need to take to get them closer to the fulfillment of their goals. They refuse to be distracted by obstacles that life presents.**

**Jack Canfield**

We must pass through hard tasks on the success journey. I didn't understand that during my school years. I could have made better decisions as a young man, taking action steps that would lead me on to the fulfillment of my goals and success. Unfortunately, I didn't learn that lesson until I was in prison.

People in prison face many obstacles and hard tasks. An example of a hard task may include spending weeks or months in SHU. The time alone limits us. While locked in a cell, we may not be able to attend programs. We cannot connect with family as easily. We are isolated from human connection. I spent months in the SHU when I was in prison. To keep productive, I took small action steps. With small action steps, I could move closer to success.

Regardless of where you are, keep moving toward success, as you define it with your values. Expect to pass through tough times today and in your future. Remember that they are part of the success journey. There is always more struggle to come. You've got to grow through the fertilizer for your seed to blossom into a solid tree.

To build strength while in struggle, I use the Straight-A Guide. It's like a compass. I use the compass to stay on course.

### Mindset of Success:

I start with introspection, thinking about my past. Those thoughts remind me of the values that define who I am. My goals show a commitment to success. With the right mindset, I strengthen my attitude. I can see what I'm trying to achieve, my aspiration. This strategy helps me take the next action step. That is the mindset of success.

I had to use this mindset-of-success strategy when I launched a healthcare business with my wife. I started on this path years ago. The healthcare industry appealed to me be-

cause of the growing need. Every person needs healthcare. The aging baby boomer group means that the industry will grow. I wanted to build a business that served and eased life for elderly people.

I faced challenges as a convicted felon. To overcome my felony background, I needed to persuade licensing authorities to give me an exemption. Sometimes I faced resistance. To get through, I revisited all the action steps I had to take when I was in prison. When I thought about each action-step I took along the way, I connected the dots.

Success comes when we take small action steps. I climb hills to get where I want to go. I jump over gaps. I wake early in the morning and I work late into the night. The small action steps bring me closer to success. When I think back, I can see the power and influence of early decisions. I read the story of Socrates when I was locked in a cell. That story changed the way I thought and put. I began thinking of avatars. The avatars helped me think about values and goals. That process gave me the right attitude and it gave me an aspiration. Action steps led me into the right programs. By finishing programs, I built my skillset. Each action step helped me get through prison. When I got out, I was in a better position to succeed.

The action steps you take today will make a difference in your life, regardless of where you are. Begin taking action steps today that will ease success as you pursue your aspirations.

That is the mindset of success!

Masterminds teach the power of values-based, goal-oriented choices. We become more than past bad choices and more than tough times of the moment. As mentioned previously, some of the Masterminds who taught me include:

- » *Socrates*
- » *Nelson Mandela*
- » *Viktor Frankl*
- » *Mahatma Gandhi*
- » *Martin Luther King*





» *Malcolm X*

» *Steve Jobs*

» *Bill Gates*

» *Jack Welch*

» *Michael Jordan*

» *Who are the Masterminds that you're learning from today?*

Leaders reflect on the past. Thoughts of the past remind them of how to move through tough times. Their thoughts of the past give them strength to take the next step. They see how small steps lead them out of struggle. They never stop taking actions.

We learn from leaders. Their clues teach us how to make progress. Learn from the clues they leave us:

» *Leaders know how to state their values.*

» *Leaders set goals.*

» *Leaders live with the right attitude.*

» *Leaders have high aspirations.*

» *Leaders change the world. They may live in struggle today. They choose to prepare, and they achieve new heights. They make life better with every decision, with every thought, and with every action step they take.*

## Make Good Choices:

We start by defining success with our values. The values lead us to set clear goals. We keep the right attitude because we want our aspiration to be more than a dream. We take action steps to connect dots, to move toward success.

Without action steps, it's all just "happy talk." We hear a lot of happy talk from people that fail to take action. It's the "I'll-be" syndrome, evidenced by statements such as:

I'll drive a new Benz some day.

I'll live in a penthouse after this.

I'll make big money in the future.

Aspirations can include expensive cars, homes, and high incomes. But we have to do more than talk. We must take action. If we don't take action, we're only dreamers that live in a fantasy. In prison, I interacted with many people that waited for calendar pages to turn, but they didn't take action. They didn't pursue the small steps that are necessary to succeed. We need to take action to advance. We can always take a new action step. They lead us from tough times to success.



## Incremental Action Steps

I learned from Marshall Goldsmith, a teacher. He is one of the top business coaches in America. I read his influential business book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. Besides writing books and articles for business, Dr. Goldsmith has a career of being a coach to CEOs. People on the path to becoming CEOs want to learn from him. They want to know about the best action steps they can take.

Since leaders hired Dr. Goldsmith to learn about action steps, I knew that I could learn from him. In his book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, I read about steps I could take in prison. He didn't write the book for prisoners, but the message was the same for anyone that wants to change.

Take Deliberate Action Steps!

Action steps bring you close to the people you want to influence.

If you want to influence people that can hire you, take action steps. Start by thinking about what they expect.

That process led me to think about avatars. Who were my avatars? They were people who could help me build a life after 26 years in prison. My avatars included:

My future probation officer,



My future employer or business partners,

My future creditors who could provide resources I would need to start a new life.

Think about the people you want to impress. Who should believe in you? Make them your “avatars.” Take action steps to prove worthy of their trust. That strategy worked well for me. If you take action steps, you can walk through tough times.

The action steps will change as time passes. Master a lesson at one level. You then climb to the next level. Growth comes with small action steps. If you don’t take an action step today, you miss out on a new action step that you could take tomorrow.

What action step you can take today? Can you read? Can you learn? Can you write? Can you do pushups? Can you do leg lifts? Can you do crunches? Can you pray? Can you ask for help?

Align action steps with values and goals. What steps will lead you through current challenges? What steps will open opportunities for you on the other side of this challenge?

I made the choice to change after a jury found me guilty. As I rested on the concrete slab of my cell, I stared at the ceiling and the walls. I heard all the noise around me.

## What could I do to change?

Asking that question was an action step.

The question led me to look for an answer.

I found a book and read about Socrates.

Reading was an action step.

By reading about a leader, I could start to think in different ways.

I thought about avatars, another action step.

By thinking about avatars, I could see the next action steps to take:

Avatars would want me to educate myself.



Avatars would want me to contribute to society.

Avatars would want me to build a support network.

Thinking about avatars led to my values: Education, contribution, and support. I set clear goals. I said I would achieve those goals during my first 10 years.



- » *I would earn a university degree.*
- » *I would find a way to publish*
- » *I would persuade 10 people to help me succeed.*

To achieve the goals, I would need to take small action steps. First, I had to find a school that would allow me to earn a degree. I didn't have any money. My record from high school was not good. But I had to start. I took the following action steps:

I found a dictionary

The book included names of universities and I wrote the names.

The book also gave the cities and zip codes for the schools.

I wrote a letter to each school as follows:

**Please allow me to study toward degree. I made bad decisions and I'm serving a long prison term. I want to learn so I can give back to others. Please let me earn a degree. By learning and earning a credential, I'll grow as a human being. I don't have any money. But I make a 100% commitment to learn and grow. Please let me know if you can help.**

## **Persistence:**

To master struggle, regardless of what type of struggle, we need patience. We also need persistence. Since my struggles were in prison, I had to figure out ways to transcend the walls that separated me from the community. I wrote more than 100 letters. And I had to be patient and wait. I could wait months for a response. Sending a letter is one step. Sending 100 letters is 100 steps. If I sent one letter, I may not have found the right person. By sending more than 100 letters, I had a better chance. I had to keep taking action steps.



Be persistent with your action steps.

This strategy gave me strength. I did not wait for months to pass. I took small action steps each day. They would lead to my goal. I could not control whether a school would respond. But I could control how many letters I wrote. By hand, I wrote letter after letter. I bought stamps and I wrote to as many schools as I could find. By copying, I could write about four letters per hour. In eight hours I could write about 30 letters. In two days I could send 60 letters. Then I could wait, or I could write more.

Those small action steps brought me closer to my goal. Ohio University accepted me. Once I started school, I felt a change. I wasn't only a prisoner. I was a student on my way to earning a university degree.

I wanted more than a credential. A degree was a piece of paper. More than the degree, I wanted to learn. By learning, I could persuade avatars to invest in me. They would see me as something more than the bad choices I made when I was 20. I took action steps from prison to influence avatars I would meet in the future.

## Influenced by The Autobiography of Malcolm X:

I was a terrible student in high school. Before prison, I didn't know anything about Malcolm X. While scanning books in a prison library, I found The Autobiography of Malcolm X. I read the book for a reason. The biography included chapters about a man who transformed his life from inside a prison cell. I wanted to do the same.

From Malcolm X, I learned more about small action steps. He wanted to learn. He thought about his past. He could connect the dots and see how he made bad decisions. He wanted to change and to give back to his community. He wanted to teach people how to get out of struggle. In order to teach, he had to learn. He started to read. He learned new words. His action steps showed his 100% commitment to reach his goals. The book showed each small action step Malcolm took to think differently. From inside of a jail cell, he took small action steps that led him to grow and mature. He became a leader.

Like Malcolm, I wanted to grow. I had to start in a jail cell. But I could take small action steps to learn. I could hold myself accountable. I could learn to read better, to write better, and to speak better. I could take action steps to influence my avatars. Others can learn from this path, too. We need to take action to change.

Action Plans Lead to Success:



Marshal Goldsmith taught the leaders that hired him to keep growing. We have to keep growing, too. If we take action steps today, we will grow. Our growth will put us in a position for new action steps. We cannot reach higher levels of growth tomorrow unless we take our first action steps today.



I am always looking back. When I reflect, I can see the pivotal points on my journey. In January of 2017, I persuaded an investor to partner with me. He provided me with \$1 million that I could use to purchase a new piece of real estate. In June of 2017, other investors provided me with an additional \$500,000 that I could use to expand the business I was building.

I finished my prison term in August of 2013. Only 41 months after finishing 26 years inside, I was growing my business. When did I begin sowing seeds that would lead investors to partner with me? How did I start?

I started with small, incremental action steps. The first step was reading a book in a jail cell. The book led me to think differently. I developed a mindset of success. I started to think about avatars. I took small steps that would show I wanted to earn their trust. I wrote to schools. I studied. I learned. I earned degrees. I wrote articles and chapters and books. By writing, I built a support network. My commitment to succeed gave me a reason to avoid problems in prison.

The small action steps I took in a jail cell put me on a path to success. Each step led me closer. I could pursue higher goals because I took small steps early. Now, when I face tough times, I look back. I see how small action steps got me through tough times before. The tough times are part of the journey. By focusing on success, I know that I can take another action step. Just as in the past, the action steps I take today will lead to new growth ahead.

As I look back now, I can see action steps let me pivot from struggle to prosperity:

- » *I earned a bachelor's degree in my fourth year.*
- » *I earned a master's degree in my seventh year.*
- » *I published my first article in my sixth year.*
- » *I published my first book in my 10th year.*



- » *By publishing, I built a massive support network.*
- » *The support network led to marrying the love of my life in prison.*
- » *Marriage allowed me to publish more, and the writing brought income.*
- » *Income from my writing supported my wife and she went to nursing school.*
- » *With my wife's degrees in nursing, I could learn about health care.*
- » *My track record led to job offers before I got out.*
- » *I became a professor at a university within three weeks of finishing my sentence.*
- » *I persuaded investors to partner with me.*
- » *Those relationships led to my building many different businesses.*

If I did not take small action steps in prison, I would not have had success. When I face tough times today, I reflect. By looking back, I see more clearly. I can see how choices I began making in jail led to a better adjustment in prison. And choices in prison put me on a path to succeed upon release. I kept taking action steps that led me away from trouble. When troubles followed me after my release, I used my Straight-A Guide to begin charting the course to recalibrate and succeed again.

- » *What action steps can you take today?*

## Basic Questions:

### I. I. Why does reflection lead to better decisions?

- » *A. Thinking about the good times helps us through the bad times.*



- » *B. By thinking about past decisions, we see a connection to where we are today and we see how to make decisions for a better future.*
- » *C. It's best to forget about the past because we can't do anything about it.*
- » *D. While in prison, don't think about the outside.*

*2. Which action step would lead you closer to preparing for a job:*

- » *A. Playing on a softball team.*
- » *B. Getting the best seat for television viewing.*
- » *C. Reading nonfiction books that relate to the type of job I want.*
- » *D. Hustling contraband.*

*3. Why do small action steps lead to new opportunities?*

- » *A. They build better skills.*
- » *B. They keep us on track to success.*
- » *C. They help us avoid trouble.*
- » *D. All of the above.*

*4. Who is responsible for steering us to action steps?*

- » *A. The system should provide more programs.*



- » *B. People should give us resources.*
- » *C. The government should make things easier.*
- » *D. We should create our own opportunities to grow.*

5. *When is the best time to start taking action steps that would lead to success?*

- » *A. Think about your future when you're close to your future.*
- » *B. Tell others that you're going to succeed, but don't make any changes until later so no one will think you're soft.*
- » *C. Start taking action steps when the system starts giving you more incentives.*
- » *D. The best time to take action steps that lead to success is today.*

## Personal Development Exercises:

- » *Pursue these personal-development exercises independently, or in a group breakoout session. Respond to the questions and discuss with your group.*

1. *Who should believe in you?*
2. *What action step you can take today?*
3. *How can reading move you closer to success?*
4. *What can you learn from where you are in life right now?*
5. *In what was can improving your writing skills advance your prospects for success?*
6. *How would doing pushups contribute to your success?*
7. *How would prayer influence your success?*

8. *Where can you sow seeds that will lead to help?*



## 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.*