



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

Straight-A Guide Introductory Course



**Module 6:
Accountability**

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Module 6: Accountability

Great companies operate with high cultures of accountability. Those accountability metrics help us determine whether we are succeeding. Accountability systems let us know when we must correct course and pursue new strategies.

Steve Ballmer

We can learn a great deal from the leaders around us. As a young man, I didn't know how to learn from leaders. Rather, I learned the wrong lessons from the wrong people. It wasn't until I went to prison that I saw how many opportunities I missed.

» *In what ways are you learning from the leaders around you?*

You may be a father or a mother. If you're not a father or a mother, you're a son or a daughter. You know that parents expect children to bring home report cards. What do those report cards tell us? We use them to measure performance. When students do well, we see progress. The report cards show areas where students can improve. They hold students accountable.

You might coach sports teams. You might play sports. Perhaps you watch sports. If so, you know that sports is all about measuring performance. We count wins and losses. We count batting averages. We count passing or rushing yards. We count points. Each metric gives us an idea of future performance.

If you invest in public companies, you measure performance. How well has the stock performed over the past 12 months? Have sales kept pace with growth targets? Does the company lead the market? How much does the company earn from each sale? Those types of questions give investors an idea of the company's health. Investors hold themselves accountable by assessing all types of metrics.

Accountability metrics help us determine whether we're on the right track. They help us examine our choices and our performance.

Aristotle, another teacher from ancient Greece, wrote that we should always examine performance. He wrote:

"The unexamined life is not worth living."



- » *In what ways have you examined your life?*
- » *How have choices you made in the past influenced who you are today?*
- » *What choices can you make today to influence the success you want to achieve tomorrow?*

I examine past choices a lot. When I think about past choices, I also think of costs.

- » *What did I gain or lose from my past choices?*
- » *If I made a different choice, would I be better off today?*
- » *What options can I choose today? Which choice will put me on track for the best future?*

These types of reflections cause us to examine our life. They help us make better choices. From inside of a jail cell, I started to assess the influence of past choices. Then I started to think about tools I could create to measure progress. I needed to create accountability logs. Such tools would keep me on the path to success.

Starting Over:

Being in prison gave me a chance to start over. While stuck in the cell, I knew that I wanted to change. In some ways, being in jail made it easier. The system would provide me with a place to sleep. I would get food and water. I had clothes. Money would make things easier, but I did not need money. In jail, the system provided for my needs. If I were not in jail, I would need an income to provide for my needs. While in jail, I had to change the way that I thought. But I also needed to measure my progress.

I could count the number of months that passed. Each month would lead me closer to my release date. But I had to think about the kind of life I would lead when I got out. I spoke to other people in prison. They told me about challenges they faced when their earlier terms ended:

- » *Former prisoners could not find jobs.*
- » *Former prisoners could not find housing.*



- » *Former prisoner said they didn't feel welcome in society.*
 - » *Former prisoners could not gather resources to make a clean start.*
 - » *Former prisoners could not break free from the criminal lifestyle.*
- » *Former prisoners said they would rather serve time in prison than live with all the challenges in society.*

Those former prisoners were capable. There wasn't anything wrong with them. Their adjustment made them ready to live in prison. They believed in prison wisdom: "The best way to serve time is to forget about the world outside." Later, they had bad news. Focusing on prison made them less able to fit in with society. Prison gave them a tone, mannerisms, and an attitude. In society, the prison vibe didn't lead to success.

For a different outcome, I had to change.

I wanted to show other people how they could change, too. If I became successful after my release from prison, other people may choose to follow the same pattern. Other people could build better lives if they learned the same lessons that masterminds taught me:

- » *They could define values.*
- » *They could set clear goals.*
- » *They could check their attitude.*
- » *They could visualize aspirations.*
- » *They could take small action steps.*
- » *They could hold themselves accountable.*

As I studied, I read the work of John Locke. John Locke was alive in the late 1600s. The world was coming out of the Dark Ages, and into an era of hope. People referred to the new era as The Enlightenment. People were learning more. John Locke wrote that all human beings came into the world with "a blank slate."

He said that human beings were not good or bad. We saw things and heard noises. Those things we saw and noises we heard made an impression on our minds. We learned. Some of us learned to do good. Some of us learned to do bad. We became the product of what we learned. It's like the saying, "But for the grace of God, there go I."



John Locke said that even if we made bad decisions in the past, we could learn new concepts. We could start at any time to make good decisions.

John Locke taught me a lot. Early "learning" led me into a criminal lifestyle. By reading John Locke's work, I understood that what we "learned" we could also "unlearn." We could build a better life by following clues from successful people.

Successful people hold themselves accountable. They don't wait for others to tell them whether they're on the right path. They know where they're going. They engineer success. When they use accountability metrics, they know whether they're making the progress to succeed. They adjust when necessary.

From studying and reading about successful people, I learned how to create my own tools and to measure progress. I could hold myself accountable. To build an accountability metric, I had to define success. I had to set a timeline. And I had to measure my progress on the timeline I set.

- » *Like a parent uses a report card to hold his child accountable, I could hold myself accountable.*
- » *Like a coach uses statistics to measure performance of athletes, I could create an accountability metric to grow from one goal to the next.*
- » *Like an investor assesses the pace of a stock's growth, I could measure if I was on track to succeed.*

Why Use Accountability Metrics?

My avatars spoke the language of accountability. My actions would convince them to believe in me. By holding myself accountable, I could earn their trust.

I thought about how I could make the best use of my time. I planned for success, even with the heavy lift ahead.



I sold cocaine.

A jury convicted me.

A judge sentenced me to 45 years.

I would serve 26 years if I didn't lose good time.

Accountability metrics could help me overcome those challenges. I simply had to begin with a clear understanding. With my values and goals, I needed to be clear about how my life would be different when I came to the end of my sentence.

» *How will your life change when you pass through this current challenge you're enduring?*

To set my strategy, and measure the growth I would make, I thought about my avatars.

» *What could I do in prison to ease my path to success after I got out?*

My avatars would consider me worthy of their trust if I earned a degree from prison.

My avatars would find it easier to employ me or extend me credit if I could show that I gave back to society while I was in prison.

My avatars may be willing to invest in me if they saw that others believed in me.

With accountability logs, I could track whether I made progress every day. And I would work toward goals I set every day. Accountability logs that I created helped me stay on track.

I went to jail when I was 23. I didn't know how to think about 26 years inside. Instead, I thought about the first 10 years. When I hit the 10-year mark, I wanted a record of accomplishments that would speak louder than words:

I wanted a degree.

I wanted to publish something.

I wanted a support network of at least 10 people.

Masterminds taught this path as:

- » *Visualize success.*
- » *Create your plan.*
- » *Prioritize your goals.*
- » *Execute the plan.*



Visualize! Plan! Prioritize! Execute!

I knew precisely what I wanted to achieve. With an accountability log, I could measure progress.

If I could define success at 10 years, I could reverse engineer. I could figure out how far along I should be in five years. If I knew where my progress should be at five years, then I should be able to reverse engineer. I could measure if I was on track at two and three years. An accountability log would show where I should be when I hit my first year. With that insight, I could figure out where I had to be in six months. I could extend that process back to the next month, to the next week, and to the next day.

How To Create Accountability Logs (wherever you are):

In prison, I had to accept that I could control some things and I could not control other things. Staff members would say where I served time. They would order where I slept. Rules would dictate how much contact I had with society. Others would say what I could eat, when I would eat, and how much I would eat. Despite all of those external controls, I could control my adjustment. I could set values and goals. I could take incremental actions that would lead me closer to my aspirations. And I could create accountability logs to measure progress. By using them wisely, accountability logs would lead me out from the labyrinth.

In lesson six I described how I wrote letters to persuade schools to admit me. I wanted a degree. I had to convince them to overlook my crimes and allow me to enroll, even though I didn't have money. I did not control whether a school would admit me. But I could control how hard I worked to persuade them. With my accountability logs, I could measure progress.

My accountability log would resemble something like the following:

Value category: Education



Goal: Earn a university degree

Purpose: A university degree would persuade my avatars to respect and invest in me.

Action Plan: Write five letters each day until I wrote 100 letters and sent letters to 100 schools.

Accountability Metric: Write letters to five different schools each day.

Timeline: Connect with 100 universities over the course of 20 days.

Intended Outcome: Persuade at least one university to admit me.

The accountability metric gave me a clear plan. I had to set priorities and execute the plan. The plan gave me a deliberate path. I didn't know whether a school would admit me. But I could measure whether I followed the plan. If I executed the plan, I would increase my chances of getting into school.

The plan worked. Ohio University accepted me. I then began to track my progress through school. I measured the number of lessons I completed and the credits I earned. In 1992, I earned my first degree. In 1995, I earned a second degree.

In lesson six I wrote how The Autobiography of Malcolm X influenced me. Reading that story gave me hope. I could increase my value by learning how to write and speak better. By building my vocabulary, I could become a better writer and speaker.

I needed a plan and an accountability log. I thought about my avatars. I could learn to communicate like them. I could refrain from talking as if I spent decades in prison.

With that end in mind, I chose my words carefully. I would avoid words like "homie" when referring to friends. I would not refer to a woman in my life as my "old lady." I set a clear path to build my vocabulary:

Value Category: Education

Goal: Add 500 words to my vocabulary within 100 days.

Purpose: Communicate in the language of my avatars.

Action plan:

Keep a sheet of paper beside me while I read each book.

Write down each word that I don't know.

Learn to define each word on my sheet.

Write and define each word and part of speech (adjective, noun, or verb).

Create flash cards.

Write word on one side of the flash card; define word and name part of speech on other side of the flash card.

Carry stack of flashcards with me at all times.

While waiting in lines, test knowledge by flipping through flashcards. Make each word a part of my vocabulary.

Accountability metric: Incorporate an average of at least five new words into my vocabulary each day.

Timeline: 100 days.

Intended outcome: Build vocabulary by more than 500 words within 100 days.



Accountability Metrics Keep Us On Track

With accountability metrics, I could measure progress. I used them as tool to keep me on track. Others advised me to slow down. They said it didn't make sense to obsess over progress with a long sentence. Progress toward goals, they said, would not result in an early release.

Success requires people to know when to accept advice. It also requires a person to know what advice to reject.

Since I did not learn the mindset of success until I was in prison, it became clear that I thought carefully about where I would turn for advice. Statistics are really clear. More than half of the people that go into prison fail after release. We cannot ignore that accountability metric.

We should ask whether our adjustment patterns mirror successful people. If they mirror the patterns of people that fail, then we should change. Choose a deliberate path. Use accountability metrics to make progress toward goals. That is the path I learned from masterminds. That is the strategy people follow when they're on the mindset of success.

By using accountability logs, I beat timelines that I set at the start:



- » *Instead of earning one college degree within 10 years, I earned two university degrees within eight years.*
- » *Instead of publishing something within my first 10 years of imprisonment, I published more than 20 articles or book chapters within my first 10 years.*

I set a goal of finding 10 people to believe in me during my first decade of imprisonment. Yet the published writings allowed me to bring many, many people into my life during those first ten years. Those people were community leaders. They visited me in prison. They opened more and more opportunities.

» *Are You Waiting for Calendar Pages to Turn?*

or,

» *Are You Measuring Success?*

In the next lesson, I'll share how accountability logs led to my building a huge support network.

Basic Questions:

1. *Why do accountability logs matter?*

- » *A. They show why we're special.*
- » *B. They get us more from the system.*
- » *C. They allow us to measure progress toward goals we set.*
- » *D. They lead to us getting out of systems.*



2. *Who should set an accountability log?*

- » *A. Our case managers and teachers should tell us what they expect from us.*
- » *B. The system should tell us what to do.*
- » *C. We should set our own accountability logs.*
- » *D. Our friends should decide how much progress we should make.*

3. *Accountability logs are the same for everyone.*

- » *A. True*
- » *B. False*

4. *When should we use an accountability log?*

- » *A. Never. Too many people already try to hold me accountable.*
- » *B. I'll start using an accountability log later.*
- » *C. I will use an accountability log to track progress on each goal that I set.*
- » *D. I don't need tools to tell me whether I'm making progress.*

5. *People are more likely to succeed if they track their progress toward 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.*

1. *In what ways are you learning from the leaders around you?*
2. *In what ways have you seen accountability metrics used in business?*
3. *In what ways have you seen athletic coaches use accountability metrics?*
4. *In what ways do parents use accountability metrics?*
5. *How do you anticipate authority figures will use accountability metrics to assess 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 understanding of vocabulary increases, are you relating to the course content differently?*
- » *Next to each word, write down what you learned from reading deliberately.*