



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

Straight-A Guide Introductory Course



**Module 9:
Achievement**

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Module 9: Achievement

Great achievement is born of great sacrifice. Happiness comes from the achievement of a difficult task that demanded our best.

Napoleon Hill

Achievement:

I'm writing this version of the lesson on "Achievement" on May 10, 2020. Despite having had a term of Supervised Release that would have kept me under the supervision of a probation officer for more than 30 years, I became free three years after concluding my prison term.

Neither early liberty, nor success after prison, would have been possible had I not started to make better decisions while I was locked in a county jail. Those experiences convince me that it's never too early, and it's never too late to begin planting seeds for a better future.

Students make daily decisions that influence prospects for success. By developing the mindset of success, students avoid the types of bad decisions that I made. Through this course, I've tried to show how all decisions influence the future we create. The Straight-A Guide has the potential to lead anyone to better decisions than I made when I was a student.

People need hope. They may find hope in what I'm about to reveal.

If you're working through this course, your success means a great deal. Plant seeds. Nurture the seeds. Watch the seeds you plant grow to bear fruit.

Decisions you make today will influence your life tomorrow. Celebrate every small success along the way. They will build upon each other. Like a snowball gathers size as you roll down a hill, success grows in geometric proportions. Start with small achievements. Keep feeding those achievements, leveraging them. They bring new opportunities that grow into larger achievements.

Let me elaborate with an example of how small, early achievements brought me a reason to celebrate along my path.

In the previous lesson I wrote, I described the many layers of my sentence. Besides a lengthy prison term, my judge imposed 29 years of supervision. First there were seven years of Supervised Release. Then 19 years of Parole. Then three years of Special Parole.

U.S. District Court Susan Judge Illston, from San Francisco, agreed that Supervised Release no longer served a purpose in my case. One year after I finished with the Bureau of Prisons, the judge signed an order to free me, saving me six years. I started my term on Parole. A year later, the U.S. Parole Commission terminated my Parole, saving me 18 more years. And in February of 2016, at 10:33 am, I received a phone call. An intern at U.S. Federal Probation told me he had good news. The U.S. Parole Commission granted early termination of my Special Parole term.



If I didn't start sowing seeds back in 1987, when I was still in a county jail, I may have had a different outcome.

Instead of serving 29 years on post-release supervision, I am free.

The early seeds led me to influence people I've never met. Less than four years after the day I finished with the BOP, people on the Parole Commission let me off. Further, despite what people in jail and prison said, I opened many opportunities upon release. Those opportunities allowed me to work with other formerly incarcerated people. They allowed me to create products and services that prison and jail administrators purchased from a company that I built.

As I do frequently, I reflect on the pivotal moments that made this possible. I would have been on supervision until 2040, or some date far in the future. I'm free because a book about a mastermind inspired me. By reading that book while I was locked in a jail cell, back in 1987, I started to develop the mindset of success. I was locked in the SHU at the Pierce County Jail. Reading the story of Socrates changed the way I thought. When I changed the way I thought, I changed my life.

Celebrate Small Achievements:

I remember setting that book on my chest to think. As a young man in a jail cell, I didn't know what I would face ahead. But I knew my early decisions led to the friends I chose. I started making bad decisions when I was a student. The friends I chose influenced the choices I made. Instead of making choices that would bring a better life, I chose to break the law. After my arrest, I pled not guilty. Then I went to trial. I lied on the stand to say I wasn't guilty. Then a judge sentenced me.

Accepting that I made decisions that led me to a jail cell was a start. I also accepted that I could make new kinds of decisions from a jail cell. That was the start of my change. By changing the way I thought, I could map a plan for a new life.



It's never too late and it's never too early
to begin preparing for a better life.

The story of Socrates helped me to think about the people I would meet in the future, my avatars. Some of them could change my life. How could use my time in prison to prepare? How could I persuade avatars to help me?

» *What steps could I begin taking then, from inside of a jail cell?*

I set clear values. I set clear goals. I invested time and energy to apply myself in the same manner that I teach through this Straight-A Guide Course. That strategy made all of the difference for me through prison.

But at the start, I could not see the end of the journey. Twenty-six years would pass. I couldn't see that far ahead. I focused on the first 10 years. Before 10 years passed, I wanted a college degree. I wanted to publish something. And I wanted to build my support network with the first 10 people. Each of those achievements would be a milestone. To reach them, I would need to make many small achievements.

» *I would need to write letters to find a school.*

» *I would need to get into school even though I didn't have money.*

» *I would need to avoid problems in prison so that others would join my support network.*

» *I would need to use all that I learned from school and from people in my support network.*

» *I would need to read books to learn from masterminds.*

If I kept taking small steps, I would reach those small achievements. Together, they would put me in a different position after 10 years. If I stayed the course, I believed that staff would transfer me from a high-security penitentiary to medium-security prison. Later I might get to a low-security prison. Staff members said I would never get to a camp. Still, I believed that through my actions in prison, I could persuade them to reclassify me. By reaching small goals, I believed that someone might agree to let me serve the last part of my sentence in a minimum-security prison.

With my sentence length, I had to start in the SHU of a high-security penitentiary. To serve my sentence in lower-security prisons. I needed to avoid problems in prison. I needed to make small achievements. Every decision in prison would influence my journey through decades in prison. My journey through decades in prison would influence prospects for success after release.



To sustain a high level of energy and discipline, I had to celebrate the small achievements. Reading a book or a story may be a small achievement. But if the story caused me to change the way I thought, it would change my life. Then, if I acted in ways to reflect that I thought differently, I would make measurable achievements. Others would notice. Later, I could look back. I could see how each decision in jail influenced each opportunity.

Decisions from the day I read Socrates were a step-by-step path. They aligned with my values and goals. They led to earning degrees, to publishing books and articles. They led staff members to transfer me from high security to lower-security level prisons. I went from the SHU in a penitentiary to general population. After eight years, I went to a medium, then to lower-security prisons. In lower-security prisons, I found it easier to avoid problems. I could make more progress. I could build a stronger support network. I could prepare for success upon release.

The incremental achievements we make along the way open up possibilities and new opportunities.

By celebrating the small achievements, I could keep focused. I didn't need to think about serving 26 years. Instead, I thought about the small goals I strove to achieve. By achieving those small goals, I knew that I could open bigger opportunities.

Freedom from the government is one reward. There are more. In the previous lesson I wrote about investors. By making a record of every success in prison, I had a solid case study. I could show people the tiny steps that I took. When I could show people the way that I worked through prison, they were willing to write checks to support projects I wanted to create. Those checks allowed me to build a new career. I'll describe that career with more detail in the next lesson.

Build a string of small achievements. Those achievements will open new options. You will create your own path to success. If release is too far away, celebrate small achievements. This strategy will motivate you. You will build hope. You will know that you have the power within to influence a better future.

Think big.



Deliberateness:

You may have seen the award-winning movie *Training Day*, with Denzel Washington. Denzel plays the role of Alonzo, a corrupt police officer that trains a rookie. Alonzo tells the rookie, “This is chess not checkers.”

The memorable line from *Training Day* describes a complicated challenge. There are many moving parts. Everything can change in an instant. To succeed, you’ve got to see the big picture. Winners anticipate what will happen many moves in advance. They are deliberate with every choice. They know how to celebrate small wins. Those small wins lead to big gains.

Your small achievements lead to big wins.

Suzy Welch, an author that inspired me, wrote a book about making good decisions. She called her strategy 10-10-10. Think of how every decision will influence your life in the following segments:

- » *How will your decision influence your life in the next 10 minutes?*
- » *How will your decision influence your life in the next 10 months?*
- » *How will your decision influence your life in the next 10 years?*

Making decisions in that way can lead you to many small achievements. Together, those achievements build hope. You will see how yesterday’s decisions led you to overcome struggle and launched to higher levels of success.

Leaders know how to get out of a bad situation. They know how to climb to a better situation. They don’t only focus on the end. Sometimes the end is too far away. They focus on small steps they can take today. Those small steps make it more likely to achieve outcomes.

Make a 100% commitment to putting yourself in the best possible position to succeed. Celebrate small, incremental achievements along the way. If they align with your values and goals, each success will lead to more success. You will be able to say:

“I am the person that I am today because of the decisions that I made yesterday.”

Written Word:

When I started in a jail cell in the SHU, I didn't know how to use my time effectively. What could I do while in there to prepare for a better future? I took an inventory of resources that I could get.

- » *I could get books.*
- » *I could get paper.*
- » *I could get a pencil.*

What could I do? I could read. I could write. I could sleep. I could run in place. I could do pushups and leg lifts and squats in my cell.

I had to use the resources in my cell to prepare for success. By reading about Socrates, I knew what I wanted. I set goals that would lead to success. I would need to stay fit and I would need to improve my skills. I could improve my fitness. I could build better reading and writing and thinking skills.

If I did well, I believed that staff would transfer me into better conditions. In better conditions, I believed I could do more. I set out to do well.

When I began serving the sentence, I did not know how to write a grammatically correct sentence. If I could learn how to write persuasively, with confidence, I would empower myself. I put a plan in place. Each day I would write 1,000 words.

What would I write about? It didn't matter. I wrote with one purpose in mind. I wanted to become more confident as a writer. From a jail cell, I read books to learn how others wrote. I trained to think and write in sentences and paragraphs. I learned to structure writing:

- » *I'd write openings to introduce the idea of an essay.*
- » *I'd write supporting paragraphs in the body of the essay to help make a persuasive case.*
- » *I'd write a compelling close to present a message with force.*

I trained to think like a writer. I prepared in ways to earn more support from the types of people who could advance my prospect for success—my avatars.





Each letter, sentence, and paragraph I wrote was a small achievement that I could celebrate. Like a runner counts his laps, I remember counting the words I wrote. I set goals of writing a minimum of 1,000 words each day, and at least 10,000 words each week.

Books:

Reading was an essential strategy of my commitment to success. We all had 24 hours in any given day. To some extent, we all chose how we spent those 24 hours. I chose to read books that aligned with my values and goals.

I read books that would help me influence avatars. I needed them to open opportunities later. So I read books that would advance the possibility of making favorable impressions on them later. I wrote book reports that would serve as a kind of accountability log to track the books that I read:

- » *Author's name: Here I'd write the name of the author.*
- » *Book title: Here I'd write the book's title.*
- » *Date read: Here I'd write the date that I finished reading the book.*
- » *Why I read (title): Here I'd write the reason that I chose to read this book.*
- » *What I learned from reading (title): Here I'd write the impressions or take-aways I received from the book.*
- » *How reading (title) will contribute to my success upon release: Here I'd write my thoughts of how this book would influence my prospects for success.*

Reading books would advance my prospects for success. I had cause to celebrate. Those achievements felt like purposeful steps. They led me out from the pit of confinement, like the string that helped guide me out of the labyrinth.

Achievements:

Masterminds teach that we never achieve success. Rather, success is an ongoing journey of incremental achievements. Our mindset shows our commitment to success. Every day we make choices. Those choices lead to our next opportunity.



Never forget how the decisions you make today will influence your future. Regardless of where you are in your journey, you can start sowing seeds that will lead to a better outcome. There is an old saying. Sometimes I quote it in my work, and I may have said it before. It begins with a question:

» *When is the best time to plant an oak tree?*

The answer is 20 years ago. The second-best time is today!

None of us can change the past. But all of us can sow seeds that will lead to a better future. Develop the mindset to success.

Start sowing new seeds that will allow you to build a better life.

Basic Questions:

1. *How did I satisfy a 29-year period of post-release supervision in less than four years?*

» *I complained about the unfairness of a long sentence.*

» *I pleaded with my probation officer to let me off early.*

» *I began building a series of small, incremental achievements when I started the term in jail, then used those small achievements to persuade a probation officer, a U.S. Attorney, a federal judge, and the U.S. Parole Commission to release me.*

2. *The Straight-A Guide recommends which of the following to stay motivated?*

» *Watch a lot of television.*

» *Sleep as much as possible.*



- » *Become an expert at playing table games.*
- » *Work toward small, incremental achievements that you can celebrate.*

3. *How do small achievements lead to success when a person is going through struggle?*

- » *Small achievements don't matter at all.*
- » *Small achievements aren't worth celebrating.*
- » *Small achievements can result in certificates.*
- » *Small achievements lead to new opportunities and growth potential.*

4. *Is the following statement true or false: Employers are more inclined to offer opportunities to people that show a history of small achievements over time.*

- » *True*
- » *False*

5. *When is a good time to start building a record of small achievements?*

- » *No one pays attention to small achievements and they don't matter.*
- » *The sooner a person starts building a record of small achievements, the better.*
- » *A person shouldn't care about small achievements because no one else will notice.*
- » *A person living in struggle shouldn't think about small achievements until he gets into a better situation.*

Personal Development Exercises:

1. *How will your decision influence your life in the next 10 minutes?*
2. *How will your decision influence your life in the next 10 months?*
3. *How will your decision influence your life in the next 10 years?*
4. *In what ways are you putting yourself on a pathway for success?*
5. *What incremental steps do you need to take along the way?*
6. *How will the incremental steps you're taking influence new opportunities and possibilities?*
7. *In what ways would writing book reports open opportunities for 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.*