

Blurb:

Success after prison becomes more likely when a person lays out a plan at the start of the journey. In this section, I strive to show the strategies that I used to make it through 26 years.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/rEwE4dG7rrg>

Web page URL: <https://prisonprofessors.com/1-success-after-prison/>

1-Introduction

Why I wrote this Book

My name is Michael Santos. I'm striving to write this book in a conversational style, hoping to convey messages that leaders taught me while I climbed through 9,500 days in prison. Their lessons influenced my adjustment. During the quarter century that I served, I spent time in federal prisons of:

- High security,
- Medium security,
- Low security,
- Minimum security

Then, on August 13, 2012, I transitioned to a halfway house in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco. And in February 2013, I transitioned to home confinement. On August 12, 2013, I concluded my obligation to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

But I wasn't finished with the system.

The crimes that led me to prison related to trafficking cocaine. Following a jury trial, US District Court Judge Jack Tanner sentenced me to serve a 45-year sentence. Since the crimes occurred before November 1, 1987, he did not rely upon the Federal Sentencing Guidelines. The sentencing laws allowed me to earn credit for avoiding disciplinary infractions. Since I earned all the statutory "good time" credits possible, I finished my sentence with the Bureau of Prisons after 26 years rather than 45.

Once I finished with the Bureau of Prisons, however, other jurisdictions had control of my liberty. First, I would have to conclude seven years with Federal Probation for Supervised Release. Once I finished Supervised Release with US Probation, I would go through 19 years on parole with the US Parole Commission. And after the 19 years of parole, the sentence required that I serve an additional three years of Special Parole.

Obligations to US Probation and the US Parole Commission did not prove to be a problem. Once authorities allowed me to walk out of the federal prison in Atwater and I met my wife, Carole, in the lobby, I appreciated the liberty. Since we'd married inside a federal prison, I looked forward to building my life with her.

This book isn't about prison. Instead, it will show how earlier decisions led to opportunities for success upon release. I publish this book as part of a series, including:

- **Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term**
 - In *Earning Freedom*, I reveal the strategies and tactics that guided my adjustment through prisons of every security level. Readers will learn how every decision in prison relates to prospects for success after release.
- **Prison! My 8,344th Day—A Typical Day in an Ongoing Journey**
 - In *Prison! My 8,344th Day*, readers learn how to maintain discipline through a single day. Opportunity costs accompany every decision we make.

I wrote the two earlier books during my final years of imprisonment. For decades I'd been preparing for my release. As the date got closer, I wanted to create resources that would allow me to build a career around all that I learned. Those two books, in my view, would show people how to maintain hope while growing through multiple decades or single days.

In *Success after Prison*, I wanted to create a new resource. It would show people the relationship between a person's decisions while incarcerated and the opportunities that open upon release.

We all face struggles or challenges at some point in life. When we go through those challenges, they can obliterate hope. Since leaders taught me, I feel a duty and responsibility to share what I learned through the long odyssey in the criminal justice system.

Anyone can use the same strategies that empowered me to conquer struggle. I'm sure of it. Before I get into the strategy, let me explain why I initially wrote this book and why I am rewriting (and recording) the manuscript in the fall of 2022.

Some Backstory:

Judge Charles Pyle, a federal judge from Arizona, reached out to me in early 2015. I didn't know Judge Pyle. He had heard about my journey and my work to improve outcomes for justice-impacted people.

What is a justice-impacted person? From my perspective, it includes every person who:

- has gone through any phase of the system,
- works in the system, and
- supports people in the criminal justice system.

I work to improve outcomes for those people.

Judge Pyle and his team were coordinating a judicial conference for practitioners in the Ninth Circuit of the US judicial system. The audience would include more than 1,000 people, including judges, directors of prison systems, wardens, and those who worked in reentry programs. Judge Pyle asked if I would attend the conference as a keynote speaker.

Since concluding my obligation to the Bureau of Prisons, I've spoken for audiences across the United States. Sometimes those events paid me well. Other times I volunteered to present without compensation. I believe in the cause of working to improve the outcomes of America's criminal justice system.

On a previous occasion, while still confined to the halfway house, judges from the Southern District of California invited me to make a presentation. Those judges wanted me to address what happens after a judge sentences a person to the custody of the attorney general.

After many challenges from the halfway house, leaders in the regional office of the BOP authorized me to fly from San Francisco to San Diego. After listening to representatives from the Bureau of Prisons tell their stories, I got to offer the judges a different perspective.

With the invitation from Judge Pyle, I had a second opportunity to influence judges. Regardless of what business I'm building, I welcome every opportunity to advocate for justice-impacted people. That means striving to help decision-makers understand steps we can take to improve the outcomes of the system.

I looked forward to the three-day event in the fall of 2015. Judge Pyle told me that Paul Wright, another formerly incarcerated person, would also present as a speaker. While I served my sentence, I read about Paul's work.

Paul Wright started the award-winning newspaper *Prison Legal News* while he served a lengthy sentence in Washington State's prison system. Although I'd never met Paul previously, his work inspired me for many years.

In *Prison Legal News*, readers can learn about case law relating to people in prison. The newspaper published commentaries, essays, and perceptions about what people would experience in jails and prisons worldwide.

Over the years, Paul grew the distribution of his influential magazine. His subscription base grew across the nation. Paul put a team together in the community. They took pains to print the magazine and mail copies to each subscriber.

Many administrators resisted *Prison Legal News*, and I know that he paid a heavy price for his commitment to publishing. In addition to the newspaper, Paul authored several books. Since his work inspired me over the decades I served, I looked forward to meeting him at the Sacramento judicial conference.

Once I got there, Paul and I walked to a restaurant after the first day of the conference. We conversed while eating at a seafood restaurant. During the conversation, I learned more about Paul's commitment to helping people in prison. *Prison Legal News*, he said, reached more than 200,000 people each month. He suggested that I purchase advertising space to reach more people who might have an interest in the books I wrote.

Before that conversation, I had never considered purchasing advertising for books. I wrote several books during the 26 years that I served. Initially, I worked with publishers that had marketing departments. They controlled the distribution of the books through their end-user sales force or their distributors. Publishers coordinated reviews that made book buyers aware of the various titles that I wrote.

Later, with the advancement of the internet, publishing my books became more efficient. The distribution came through various channels, which I'll describe in the following chapters. Advertising to a mass audience hadn't been one of my strategies. I asked Paul more about the process and the readership.

Prison Legal News reaches prisoners in every state, he explained. In addition to the newspaper that went into prisons, his website reached a broad audience of lawyers and others who expressed interest in prisons.

Since I wanted to support his team's effort with *Prison Legal News*, and he convinced me that I could reach more readers, I decided to advertise with him.

My conversation with Paul inspired me to write a new book that could influence people's adjustment in prison. They needed hope. During the 26 months that had passed since I finished my sentence with the BOP, I'd built an asset portfolio worth more than \$1,000,000. Had I still been in prison, I would have liked to read a book that showed how decisions inside influenced opportunities outside.

Few people would expect opportunities to open for a person that served multiple decades in prison. Part of my advocacy work focuses on showing more people how to come out of prison strong, with their dignity intact. With that end in mind, I made a commitment to start writing *Success after Prison*.

Writing became essential to my release-preparation strategy from the earliest part of my journey. Besides authoring books that I would publish under my name, I became a ghostwriter for other people while I served my sentence. The chapters that follow offer more details on that adjustment strategy.

Since I didn't have access to technology, I wrote each manuscript in longhand. After writing, I would send the manuscripts home. My wife, Carole, would convert my handwritten pages into a digital format. She printed the pages, then sent them to my prison for editing. We devoted hundreds of hours to that process of writing, editing, and rewriting until we published the paperback books.

I may not win writing awards or earn distinction for eloquence through these projects. I have different intentions. I want to build hope for justice-impacted people. If they adhere to the same path that leaders taught me, they will restore confidence and strength while climbing through imprisonment.

What's the path?

It's simple. Leaders teach that anyone who wants to overcome a challenge should adhere to the following strategy:

1. Start by defining success,
2. Create a plan that will make incremental advancements,
3. Put priorities in place,
4. Develop tools, tactics, and resources,
5. Execute the plan with clear accountability metrics.

Following my presentation at the judicial conference where I met Paul, opportunities opened for me to reach more justice-impacted people. A US Attorney—Alicia Limtiaco—invited me to create a series of presentations for her district. Then, I spoke with Andre Matevousian, who served as the warden of a federal prison in Atwater, California.

The following pages reveal more about how interactions from that judicial conference opened opportunities to make a more significant impact on improving outcomes for justice-impacted people. They also pushed me to accelerate the time and energy I intended to write *Success after Prison*.

I finished the first version of this manuscript on December 4, 2015, approximately 28 months after finishing my obligation to the Bureau of Prisons. With this revised draft, which I'm publishing in November 2022, I'll include an epilogue to share more about how adjustment patterns in prison influence prospects for success upon release.

If I've done my job, readers will understand more about why it's never too early, and it's never too late to begin working toward a better outcome.

Self-Directed Questions:

1. In what ways are you preparing for success upon release?
2. How would you say your earlier decisions relate to the activities you're pursuing today?
3. How would you define success upon release?