

What is Effective Advocacy?

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A person in prison should have examples of effective advocacy. That way, they can begin to craft a strategy that will lead to better outcomes. I'd like to share what I learned about advocating from inside a federal prison, and from outside.

In truth, effective advocacy requires a long-tail process. To advocate effectively, a person needs perspective, as well as both depth and breadth of experience. In the end, it's similar to building a business, or solving any problem.

- » First, we need to define success as the best possible outcome.
- » Second, we need to create a systemic plan, making use of all resources and mechanisms available to us.
- » Third, we need to put priorities in place.
- » Fourth, we need to execute our plan, making daily progress along the way.

WHO AM I TO OFFER THIS GUIDANCE?

For those who don't know, my name is Michael Santos. After concluding a 26-year odyssey that carried me through federal prisons of every security level, I began building a career to influence better outcomes for all justice-impacted people. I finished my obligation to the Bureau of Prisons in August of 2013, and received early termination of Supervised Release, parole, and special parole.

In the various books I published, I show the strategies that worked for me. It's my hope that members of our community will see that I've never asked anyone to do anything that I didn't do while incarcerated.

LESSONS FROM EARNING FREEDOM:

If you haven't read *Earning Freedom*, you'll see the strategies that worked for me at various stages of the journey. I offer many examples that show a long-tail, self-advocacy campaign.

During my first Unit Team meeting, administrators told me that they would never authorize me to transfer from a high-security prison to a lower-security prison. The chapter shows the methodical strategy that allow me to get the outcome I wanted. That strategy did not include any of the following tactics:

Complaining that it wasn't fair, saying it wasn't my fault, blaming my attorney for the bad decisions that led me into the penitentiary, or filing frivolous paperwork that did not have a chance of succeeding.

As shown through the story, I created tools, tactics, and resources that would further a systematic plan to get the outcome I wanted. To improve my chances for success, I had to master the following subjects: 1) the custody and classification policy; 2) understanding of the BOP's regional system; 3) knowledge of stakeholders who could help me influence the system, and 4) persistence. The plan I launched required me to leverage outside resources, including a mentor, a professor, a publisher, a BOP administrator in DC, a regional director, and a warden.

An alternative may have been to complain that the system wasn't fair. Many people with whom I served time used that approach to self-advocacy. They rarely got the results they wanted.

We distribute Earning Freedom to our community because we want people to see the many examples of advocacy in action. It isn't the only strategy. But it worked for me in prison, and we're still using it now.

ORGANIZATION:

When I got out of prison, I made a commitment to advocate for other justice-impacted people. Simultaneously, I had to earn a living. I went into the prison system at 23 and I didn't finish my obligation to the BOP until I was 49. In the same way that every other person would need to resolve problems, I had to create a systemic plan.

To build that advocacy strategy, I would use the same lessons that I used in prison. That strategy required persistence and included many moving parts. To be effective, we would need the following:

- » Funding,
- » Scale,
- » Assets,
- » Influence,
- » Data
- » People

For that reason, we created a consulting business that would offer services to justice-impacted people. The consulting venture would generate financial resources we could use to hire other justice-impacted people, and to build our advocacy strategy.

The advocacy strategy would include building a nonprofit, Prison Professors. One message I consistently give is that through our nonprofit, people can receive everything they need to advocate for themselves—without paying a single penny. If they want others to do the work for them, however, they can hire our consulting companies.

Some members of our team devote their time to providing one-on-one services through our consulting company for paying customers. Others, including me, devote our time to the nonprofit.

Although consumers do not pay for services through our nonprofit, Prison Professors represent an integral part of our strategy. We can accomplish goals with the nonprofit that would not be open to us through for-profit entity. For example, a nonprofit allows us to:

- » Build a voice with the media,
- » Hire subject-matter experts that would not provide their expertise to a for-profit entity—even though some of those experts charge us more than \$500 per hour for their time,
- » Open and nurture relationships with senior leaders in the Bureau of Prisons, US Probation, and even the federal judiciary,
- » Collect data that we can use to bolster arguments for reform,
- » Develop a voice that will prove more influential and bringing change to the system,
- » Provide an employment bridge for formerly incarcerated people.

WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW:

As the founder of the nonprofit, I'm enthusiastic about opportunities that Prison Professors is opening now. In November, I'll visit four federal prisons to make presentations. After the federal government passes its budget, I anticipate more opportunities to bring our programs into prisons. We're now working to qualify as a "Productive Activity" that will help more people receive time credits that apply to their sentence reductions, or earlier transition to home confinement.

Each time I present, I will ask people in prison to collaborate in these advocacy efforts: To persuade administrators to open more opportunities for people earn freedom, we need to show that people inside 1) avoid disciplinary infractions, 2) complete their obligations with FRP, and 3) participate in self-development programs.

The data we collect will either help or hurt our efforts to advocate for change.

Another big program we're working on includes building our relationships with tablet providers. Through those efforts, we also anticipate collecting data that will become crucial to our advocacy efforts.

HOW TO CONNECT WITH US:

We invite any person in federal prison to receive our general newsletter. They may send an invite to the following address: Impact@PrisonProfessors.com. Through that general email, we disseminate information that we're learning and we invite people to share what they're seeing. That information can prove helpful in our advocacy efforts to improve outcomes for all justice-impacted people.

Those who paid the consulting companies that support our nonprofit have a separate email address, reserved for the customers that paid for services.

WHAT WE CANNOT DO:

We are not lawyers, and we cannot change the past. As an advocacy company, we strive to improve outcomes for all justice-impacted people. Previously we published and distributed an article that we called "Understanding the Mitigation Arc." In that article, we describe the different stages of mitigation or advocacy. Although it's never too early and it's never too late to work toward a better outcome, we always must work with the situation at hand, or live in the world as it exists.

Stage 1: We would have liked to have communicated with people before authorities charged them with a crime, because we could have offered an advocacy campaign to help them at that stage.

Stage 2: If we didn't connect at Stage 1, we would have liked to have communicated to assist with the presentence investigation to assist with advocacy preparations.

Stage 3: If we didn't connect at Stage 2, we would have liked to have communicated to assist before the sentencing hearing to assist with advocacy preparations.

Stage 4: If we didn't connect at Stage 3, we would have liked to have communicated before surrendering to prison to assist with advocacy preparations.

Stage 5: If we didn't connect at Stage 4, we would have like to offer guidance on how to rebuild after release.

We understand that people get frustrated with bad guidance they received from defense attorneys, or from the system itself. We cannot change what happened before, nor can we change the system with a simple filing of paperwork. The system is a complex, labyrinthine bureaucracy that sometimes fails to act in accordance with what Congress intended.

We're striving to improve this system. We hope that you'll be patient with us as we execute on the effective advocacy campaigns listed above.

We hope that you'll do the same.

Sincerely



Michael Santos