

Self-Assessment

Gauge Your Commitment to Preparing for Success Upon Release

I am grateful to prison administrators that open opportunities for me to visit institutions. It takes a lot of courage to allow a person with my background to make presentations inside state and federal prisons. I'll work hard to prove worthy of this opportunity to contribute.

Backstory:

I began serving a 45-year federal prison term in 1987—in the pre-guideline era—in a United States Penitentiary, when I was 23. Over the next 9,500 days, I transferred to prisons of incrementally lower security levels. In August of 2012, I transitioned to a halfway house, and six months later, to home confinement.

Since finishing my obligation to the BOP on August 12, 2013, I've built a career working to improve outcomes for justice-impacted people. Part of that work includes helping leaders understand why it makes good sense to offer programs that show people in prison the relationship between their adjustment patterns inside and their prospects for success upon release. Another part includes creating job opportunities for formerly incarcerated people. To succeed in this effort, I must show the influence our courses have on the adjustment patterns of people in prison.

My Pledge:

I promise to be 100% honest and transparent during my presentation. Participants will have opportunities to ask anything about my time before prison, while in prison, or experiences since finishing my sentence. I'll respond openly and honestly. I'll never ask anyone to do anything that I didn't do while serving my sentence.

My Request:

To succeed in bringing more awareness to the need for effective programming in prisons, I must show that people who work through the programs I create are more likely to succeed upon release. For that reason, I'll ask participants to join my efforts of working toward meaningful reforms. Those who attend the presentation can help me collect crucial data.

The following pages include 10 questions, with five optional responses. Each optional response includes a point range. Those who want to participate may circle the response that mostly closely aligns with today's mindset, and write the point total associated with the response.

There are no right answers or wrong answers to the questions. Some people may disagree with the points I've assigned to each of the responses. That's perfect. We can use those disagreements to learn more and improve our program.



We're always striving to improve our programs, and we will learn from your responses; we'll also use the information we collect to apprise others of what's working with regard to programs that help people in prison prepare for success.

After circling the best response to each of the 10 questions, and recording the points, please enter points in the summary grid on the following page.

After the presentation, I'll ask participants to respond again.

We aspire to improve outcomes for all justice-impacted people. The difference between a self-assessment—before the presentation and after the presentation—becomes a tool we can use to reach our goals. We want to create programs that improve the culture of confinement, and help all stakeholders understand the value of meaningful programs in federal prisons. We invite people to share their before-and-after assessment results. Either send your responses to the address at the bottom of this page, or send a Corrlinks invite to the following email:

- » **Impact@PrisonProfessors.com**
- » **Subject line: Survey Response**

One of our interns will compile the scores. The data participants share helps us advance our efforts to bring relevant and useful programming into prison systems.

Respectfully,
Michael Santos



Self-Assessment: Preparing for Success after Prison

Question Number	Points Before Presentation	Points After Presentation	Change (+/-)
1. Defining success			
2. Setting goals			
3. Attitude			
4. Aspiration			
5. Action			
6. Accountability			
7. Awareness			
8. Authenticity			
9. Achievement			
10. Appreciation			
Total Score			

Question 1—Values:

- » Which response most closely aligns with how you define success?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » While in prison, I don't concern myself with thinking about questions that have nothing to do with my life. I'm only thinking about what I'll have to do to make it through my sentence.

3 or 4 Points:

- » I define success as having enough money.

5 or 6 Points:

- » I'm unsure how anyone can define success while serving a prison sentence.

7 or 8 Points:

- » Later, when I'm closer to getting out, I'll start thinking more about how to define success and what success will mean for me when I get out.

9 or 10 Points:

- » I define success as being able to function where I am, regardless of other people's decisions. To work toward success, I created a plan. That plan helps me stay on track. I know what I will accomplish in the next ten days, ten months, and ten years.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Question 2—Goals:

- » Which response most closely reflects your perspective on goals?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » Goals don't matter while serving a prison term, so I'm not setting any. All that matters is that I stay alive and serve this time.

3 or 4 Points:

- » While serving a prison term, I don't relate to goals. I'll probably start thinking about goals when I get out.

5 or 6 Points:

- » I'm setting goals like getting in better shape and reading.

7 or 8 Points:

- » I set specific goals, like trying to improve my education before I get out. But if I don't finish on time, I disagree that it's my fault because I'm in custody and don't control what goes on around here.

9 or 10 Points:

- » I set specific goals that align with how I define success and strive to hit those goals within a particular time. The goals I reach put me on the path to new opportunities that aren't available to me right now.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Question 3—Attitude:

- » Which response most closely reflects your attitude?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » I've got a bad attitude because I'm in prison and shouldn't be here.

3 or 4 Points:

- » My attitude reflects where I am right now. While in prison, I'm not thinking about what I can't control. My perspective is appropriate for where I am.

5 or 6 Points:

- » Staff members have told me countless times that a person in prison doesn't have anything coming to them, so I'm just going with the flow and trying to get through this term without problems.

7 or 8 Points:

- » I'm applying myself to the best of my ability, but I'm only easing my way into reentry preparation while I cope with the challenges of being confined.

9 or 10 Points:

- » I make a 100% commitment to pursue success, as I define success. I'm always striving to become better, regardless of what situation I'm in.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Question 4—Aspiration:

- » Which response most closely aligns with how you see your future?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » Thinking about the future is a waste of time because I can't do anything about the future. I live in the moment, doing what I must do to survive.

3 or 4 Points:

- » When I get out of here, I will have a beautiful place to live, I will drive the car I want to drive, and I will have all the financial resources I need. I've just got to get out first.

5 or 6 Points:

- » My future depends on when authorities let me out and whether people will give me a chance when I get out.

7 or 8 Points:

- » When I'm alone, I think about the type of life I want to lead in the years ahead. But I try to keep those thoughts to myself because I don't want others here to judge me.

9 or 10 Points:

- » Every day I wake up with thoughts of the successful life I want to lead. Those thoughts influence the choices I make every day. I'm determined to continue visualizing success and setting a series of incremental goals that will lead me closer to success as I define it.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Question 5—Action:

- » Which response most closely aligns with your thoughts on the relevance of incremental action steps?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » While serving this sentence, the best thing I can do is forget concepts like “incremental action steps.” I’ve got to live here, and nothing will matter until I finish serving my sentence.

3 or 4 Points:

- » Since this prison doesn’t offer many rehabilitation programs, I’m just trying to pass my time. The staff can do what they’re going to do, and I’ll do what I must do to survive here.

5 or 6 Points:

- » While serving my sentence, I don’t go for the “incremental-action-step” concept. If I work toward something, and the staff members don’t care, I’m reminded of the time I’m wasting in prison.

7 or 8 Points:

- » As I’ve defined success, I’m clear on what steps I need to take to reach success. That’s why I’m keeping a clean disciplinary record and working on my job as staff members require.

9 or 10 Points:

- » Every step I take relates to the successful life I’m building. The little steps matter, including the books I read, the classes I take, and the people with whom I make relationships. Since every decision comes with an opportunity cost, I’m as conscious about the steps I don’t take as I am about the steps I take.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____



Question 6—Accountability:

- » Which response most closely aligns with your perspective on the importance of tracking your progress?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » I'm not particularly eager to look at calendar pages because they remind me how much time I'm serving. I keep track of time by the seasons or by the new year. I'll start thinking about getting out when my release date gets closer.

3 or 4 Points:

- » The system sets my schedule. It tells me what I'm supposed to be doing with my time, and I just follow along, trying not to think about what I'm missing.

5 or 6 Points:

- » I know the length of my sentence, and I know that once I get closer to release, I'll participate in reentry programs. Until then, I don't want anything reminding me how much time I must serve.

7 or 8 Points:

- » I use the calendar to mark off tasks when I complete them.

9 or 10 Points:

- » I've created a series of accountability logs that help me measure my progress toward each goal I set. The journals show that I am pursuing a disciplined, deliberate plan related to my success upon release. I track everything daily and write monthly summaries I share with others.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Question 7—Awareness:

- » Which response most closely aligns with the importance you place on staying aware of opportunities and making others aware of your commitment to preparing for success?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » There aren't any opportunities here. Nothing matters. For that reason, I hang out with my crew and stay true to them. If things go wrong, I'll need them to have my back, just like I'll have their back.

3 or 4 Points:

- » I try to keep away from staff. By sticking with my people, I'm more likely to avoid problems with others. If I can avoid problems, I can avoid making things worse.

5 or 6 Points:

- » I try to get certificates whenever they're available. The staff members put those certificates in my file, which shows that I'm "programming." That's important to them.

7 or 8 Points:

- » I am taking advantage of various classes and earning certificates. They will help me build a case for staff members to show that I'm trying to better myself.

9 or 10 Points:

- » Since I've taken the time to define success, I've been able to set a series of incremental goals that I need to complete. Each time I finish one goal, I open new opportunities. This process sharpens my focus. By using journals to document my progress, I memorialize my commitment to success. When I share my progress with others, those people become more likely to support what I'm trying to achieve.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Question 8—Authenticity:

- » Which response most closely aligns with the importance you place on being authentic?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » I don't even understand the meaning of this question. I live day by day, dealing with situations as they arise. But I disagree that much of what goes in here is my fault. The system put me in this situation, and I've got to do what I've got to do.

3 or 4 Points:

- » I'm a convict, a prisoner. That's authentic. While in here, I'm doing what I'm supposed to do in that role, as a convict. The system uses anything I say against me, so I'm not willing to say more.

5 or 6 Points:

- » I show my authenticity by doing the best I can, given my situation. I will try to avoid problems, but if a problem surfaces, I'll do what I must.

7 or 8 Points:

- » I show my authenticity by being selective. I'm careful with the friends I choose, and I participate in any classes available, whether they have any value or not. For the most part, I think staff members view me as a model inmate because I stay active in programs. I avoid behavior that can lead to disciplinary problems.

9 or 10 Points:

- » I am building a record of authenticity, showing how every decision I'm making relates directly to the success I'm aspiring to become. I adjust confidently when obstacles surface, knowing I'm engineering my pathway to success. With incremental steps, I'm constantly creating tools, tactics, and resources to advance and accelerate my preparation for success.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Question 9—Achievement:

- » Which response most closely aligns with your view on how small achievements relate to your preparation for success?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » Small achievements don't matter here at all. I have to finish my sentence, and that's it. They can't do anything more than keep me here until then.

3 or 4 Points:

- » I don't care about small achievements like completing courses because all that matters is getting out of here. No one will care about small achievements like getting certificates in prison.

5 or 6 Points:

- » Small achievements like earning certificates only do so much. I'll go through the motions to get what I can to satisfy the system, but my heart isn't any of this nonsense. I'm simply passing the time and getting through this sentence.

7 or 8 Points:

- » I look forward to the small achievements because they help me pass the time. I'm looking forward to finishing each course to get a certificate. The staff members want me to complete programs because they can fill my file with certificates and say they're encouraging me to program.

9 or 10 Points:

- » Every day, I think about how I can prepare for success upon release, and small achievements matter greatly. I celebrate the little wins, knowing they bring more significant victories later. For example, I'm always working to improve my vocabulary and my writing skills, and I'm working to build a strong support network. Each minor achievement puts me in a position for a new opportunity.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Question 10—Appreciation:

- » Which response most closely aligns with your view on the importance of showing appreciation for the blessings that come your way?

0, 1, or 2 Points:

- » There isn't anything to appreciate here. No one ever did anything on my behalf, and I don't owe anything to anyone. I'm just trying to finish this time, one day at a time.

3 or 4 Points:

- » I don't have any blessings that I can appreciate from here. I shouldn't be here at all. What matters is getting through the day and my challenges. It's not my job to think about others. I simply want to avoid problems.

5 or 6 Points:

- » I appreciate being alive at this stage because life is all I have here. I've got a good perspective on reality. At this point, I'm limited to focusing on my challenges and getting through this struggle. I try to abide by the rules and comply with the staff's requests, but I hate being here and can't wait until I get out.

7 or 8 Points:

- » I'm showing appreciation by working to help those I care about reach their highest potential.

9 or 10 Points:

- » I appreciate that being here has helped me understand more about the social contract and what it means to live in a community. I've learned to appreciate that life isn't always about what's going on in my life. I can make myself stronger by working to contribute to my community. The lesson in humility will make me a better person.

Enter points:

Before presentation: _____

After presentation: _____

Difference: _____

Conclusion:

Finally, I offer my commitment to every recipient of this document: I am working to improve outcomes for all justice-impacted people. This commitment requires collaboration, and every voice has value.

We define “justice-impacted” as anyone:

- » Going through any phase of the criminal justice system,
- » Who have loved ones in the prison system,
- » Who devote their careers working in the criminal justice system,
- » Who create policies and laws relating to criminal justice,
- » Who may create job opportunities for people with criminal records,
- » Who wants to see improvements in our criminal justice system.

We value your input and invite your feedback anonymously or with your name.

Our team of dedicated interns at Prison Professors will compile the responses we receive through the US mail and Corrlinks. The feedback contributes to the development of self-directed programs that improve prison cultures and lead more people toward preparing for success upon release.

We cannot change the past for anyone, but we can start preparing today for a better future.

Respectfully,

Michael Santos