

From: Self Reinvention
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To: Haley, Nikki
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Inspiring the people with the problem to become their own Solution

Successful Community Reentry

Starts with

Cleaning Up

Life Baggage

I continue to be astonished that an individual who enters prison with consumer credit problems, garnishments, civil judgments, delinquent student loans, delinquent taxes, delinquent child support, expired, suspended or revoked driver licenses, open traffic violations, open warrants, taxation compliance issues, etc. is *exiting* prison years later with the exact same life baggage with which they entered, and in most cases the circumstances have been exacerbated.

People are released from prison with no instruction on how to address these issues, let alone a deliberate program that provides instruction and resources to resolve these problems before release. In many circumstances, individuals secure employment only to have their entire paycheck garnished to pay fines, bureau of motor vehicles penalties, child support, etc., and are left with zero to provide for their own subsistence.

In some states, an individual who has any outstanding fines that are payable to

the bureau of motor vehicles cannot receive their driver's license, which substantially handicaps the individual's ability to secure employment and provide for their own subsistence – so they can continue working and pay the fines. Thus, because of a \$250.00 bureau of motor vehicles fine, government agencies that are not coordinating with corrections exponentially increases the likelihood of recidivism at a cost to the taxpayer of over \$30,000 per year.

In many states, child support is also tied to an individual's driver's license, and payment delinquency can result in the suspension of an individual's license. Should the individual drive under suspension, it can result in an administrative or parole violation or a new case.

It is difficult to rationalize the economic case of incarcerating an individual at a cost of more than \$30,000 per year because his economic hardship caused him to fall behind a few hundred, or even a few thousand dollars on child support. With such overwhelming challenges, how can an individual ever hope to pursue a normal lifestyle?

Fundamental to solving problems is organization. When a person is faced with compounding issues that continue to escalate in intensity and severity, the individual frequently becomes consumed and overwhelmed. There is no systematic and disciplined agenda in place within our correctional institutions that methodically addresses the most important issues an individual needs to resolve before release to insure a streamlined reintegration into the community.

As mentioned, many people are released from prison today with the same *Life Baggage* they carried into prison xx years prior, i.e. child support and consumer credit delinquencies, tax compliance issues, civil litigation and judgments, driver's license suspensions or expirations, no directional goals, no listing of social organizations that can help, open warrants, little or no education or trade skills, etc.

If a person's life baggage is not deliberately reorganized with specific solutions to resolve each individual issue, these individuals are instantly overwhelmed upon release. If an individual hopes to change their life direction and enjoy a successful community reentry, it is paramount to resolve your life baggage before you are released, or at least have a very definitive plan to get it resolved expeditiously upon your release.

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As opposed to the many pre-release programs I have witnessed in our corrections system, very few employ a nuts and bolts practical agenda to help people get their life baggage cleaned up, and open issues resolved or at least organized so they can be resolved upon release.

The ex-offender reentering the community needs income. However, if they have open consumer credit, judgments and liens, Bureau of Motor Vehicles fines, or child support delinquencies, despite working hard and securing gainful employment, their income can be garnisheed. In such circumstances, an individual is left with inadequate income to provide for their own subsistence.

When the ex-offender's need is immediate, the reaction might be to treat the symptom with an instant gratification action - a criminal act. Conversely, if proper planning took place well in advance of release, the person's life baggage would be identified and each issue would have a plan and an approved solution implemented.

The instant gratification impulse should be seen as a danger signal. Only symptoms are treated with instant gratification actions, but the problems that are the root cause of the symptoms are rarely eradicated.

Our desire for instant gratification is an interesting phenomenon. The American culture has been influenced substantially by corporate America to accepting instant gratification as a lifestyle, almost an entitlement, and it has certainly become an expectation. Visa, MasterCard, technological advances, the Internet, microwave ovens, instant mashed potatoes, fast food, and on and on. These all provide instant gratification.

As a society, we have become very accustomed to expecting everything instantly. You can go to a car dealership, give them your Social Security number and within an hour, drive out in a new car. Prior to the exposure of predatory lending (*circa 2008*), if you could steam a mirror, you could get a mortgage on a six-figure house.

Clearly, some of this loose credit had contributed to the economic challenges facing the nation during 2008 - 2009. But, my point is, our entire culture has

become impatient, and generally unwilling to invest time and hard work before getting the prize. Albeit, we enjoy many conveniences from the technologies and services that offer instant gratification. However, we have become a very impatient society as well, and in many respects, this is detrimental to many people.

As people (*you and me*) who have served time and have the conviction label to conquer, the instant gratification syndrome can create a formidable internal challenge. We are subject to, and influenced by, the social conditioning that is inherent to our membership in the aforementioned impatient society. We have come to expect everything instantly, and we need to recognize that this can be a big influence on how we choose our paths toward achieving our goals and objectives.

Moreover, we also need to overcome our own habits and experiences. If a person has had a life of crime, then substantially everything they have accumulated has been by employing criminal or otherwise nefarious methods.

Here is where you need to be brutally honest with yourself. Look at everything you have accumulated in your life as a whole. What percentage of that whole was accumulated via honest hard work - work that would be considered acceptable within the guidelines of mainstream society? If that percentage is less than 100%, then simply recognize that you have developed a habit and methodology for achieving objectives, or accumulating the things that you want via mechanisms that serve the instant gratification syndrome.

If you are serving the instant gratification syndrome, then you are not in control of your path or your destiny. Indeed, the instant gratification syndrome is controlling you. If you genuinely want a life of legitimacy, then this is a habit that we will need to modify, which I address in more detail in my book, *Slaying the Dragon - The Journey from the Dungeon to the Ivory Tower*. For now, just internalize the realization that a habit does exist that is controlling what you do and how you do it, and that you are serving the habit as opposed to having a habit that serves you. As long as a person continues to serve their desire for instant gratification, they will likely continue to experience havoc in their life.

With respect to making a successful reentry into mainstream society, success is clearly enhanced for the person who has made the conscious choice to embrace legitimacy toward a life of normalcy, and has organized their life, and life baggage, and made a deliberate plan to follow upon release. The person who is just going to walk out the gate and wing-it is likely to chase after the instant gratifications to resolve the symptoms ***that are chasing after them***.

If you are released from prison, the system owes you nothing. An incarceration event is not a valid reason to expect entitlements. You have simply been given a new opportunity to change your life path. The direction of that path and its resultant destinations are your choice. People are well advised to look at a prison sentence as an *opportunity* to turn their life around as opposed to a