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Please feel free to share these articles and links with friends, colleagues and anyone who may need support conquering the challenges of community reentry.

The first consideration an individual must contemplate when facing community re-entry after incarceration is whether or not he or she *genuinely* wants a different path in life.

Changing your life path requires work, dedication and sacrifice. If an individual is unwilling to put forth the effort and work that is necessary to change his or her life path, then that person will probably find the exercise of trying to reenter mainstream society very frustrating.

People who do not genuinely want to embrace a new life path, but feel some obligation to demonstrate that they are trying, in an effort to appease the expectations of a spouse, family member, or parole officer, will arguably expend a great deal of energy manufacturing a plethora of excuses as to why the barriers to reentry cannot be overcome. The myriad of tortured excuses provides a convenient rationalization for an individual to not try very hard toward changing their life path, and it justifies why he or she is in life where he or she is – a sort of victim, that has somehow been singled out and persecuted, at least in his or her own mind.

If you're happy with the path that you're on and it is producing the results that you want for your life, then accept your future as being the result of your efforts.

However, if you are an individual who *genuinely* wants a new life path, but you wonder if putting forth the work and effort would just be an exercise in futility, *worry no more*. Hundreds of thousands of people who were released from prison and successfully re-entered mainstream society speak from experience. If you put forth the genuine work, sacrifice and effort, you can succeed.

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There are many important elements that we must consider when seeking employment. We must seek employment opportunities for which we are qualified – not in our assessment, but rather, qualified in the employer's judgment. There are numerous aspects of our education, experience, character and persona that contribute to an employer's assessment of our overall qualification for a particular position.

A single boilerplate resume sent to employers in disparate industries for a multitude of different positions is probably not very effective. When an employer is recruiting to fill a particular position, that employer wants to locate an individual whose qualifications closely fit the particulars of that position. Your resume needs to be tailored by industry and position. A successful employment search will likely require eight or ten variations of your resume, each customized to exploit those elements of your specific qualifications that appeal to the particulars and requirements of each opportunity.

In this day of the Internet and instant communication, many people have this delusion that filling out a couple of applications on the Internet, or sending in a few resumes via e-mail each day qualifies as a sincere job search. It doesn't! A genuine job search requires a good deal more dedication.

Seeking employment, particularly in an economy where there are more people than jobs, requires a plan. Don't be discouraged though – there may be more people than there are jobs, but there are definitely more jobs than there are people with a plan to find a job.

If a person takes the time to create a genuine employment acquisition plan, he or she absolutely will locate gainful employment. On the other hand, if an individual is unwilling to put forth the effort to create an employment acquisition plan, then he or she can expect results that amount to little more than frustration.

Even worse, some people convince themselves that the limited results they realize from their lackadaisical search for employment provides them a convenient excuse that no one will hire them because of their background – suggesting that a felony conviction is some kind of total disability. It isn't a disability, but it does present some unique challenges – none that cannot be conquered if an individual is willing to press forward and not give up and quit.
Just don't quit!

Decide which industries and positions are of interest to you. Begin with perhaps six industries and positions, and tailor resumes to each of those six positions. Emphasize your education, experience, and how your personality is best suited for the particulars of each specific position. When an employer reads your resume, you want them to see a match of your qualifications that fulfills the employer's needs – not just another person seeking a paycheck.

The preceding is probably decent and fundamental guidance for the majority of people seeking gainful employment. However, the individual who was recently released from jail or prison faces a unique set of challenges. The fundamentals mentioned above are still important, but there are a number of other considerations for someone who carries a felony record.

As previously mentioned, the first consideration is: *do you really want to change your life path?* Do you really want to become a member of *mainstream society*? If you genuinely want to take a new life-path, then this process will not be a frustrating and painful drudgery. Rather, it will simply present interesting challenges that you can and will conquer. A felony conviction or incarceration event does trigger some *collateral damages*, but a felony background is not a barrier to achieving a successful new life path.

Many people who are released from prison are fundamentally brainwashed to believe that becoming a card-carrying member of *mainstream society* is an almost impossible mission. That is a fallacy that is frequently proliferated by those who have been in, got out, and then came back – the recidivists.

Why would you even listen to an oratory regarding the challenges of community reentry from someone who failed at reentry? That would be analogous to taking financial planning counseling from someone who just filed a personal bankruptcy.

If you have the desire to take a new life-path, then the fulfillment of your desire is going to require change – a kind of *self-reinvention*. Change is difficult, especially after an individual is released from prison. All of the temptations and all of the old friends are readily available when an individual is released. In some respects, it is harder to get out than it is to be in, but not because of the “*barriers*” to reentry. The re-entry “barriers” are overrated and are largely

propaganda perpetuated by recidivists.

Whether you have been an inmate in a prison, work in a prison, or work in the community reentry profession, chances are that some of the people who have influenced your assessment regarding the "*insurmountable*" reentry challenges are people who got out of prison and then returned – offering a laundry list of tortured excuses as to why the felony conviction prevented them from reentering mainstream society.

With a national recidivism rate of roughly 65%, that means that thirty-five percent of individuals who got out *never came back*. Very, very few individuals in prison, or individuals working in prisons or reentry have had a comprehensive dialog with those individuals who got out, genuinely re-entered mainstream society, and stayed out.

"*Genuinely re-entering mainstream society*" is an important distinction. Individuals who are released from prison and recidivate are not qualified to engage in a "*how to make a successful community reentry*" dialog.

The veracity and effectiveness of those who are released and immediately find employment in an organization that is offering some kind of ex-offender reentry assistance or counseling is questionable, or those who start a community reentry non-profit organization right out of prison. They have not done what all of their constituents are expected to do – **reenter mainstream society** and locate a regular mainstream job.

If the lifestyle of mainstream society is what you really want, stop listening to people who talk about successful community reentry when they have no actual life experience, and start listening to that 35% who have succeeded at genuine re-entry into mainstream society. If a new life as a member of mainstream society is genuinely what you want, *you absolutely can have it*.

It seems that is always someone else's fault when someone recidivates, if you listen to the excuses some people offer when they return to prison. The police were targeting them, their parole officer had it out for them, the judge had a burr, etc. This group of recidivists refuses to accept personal accountability for their actions, and they justify themselves to everyone else by placing blame on everyone except he who stares back in the mirror. If you are one of these individuals, you either don't genuinely want to be a member of mainstream society, which is completely respectable, or you are making excuses. If you are the latter, when you are alone and making an honest assessment, you know that all you are doing is making excuses to justify not doing the work and making the sacrifices necessary to engage yourself in mainstream society.

If a person wants to become a card-carrying member of mainstream society, *it is simply a choice*. The person who has made that choice to successfully reenter mainstream society will do it with or without any assistance.