

Making a “Personal Game Plan” for Your Release

By Joseph Chiapetta, Jr.

Getting out of prison is a stressful experience no matter how prepared you may believe that you are. In effect, you are moving from one type of culture to another. To lessen the shock and increase your odds of success, you should draft a personal checklist tailored to your specific needs. Many inmates put this process off or dismiss the notion of writing things down at all. When a person leaves prison, hundreds of distractions can derail any plan. Writing down your plans keeps you focused. It's like making a list to take to the grocery store. You stick to that list; otherwise you end up with a cart full of stuff you really don't need and forget to pick up the things you wanted in the first place. “Getting out” is just like that. If you don't create a list and work through that list, many things simply will not get done.

THE PERSONAL GAME PLAN

Your game plan is a list of realistic and attainable short-term goals. Everybody's long-term goals are roughly the same: not returning to prison, getting a job, taking care of or starting a family. It's the specific short-term goals we set for ourselves that pave the way to our long-term ones. One of the best ways to start is by creating lists that cover each day or your first two to four weeks after release. Write each list to cover three to four days at a time. Remember not to assume you have jobs or other resources waiting for you. Just because somebody promises you something, even if it's family, it's not a guarantee. Many ex-inmates re-offended after going home to broken promises. You must make a plan that relies upon you and what you can do. There are many resources available out there. One-Stop Career Centers have lists of places to obtain employment, housing, food, clothes, tools and transportation. Your “Game Plan Checklist” for the first four days should look something like this:

DAY 1

- Call my family
- See my parole officer
- Check in at halfway house
- Set up transportation (public, friends, family)
- Pick up/purchase clothes and hygiene items

DAY 2

- Get driver's license
- Get Social Security Card
- Go to One-Stop Center to register for services, set up federal bonding, update my resume and set up job interviews
- Set up a free e-mail account

DAY 3

- See my family
- Set up job interviews
- Open a checking account
- Get a copy of my credit report

DAY 4

- Go to interviews
- See children
- Go to a 12-step or other support group meeting
- Make phone calls and e-mail my networking contacts.

MAKING YOUR PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Notice that things like going to the old neighborhood, having a party with old friends or looking for a date do not make the list. The hard truth is that if you do not get yourself squared away first before worrying about recreation, your odds of violating parole or re-offending go through the roof. This is common sense and your choice. You may not get everything done on this time table you set, but you can add and delete tasks as you go. The key is writing everything down and steadily getting things done. Before you know it, you are closer to those long-term goals.

TIPS

- Get involved in a prerelease or transitional living program. This is the best thing you can do to maximize your changes of success. No other program gives you more tools and current vital information than a reentry program.
- Get started. Start making your personal game plan now. Make as many arrangements as you can before you get out. Waiting until the last minute is a plan for failure.

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A WORD ABOUT NETWORKING

Networking is developing a pool of people who can help you, provide you with useful information or even introduce you to others willing to help. Making a list of names and contact information of everybody who gives you any positive feedback is the beginning of this networking. People you should add are your friends, family, clergy and even prospective employers who liked you during the interview, but couldn't hire you right away. It's all about who you are now and what you can do with your future, not just where you've been and how you got there.

- Give yourself time to adjust. Don't try to get everything done of the first day. Be sure to take time alone with family and close friends. Be patient with yourself and understand that it might take you a while to reach your goals. You may feel depressed or overwhelmed. These feelings are normal. Just be patient with yourself, stay positive and follow your plan.

CONCLUSION

Many of our transitional-living students are focused on small business ownership, credit repair, real-estate ownership and the other financial lessons we provide. However, at the end of the program most of them learn that it's the simple things that matter most. The simple habit of writing things down and carrying out those tasks is the foundation to any future success. 



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