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## THE PRISONER’S GUIDE TO DOING TIME

A Prerequisite for Anyone Who Has to Self-Surrender

### Life Behind Bars

First and foremost, the Prisoner’s *Guide to Doing Time* is designed to help you, as a newly committed offender, to make the best use of your time while incarcerated. It is inspired by my 24 years behind bars and the lessons I learned there—lessons that changed my life for the better.

By understanding your rights while in prison and following my seven laws for doing time, you will begin the positive work of preparing for your release and successful re-entry while *inside*, rather than *outside*, where it is much more difficult. According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, nearly 68% of released state prisoners return to prison within three years.<sup>1</sup>

But, you do not need to become a recidivism statistic. Instead, this guide will help you begin the process of understanding and reconciling your past behavior, while you actively plan for a better future. Here are some important things you can choose to do now to prepare for a successful re-entry:

- Take advantage of educational and vocational opportunities.
- Set realistic goals that you can achieve.
- Make better choices.
- Be a model prisoner.
- Communicate effectively with other inmates and staff.

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<sup>1</sup> This 2018 Bureau of Justice Statistics update on prisoner recidivism tracks a representative sample of prisoners released in 2005 in 30 states and chronicles their arrests through 2014. In 2005, those 30 states accounted for 77 percent of all persons released from state prisons nationwide.

After you successfully complete this tutorial, you will be ready to serve your sentence in the safest and successful manner.

There are two questions to keep in mind as you begin your journey toward positive self-awareness:

1. What changes do I need to make in order to live a positive and productive life?
2. How can I implement those changes?

By answering these two questions truthfully, and sincerely applying what you learn to your own situation, you can begin to change your life before your release and be much better prepared for a successful re-entry into society.

—*Cedric Dean*

**Know Your Rights**

It is important for you to know what legal rights you have while serving time. Although some of your constitutional rights may have been suspended, you have the right to:

1. Be treated respectfully, impartially and fairly by prison staff.
2. Be informed of the rules, procedures and schedules concerning the operation of the institution.
3. Enjoy freedom of religious and voluntary worship.
4. Visitations and correspondence with family members and friends as well as members of the news media, while adhering to the institution's rules and guidelines.
5. Unrestricted and confidential access to the courts regarding such matters as legality of your conviction, civil suits pending, criminal cases, and the conditions of your sentence.
6. Legal counsel from an attorney of your choice through interviews and correspondence.
7. Use of the law library reference materials to help you resolve legal problems, either on your own, or, if available, with the aid of a legal assistance program
8. Access to reading materials for your educational advancement or reading enjoyment, with the exception of some restricted magazines and newspapers
9. Opportunities to participate in any available educational classes, vocational training, and employment suited to your interests and abilities.
10. Use funds to open checking and savings accounts, assist your family, and purchase items from the commissary and other authorized vendors compliant with institution security and good order.

## **The Seven Laws of Doing Time**

One of the definitions of *law* is a rule or order that it is advisable or obligatory to observe.<sup>2</sup>

Although following my seven laws of doing time is voluntary, the consequences of breaking any of them may lead to dire straits and a world of difficulty for yourself and others.

Whether you're doing time or not, adhering to these seven laws will help you stay centered the rest of your life.

### **1. ALWAYS THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK**

The more you think before you speak, the more likely you won't say something foolish that you can't take back. Regardless of the situation, the single greatest mistake you can make while incarcerated is to lose control of your emotions and react angrily. It may be good for your instant gratification, but inappropriate reactions inevitably increase the likelihood of more verbal abuse or a serious physical altercation. Once you speak, you cannot take it back. Know *what* you want to say and *why* you are saying it.

### **2. NEVER PUT TOO MUCH TRUST IN ASSOCIATES**

In prison it is common to want to turn to other inmates from your geographical area when you find yourself in trouble. Prison is a bad place, and your associates can foster its badness. Oftentimes, you think you know someone, when you really don't.

The problem is that your associates often agree with you for personal gain. Many will

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<sup>2</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

conceal their true intentions and feelings in an attempt *to go along, to get along*. They will laugh with you one minute, and laugh at your demise the next.

Since truthfulness is a rarity in prison, you may never know how an associate truly feels. Associates will say that they love your company, support your position and have your back—maybe they do, but more often, they don't.

### 3. **DO NOT DISRESPECT ANYONE—STAFF OR PRISONER**

Being respectful is the most essential skill of all in communicating with others.

Because you can never be absolutely certain who someone is, treat everyone you meet with respect, just like you'd like to be treated.

Always be mindful that it is never wise to bum bridges. As in all of life, whether or not you're doing time, a person who is insignificant to you today may be a person of great significance tomorrow.

### 4. **REDEFINE YOURSELF**

Don't let your past define who you are today. Redefine yourself by self-consciously becoming the person you need to be. That includes taking control of your actions and developing a more positive behavior that transcends prison games or gangs.

Your primary responsibility to yourself for the rest of your life, is to build your new character in a fashion that is honorable, respectable and likeable. And finally, you must have a mission—one that does not just include yourself, but your family and

friends as well.

## **5. IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD IT, YOU DON'T NEED IT**

Want often produces adverse effects. The more you desire something, the more you pursue it. Unfortunately, in prison, as in life, expressing an obsessive desire for something you can't afford makes you vulnerable and more likely to be preyed upon by others, or commit a crime to get what you want.

In prison, you must turn your back on what you want, and show your self-discipline and self-respect. This is the kind of willpower that will help you avoid taking unnecessary risks that could lead to serious problems.

What is offered for free is chancy and often involves either deception or a *Catch 22* (no-win) situation. What has worth, is worth paying for.

## **6. AVOID ATTRACTING ATTENTION TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS**

Never give other inmates the impression that you think you are better than they.

Appearing better than others is always risky, but appearing to be perfect and faultless is even more risky. Jealousy produces unnecessary enemies.

Prisoners have a difficult time dealing with feelings of inferiority. This is because most convicts have an inflated sense of pride, and when they meet conceited inmates who are self-centered, they make it clear that the world doesn't revolve around them.

Self-centeredness of any kind in prison produces problems, and one of the best ways to avoid problems is by being humble.

## **7. EDUCATE YOURSELF**

Prison is a school of higher learning for the uneducated and unethical. It can be an institution of confinement or an institution of preparation. Being incarcerated gives you full access to a chest of knowledge, or a casket of schemes.

You must choose which it will be for you and not be distracted by con artists, who will use all manner of chicanery to discourage you from seeing prison life for what it really is—your opportunity to educate yourself for success, now, and in the future.

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