

The Day After Prison

A Letter to Every Individual Soon to
Be Released from Prison or Jail in
the United States of America

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The background of the entire page is white, decorated with several large, semi-transparent yellow geometric shapes. These shapes include rounded rectangles, vertical bars, and triangles, some of which are oriented horizontally and others vertically, creating a modern, abstract pattern.

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from Prison or Jail in the United

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Foreword



To those currently incarcerated and soon to be released from prison or jail:

As I begin this letter, I want to emphasize that this message is not intended to diminish the pain and suffering endured by victims of crimes. Rather, its purpose is to help individuals steer clear of reoffending and re-entering the justice system.

According to the United States Department of Justice, a staggering 70% of individuals released from prison will find themselves back behind bars within five years. Considering that

95% of incarcerated individuals will eventually regain freedom, it becomes paramount for both you and your community to get ready for this approaching transition.

Navigating our justice system is no easy feat. Many seek legal counsel even for minor infractions like traffic violations, and entanglement with this system often feels inescapable once you're in it.

When I engage with someone who has been incarcerated, I am often struck by the realization that circumstances could have easily led me down a similar path.

Some skeptics believe that messages like this fall on deaf ears and are futile endeavors. But how does one begin to listen if not exposed to the message? Are all efforts to reach out to those in prison truly in vain?

This message does not advocate leniency toward crime nor does it oppose prosecution. It addresses the cyclical nature many face post-release and aims to break the cycle of reincarceration. Successful reintegration into society results in reduced crime rates, fostering a safer environment for everyone.

On a broader scale, this message promotes a more intelligent justice system. On a personal level, it offers a roadmap for success for those leaving confinement.

The power of this message lies in its simplicity; if embraced, it has the potential to revolutionize your life. Isn't it true that our lives are influenced by one meaningful interaction at a time?

About me



I have dedicated the past twenty-five years to working with marginalized groups within society, often labeled as “at-risk populations.” My professional journey has encompassed roles as a probation officer, parole officer, diversion counselor, court administrator, and public speaker. Additionally, I served as a combat stress counselor for the United States Air Force Reserve, culminating in a twenty-seven-year military career.

Throughout my diverse roles, I have continuously pondered proactive strategies to break the

cycle of recidivism. Motivated by curiosity and a genuine desire to assist, I immersed myself in various work-release facilities. Witnessing individuals thrive within environments characterized by structured routines, attainable goals, consistent feedback, and unwavering focus was enlightening. Many successfully secured employment, earned promotions, and abstained from substance abuse. However, post-graduation from these programs, far too many individuals regressed into their previous habits, presenting a disheartening cycle to witness. While counseling and treatment have always held significance for me, I often felt that the available options lacked a solid and meticulously designed foundation. This spurred my determination to provide meaningful help.

To those among you who have dedicated your lives to aiding incarcerated populations in their transition, I commend and appreciate your invaluable service.

This letter is directed towards individuals soon to be released from prison or jail, individuals striving to enhance their circumstances and break free from the cycle of incarceration.

Why this letter? In a world teeming with varied opportunities to foster positive change, why focus on successful reentry? The answer lies in recognizing that you hold crucial roles in the lives of others—you are someone's son, daughter, sibling, relative, neighbor, or friend. Within your community, you possess the ability to influence and be influenced by others, shaping the collective environment.

Why you? As mentioned earlier, your eventual return to the community is inevitable, shared by 95% of your fellow inmates. A successful transition home harbors mutual benefits for both you and the community awaiting your reintegration.

Why now? Our society is grappling with a whole new set of emerging challenges, presenting boundless possibilities for those willing to rise above the rest. Moreover, at this moment, it is likely you have a clear mind and a body free of mood-altering substances, you may be in the best shape to read this letter and strategize for your future.

One



We have a responsibility to ourselves and to our collective.

Imagine for a moment the awe-inspiring reality of our existence. Picture our planet hurtling through space at nearly 70,000 miles per hour, and simultaneously spinning at almost 1,000 miles per hour. Despite this tremendous movement, we can stand together, feeling the stillness as if time itself has paused.

Consider the intricate forces, whether you call it God, Allah, Great Spirit, The Universe, or by any other name, that have orchestrated

this extraordinary human experience. It is a testament to how significant each and every one of us is in the grand scheme of things. Regardless of your background, whether from the east side or west side, identifying as White, Black, Asian, Native, male, female, or nonbinary, remember that you are an integral part of something wondrous.

This realization can serve as a guiding light on the darkest of days. No matter the mistakes of our past or the trials we have endured, the sheer act of being alive and present on this Earth connects us to this miraculous and inexplicable phenomenon. Reflect on the words of A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the esteemed scientist and former president of India, who believed that the universe is inherently benevolent towards those who dare to dream and toil for a better tomorrow.



As I start this letter, I find myself navigating familiar topics, sharing insights that I suspect are not new to you. If some of these reflections seem obvious, please accept my apologies; my intent is not to come across as condescending. I merely seek to ensure that all angles are considered.

Also, I acknowledge your intelligence as an individual. After all, some of the activities that landed you in prison or jail required a depth of understanding of human behavior and human systems. The intricacies of human behavior and psychology are not easily mastered, underscoring the complexity of the situations that brought you to prison or jail.

For many, the cyclic journey between prison and the community can feel like an inescapable whirlpool, locking them away for a significant portion of their lives. This relentless vortex exerts a gravitational pull, drawing everything towards its center. While some may view this

pattern as inevitable, it is essential to recognize that accepting this cycle as the norm is only a partial truth. Sure, the revolving door of prisons may always exist, but it does not have to be this wide and it doesn't have to include you.

The pivotal question emerges: What fuels this cycle that entangles individuals in the web of incarceration? Understanding this fundamental query is key to breaking free from its grip.



There's a prevailing belief that the vortex trapping individuals in the prison-street-prison cycle is none other than themselves—a notion suggesting a comfort and familiarity with the incarcerated lifestyle. However, I find this perspective to be overly simplistic, serving as a convenient endpoint for discussions. Still, I've witnessed firsthand that for some, returning to

jail or prison represents a reunion with familiar faces and routines. In those walls, some find a sense of belonging and stature. To them, prison is a realm they comprehend; prison is home.

I have to add, it's all too common to drift through years, existing in survival mode without recognizing that our actions are primarily dictated by ingrained patterns and conditioning. This unconscious state hinders true transformation, as insight alone often falls short in altering our behaviors. Genuine change emerges from shedding old habits, embracing new ways, and diligently practicing them.

If we entertain the notion that the vortex indeed resides within us, I pose a simple yet profound query: Does this way of life align with the vision you hold for yourself?



Do the people you surround yourself with act as a vortex pulling you back into the cycle of prison and the streets? Perhaps you've heard that the company you keep can either uplift you or drag you down. Have you experienced this in your own life? If your associations are contributing to a cycle that leads back to prison, you might be caught in a harmful leader-follower relationship that pushes you towards incarceration once again. Could it be that these leaders are not truly looking out for you? Are they self-serving, abandoning you when you need support the most? Developing your leadership abilities and defining your personal values could be the key in avoiding trouble and selecting more positive influences.

Do you know who truly guides you? In a world filled with endless information and competing voices, the leader worth listening to is the one genuinely concerned for your well-being. This leader stands the test of time, never seeking

control or becoming offended by your choices. Their wisdom is best heard in moments of silence, as they guide you through your inner voice. Dismissing this inner guidance can derail your path forward. Take the advice of Oprah Winfrey, who speaks of the powerful, quiet voice within each of us calling us towards something greater.

I encourage you to embrace moments of silence and introspection. Silence, as Thich Nhat Hanh describes, is a crucial element for connecting with your inner self. By dedicating fifteen minutes daily to quiet reflection and breath focus, you may begin to unlock the wisdom within. Although this process varies in speed for everyone, the inherent qualities of kindness, cooperation, and generosity strive to illuminate our actions from within.

Some may argue against this approach, doubting your ability to seek answers within yourself.

They might even suggest your inner voice will lead you astray. But I challenge you to recognize the strength and capabilities you possess. What you may need is guidance in shedding old behaviors, that have not delivered your desired outcomes, and embracing new, positive patterns. Develop your skill in listening to your inner voice and allow it to be your guiding light towards a better future.



Another significant factor to consider is mental and emotional health. Mental health concerns the physical structure of your brain, often referred to as your body's computer. Blood flow facilitates communication among different brain regions. Any head injury, whether from a blow, a car accident, or a fall, can potentially disrupt this communication network in your brain. Despite feeling physically fine, such

incidents might lead to noticeable changes in behavior that are difficult to explain. Due to the hidden nature of head injuries, others might misinterpret your actions, assuming traits like laziness, forgetfulness, or irritable that are not accurate reflections of your true self.

Emotional health involves the smooth functioning or dysfunction of various brain systems. Similar to apps on a mobile device, when one system is overwhelmed, glitches can occur without your awareness. Symptoms may manifest as sleep disturbances, social withdrawal, low energy, feelings of hopelessness, or physical discomfort. These internal struggles remain invisible to others, leading to misconceptions about your character and capabilities, such as being lazy, unambitious, or quick to anger.

Consider the wise words of an Air Force psychologist: “If a friend broke their leg, you wouldn’t advise them to tough it out; you would support

them in seeking proper medical care. Similarly, if you suspect mental or emotional distress, why not seek professional assistance?” Continuous counseling has the potential to significantly improve your well-being and quality of life. Also, consider the complexity of the language of our emotions. Learning to speak and understand it is akin to learning a new language such as Spanish or Japanese. You would have to attend class every week for several years—but with remarkable dedication comes remarkable achievements.



Let's examine the potential impact of substance abuse and addiction on your life. Alcohol, in particular, has been linked to numerous violent crimes, prompting us to explore its role in perpetuating destructive cycles.

Reflect on your initial experiences with alcohol. For many, the first taste may have

been unpleasant, requiring mixing with other beverages to mask the bitterness. Why, then, do individuals persist in consuming a substance that elicited such negative reactions initially? Consider the reasons behind your alcohol consumption - whether to enhance social interactions, cope with challenges, lower inhibitions, or for the sense of ritual and excitement. There is no judgment attached to these motives, only a call to acknowledge the driving forces behind your past alcohol use.

Turning to other drugs, it's crucial to recognize their potential to alter your emotions, thoughts, and actions significantly. Some turn to drugs for pain relief, whether physical or emotional, while others seek euphoria or comfort. Reflect on whether your past drug use aligned with the life you aspire to lead or if it led to consequences requiring substantial cleanup. These introspective inquiries, though uncomfortable, can pave the way for essential self-discovery and growth.

As you move forward with a clear mindset, consider how substance use aligns with your future goals and well-being. Addiction presents a multifaceted challenge best addressed through professional assistance, which should also encompass addressing underlying traumas. Dr. Eric Kandel's research highlights how addiction alters the brain's reward system, highlighting the complexities involved in combating substance dependency.

If you are prescribed medications, follow your doctor's instructions diligently. It's essential to continue medication even when you start feeling better, as prematurely discontinuing treatment may compromise your progress. Trust in the guidance of medical professionals to navigate the complexities of addiction and prioritize your long-term well-being.



Let's explore the allure of exhilaration within the prison-street-prison cycle. Some individuals derive excitement and satisfaction from this lifestyle, finding the routine of a conventional nine-to-five job, financial responsibility, and adherence to deadlines mundane in comparison. The prospect of stability and routine may hold little appeal for these individuals who are captivated by the thrill of their current existence.

Reflect on the potential sacrifices entailed by this lifestyle. Are you compromising valuable time with loved ones, including family and children? Are you neglecting your creativity, your personal influence, or your opportunities to explore the world around you? Consider whether this path is limiting your potential, hindering your growth, and impeding your ability to shape a fulfilling future.

Could there be exhilaration beyond the confines of the prison-street-prison cycle? Discover

the joy of nurturing your creativity, fostering relationships, exploring your passions, and unlocking your full potential. Embrace personal virtues such as honesty, loyalty, self-sacrifice, accountability, and self-control to cultivate your character and evolve as an individual. As Buddha wisely stated, the greatest conquest lies within oneself.

If exhilaration serves as a vortex trapping you in this cycle, the solution lies in establishing a foundation of personal meaning and enduring joy. By anchoring yourself in values that resonate with your core beliefs, you can begin to experience genuine exhilaration. Consider embodying a state of steady gladness akin to the serene half-smile of a devoted yogi, observing how it transforms your inner state.



Consider the possibility that the judicial system itself serves as a vortex in perpetuating the prison-street-prison cycle. Navigating this complex system can be daunting, leading individuals to seek legal counsel for even minor issues like traffic violations. Within a single county or municipality, various officials - such as police officers, pretrial officers, probation officers, and many others - often lack coordination and collaboration. Imagine the invaluable insights that could arise if all these agencies convened to streamline the process for defendants and minimize duplicated efforts.

The challenges faced by those on probation, parole, or work release often go unaddressed. Take, for instance, a scenario where a past head injury impacts your ability to follow instructions or learn new tasks, leading others to misconstrue your struggles as laziness or even defiance. Such misunderstandings can result in accusations of

non-compliance from Community Corrections Officers, leading to undeserved return to prison.

Picture yourself on your first day searching for employment after entering work release. Overwhelmed by the numerous rules and unfamiliar surroundings in the community, you find yourself disoriented and anxious. A dead cellphone battery, an impending anxiety attack, and personal concerns compound your stress as you, with fear and uncertainty, break a rule by accepting a ride to get to your next destination. Despite your sincere intentions, this mistake leads to charges of deviation and a heartbreaking return to prison, with outsiders quick to pass judgment on your failure to adapt.

In these challenging moments, it becomes evident that the intricacies of the justice system and personal struggles can intersect in ways that hinder progress and perpetuate cycles of incarceration. Empathy and understanding

from all involved parties, along with targeted support and comprehensive guidance, are crucial in breaking free from these destructive patterns and fostering genuine rehabilitation.



Let's address the pervasive issue of racism within certain governmental systems that can contribute to the prison-street-prison cycle. Racism, whether overt or subtle, can infiltrate various facets of society, raising concerns about its potential impact on an individual's likelihood of arrest or re-arrest. Studies have shown that a Black male in the United States faces a higher probability of re-arrest, even when possessing attributes associated with lower re-arrest risks. This stark reality underscores the systemic challenges faced by individuals of color, highlighting the need for a critical examination and reform of discriminatory practices within the criminal justice system.

For those nearing their release from incarceration, it is crucial not to succumb to stagnation in the face of racism. Rather, it is essential to persist in advocating for racial equality within your community while striving to overcome systemic barriers.

By acknowledging and confronting the detrimental impacts of racism on the justice system and society as a whole, we can work towards fostering a more equitable and just environment that supports the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals and upholds the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of race or background.

Two



We have explored nine significant factors contributing to the prison-street-prison cycle: 1) Comfort with the lifestyle, 2) Social influences, 3) Lack of leadership skills or susceptibility to following others, 4) Mental health challenges, 5) Impact of head injuries, 6) Substance abuse, 7) Pursuit of exhilaration, 8) Complexities within the judicial system, and 9) Racism. If you resonate with any of these vortexes, I encourage you to open up about your experiences with a trusted mentor or counselor.

Now, let's focus on the path forward. Firstly, create and activate an accountability circle; secondly, develop a straightforward plan for your immediate future; and lastly, steer clear of common pitfalls.

Consider this accountability strategy example:

- I engage in phone conversations with Jonathan every Sunday at 4 p.m.
- I connect via FaceTime with Olivia every Wednesday at 6 p.m.
- I meet Frank at Main Street Bakery every Saturday at 9 a.m.

Implementing such a structured accountability approach is accessible to all and proves highly beneficial. When you schedule regular interactions with mentors, the likelihood of follow-through significantly increases – akin to

the motivation gained from meeting an exercise buddy. Your accountability circle should consist of individuals who hold you to the highest standards, enabling them to provide constructive feedback that might challenge you but ultimately fosters personal growth and positive change.



One of the most crucial messages in this letter is for you to contemplate the endless possibilities to carve out a new life for yourself to such an extent that, if you are on any form of community supervision, engaging in any activity risking your return to prison or jail offers no sustainable benefit. Whether it involves major or minor infractions, it's essential to grasp that the temporary gains of taking such risks can swiftly escalate into severe consequences. Just as running a red light might offer a fleeting advantage of getting somewhere faster initially,

repeated actions of such nature can inevitably lead to a catastrophic outcome. The allure of small risks tends to grow into more significant dangers over time, overshadowing any short-term rewards they may offer.

Furthermore, never dismiss the small voice at the back of your head - the innate internal compass guiding your decisions. This intrinsic guidance system is an integral part of your being and should not be overlooked but rather heeded.

Also, establishing an accountability circle before your release from prison will play a pivotal role in shaping your future success, providing much-needed support and direction as you navigate the path ahead.

View your life from a holistic perspective, akin to seeing it from 30,000 feet above ground level. Start by securing a stable place to stay, ideally with a supportive family member willing to

assist you in forging a brighter future. If this isn't feasible, consider seeking accommodation with a friend unstained by past criminal activities or exploring transitional housing programs as viable alternatives.

Upon securing lodging, focus on obtaining employment to sustain your daily needs. While aligning your job search with your skill set is ideal, remember that it doesn't necessarily have to be your dream job right away. Consider vocational retraining programs if your skills require honing, and seek prospects for advancement within companies to foster professional growth. Leverage resources like Work Source and staffing agencies and use commute time wisely to engage in productive activities such as reading or listening to educational materials or podcasts.

As you transition into independence and navigate personal decision-making, rely on your circle of accountability to guide and inspire you.

Cultivating a vision for your life, such as continuous self-improvement through reading and personal development, can provide a roadmap for ongoing growth and fulfillment. Embrace this journey with resilience and determination, remembering that each step forward is a testament to your commitment to a brighter future.



To avoid falling back into the cycle of incarceration, it's crucial to address common pitfalls such as romantic relationships, unchecked negative aggression, and alcohol intoxication. Bringing these aspects under control significantly enhances your chances of steering clear of prison or jail in the future.

Let's examine these three common pitfalls more closely:

Let's begin with romantic relationships. When embarking on a romantic endeavor, chemical bonds form in the brain, fostering attachments that may prove challenging to sever. Honesty about your intentions within a relationship is paramount – misrepresenting yourself to fulfill personal needs can trigger a chain of events leading to adverse consequences, potentially culminating in legal trouble.

Moving on to negative aggression, distinguish it from positive forms of assertiveness like aiding someone in need or appropriately aggressive in sports. Negative aggression entails losing control or infringing on others' rights, often arising unexpectedly, leaving you blindsided by its potentially damaging consequences. This impulsive response, rooted in survival instincts, fails to consider rational outcomes and can swiftly escalate out of control, akin to compulsively scratching an eye itch until it becomes

inflamed. While negative aggression may seem like a display of strength, it often conceals an underlying sense of fear. Seeking counseling, practicing mindfulness, and training in meditation can equip you with the tools to recognize and manage aggressive tendencies effectively.

Exploring emotions like anger and forgiveness is vital. Sustained anger can lead to various health issues and deepen into chronic depression, whereas forgiveness offers emotional release, improved well-being, and enhanced physical health. Embrace forgiveness not as exculpation for others, but as a means to unburden yourself from negativity and foster inner peace.

Lastly, be mindful of alcohol intoxication's detrimental effects. Research indicates that over 40% of violent incidents involve alcohol consumption, underscoring the importance of responsible drinking habits to avoid impulsive

actions and mitigate the risk of engaging in harmful behavior.

By addressing these challenges proactively and cultivating self-awareness and emotional resilience, you can navigate potential pitfalls and strive towards lasting change and a stable, fulfilling future outside the confines of incarceration.

As we near the end of this letter, it is crucial to remember these key points:

1. Embracing honesty in your romantic relationships can lay a strong foundation for your future outside of incarceration.
2. Managing negative impulses and aggression will pave the way for healthier interactions and a more stable path moving forward.

3. Maintaining sobriety is a significant step towards breaking free from the cycle of prison.

It's imperative not to overlook the power of these actions just because they seem simple. They hold the key to a successful journey beyond bars.

Remember, the world is full of boundless opportunities awaiting your grasp.

Wishing you well on your path ahead,

Sincerely, Edrid Tirado

Highlights



Top three tips to stay out of prison or jail:

1. *Be honest in your relationships*
2. *Keep your negative aggression in check*
3. *Stay sober*

Solid platform:

1. *A simple plan for your near future*
2. *An accountability circle*
3. *New mantra: Small risks are not worth it*
4. *Develop the skill of listening to your inner leader*