

Getting Out vs. Staying Out

Ex-Con Learns To Break Free of Prison's Tunnel Vision

As told to Rex Parkerson...

You meet a lot of guys in prison, and most of them have the same goal in mind: Getting out. Too bad they don't know squat about setting goals. If they're unlucky, they just might achieve theirs.

I know a thing or two about life in prison, myself. And I know that just about every convict who has a goal to get out of prison doesn't have any idea how he's going to stay out once he gets out. You see, getting out of prison is really pretty easy. Almost anyone can do it. If that's your goal, congratulations! You've got about a 95% chance of success. That's how many people on average get out of prison over time, out of the total prison population, that is.

But how many of them have set tangible, realistic, achievable goals that will keep them from coming back? It's one thing to want out of prison. It's a whole other thing to want to stay out.

Take Jesse, for instance. He'd been living on the streets as a teenager and had several run-ins with the law as a juvie. A high school dropout from a pretty dysfunctional family. Life dealt him a pretty bum hand. But it wasn't his fault he kept getting into trouble. He was just doing what everyone expected him to do, and by the time he was twenty-one, he was locked up, doing a thirty-six month sentence for getting drunk, stealing a car, driving it up to the mountains and going hunting without a license. At the time, Jesse's main excuse was he was bored, and that he couldn't afford his own car or a hunting license because no one would give him a job. Yeah, the usual attitude of entitlement. You've heard it all before. And he even had a motivation for not wanting to go to jail. Life is boring enough without money and too much time on your hands, but its even more boring behind bars. So Jesse couldn't wait to get out of prison and back into society where at least he could live and breath like a regular guy. So he could eat his meals when he wanted to, not when he was told. So he could work out on his own weight pile when he wanted to, not when he was allowed to as a privilege. So he didn't have to always watch his back to see who might be sneaking up to thump on him.

Oh, and most important of all to Jesse, there are no women in prison, and he kind of missed spending a little time with them, too. So, yeah, Jesse was real motivated to get out of prison. He got regular visits from his girlfriend and they made plans for moving him in to her apartment, looking for work, getting a car—the whole bit. A great plan for getting out of prison.

But less than two months after he paroled, Jesse



was right back in the slammer. Why? He said his plans didn't stick. They weren't on solid ground. "I guess all that time I spent locked up, all I could see was outside the walls, looking from the inside out. When I got out, my mind was still trapped behind bars. I got out of prison, but I never had a plan for staying out."

He got out of prison, but his thinking was still behind bars. And every time he got out, the cycle just started over again, again and again, until he finally woke up one morning and realized he was the most successful convict in the world. Only it wasn't getting him the things he really wanted out of life.

Jesse was exactly like most convicted felons today—maybe even you. Think about it—if you can see a light at the end of the tunnel, you're still in a tunnel. The only way you're going to ever keep from coming back to prison is to break out of that tunnel vision and see yourself as free. Free of all the negative thinking that's holding you back. Free of doubt as to your ability to succeed in life. Free of the so-called friends who drag you back into their tunnel world of entitlement and fast money and reckless lifestyles.

It's sort of like what those millionaires claim, who write those fancy self-help books on how to get rich by just thinking about it all day long. Yeah, they have some pretty good ideas in those books now and then. Like the one that goes, "No



one ever built a reputation on what he said he was going to do some day." That one was from Henry Ford, and he ought to know a thing or two about reputations! Or this one: "If you're planning to be rich some day, you'll always be planning to be rich." I don't know who said it, but there's at least a grain of truth to it.

So are you like Jesse, always setting the goal of getting out of prison? You know, the only way you can be successful at a goal like that is to keep coming back. And if that's what you plan, that's exactly what you'll get.

Leave getting out of prison to the punks. They seem to like bouncing in and out, anyway. Why else would they keep going back? But for me, for Jesse—maybe even for you, there's another, better way of life, one where you see yourself out, and then staying out. Oh, it ain't easy. No one's trying to fool you here. But you can do it. I used to be pretty successful, myself, at getting out of prison. In fact, every time I paroled, I turned around and came right back, and then got out again. My goal every time was to get out of prison, and every time I went to prison, sure enough—I got out again. Hey, I was a 100% success rate! How's that for being successful in life? A 100% success rate is pretty hard to beat.

But now my goal has changed. My goal is to stay out of prison. To live and think and breath like a free man, without some jerk breathing down my neck telling me what to do all the time. To move around in society without worrying about getting arrested. To sweat hard and earn a pay check and feel good about it and ride my bike up into the mountains for a little vacation now and then, just because I can. To spend the day with my friends and my family, not some other loser whose been assigned a bunk in my house, or some gang that tries to substitute the warm fuzzy feelin' of extortion and intimidating weaker inmates for the love of a real family—people who actually care about you.

I'll never set the goal of getting out of prison again. My goal is staying out. And you know what? I woke up this morning in my own bed, in my own house—again. In fact, its been about ten years since I broke outta that tunnel vision thing and started achieving a better goal in my life. So I guess you could say, for the past ten years I've been 100% successful at staying out of prison. A 100% success rate. I'd say that's pretty sweet.

By the way, my name's Jesse. Glad to meet ya.

If you can see a light at the end of the tunnel, you're still in a tunnel... Break free of that tunnel vision and see yourself as free.

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