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Basic Steps to making it on the outside of prison

“Studies show that a prisoner who is released on parole from prison or any correctional facility has a high chance of having their parole revoked in less then 48 hours”

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Life after Prison | Basic Steps to Making it on the Outside

First I want to point out that I am not going to focus on steps to getting out of prison, for most people time does this for you. If you were sentenced to 10 years you have a release date and will get out, regardless of almost all circumstances. It is only for people who have been released or are about to be released. If you want to make these steps work it is best to start and prepare for them while you are in prison, jail or a correctional facility.

If you are about to leave prison soon or have recently, there are steps in which you need to take in order to stay on the outside. It can often take you a long time to get out and a very short time to go back. Many end up having their parole revoked within the first 24-48 hours, so it is very important you have the necessary steps in place before your release. You need to follow all these steps, and will have to work hard to make it. It will take every bit of effort and strength you have to do this. You will need to master them to stay out of prison, however you will only need to not do one of them to go back inside of prison. These are initial steps, what you need to do from the first day and work through for the first year. Hopefully you will be able to build the groundwork to stay out of prison. What you do in your first year and even the first month of your new freedom will ultimately decide how long you choose to live in the real world.

Support Groups & People Who Can Help

The most important step is the one you start inside prison. Support groups of people you can call, visit or work with. Depending on how long you have been inside prison these groups could be as small as one (better to be at least 3 or more). One of the biggest mistakes most convicts make when leaving prison is not having a safe group of support. You will need to develop a network of people that do not have criminal pasts or limited associations preferable. If your family is involved in crime you may find this hard to take, but you need to move away from them. If all your friends before you went to prison do any type of illegal activity, find new ones. There are usually a lot of volunteers that come into the prison for numerous events; perhaps some of those people may be able to assist you. There are a lot of religious and non-profit places that you can go to, and please understand I am in no way putting these places down, however they are full of ex-cons who have not changed, and who are simply playing the system from the outside. So keep the people who are using these services at an arms length, until enough time has past to see their true intentions, and even then, only very passive friendships. With that said, these are often great places to find support and someone to talk to; chaplaincies are located in most major cities and almost always not to far from a halfway house.

I have often heard many guys say the first thing they want to do it get laid, drunk and high, and not always in that order. However if you are serious about making it you may want to consider giving yourself sometime to be re-socialized. Our immanent wants need to take a back seat to what we really need. I personally waited a full year before I started dating anyone; yes it was hard after a long time inside prison. However at this point I like to remind you I have been out over 10 years and now sex and having a few beers are something I can do whenever I want now. You have to ask yourself, would you rather have a lifetime of freedom or 1-2 days of excitement that land you right back in jail. If this does

happen to you, you will always have someone to share your stories with in your cell. While your family suffers, and your kids do not have a father or mother, you will always have someone to brag to about your 48 hours of freedom. Prisons will give you plenty of time for you and your loser friends to reminisce. This site is not a sympathy ground for repeat offenders. We all make mistake, some much larger than others, it is time to stop repeating them and grow up.

The First 48 Hours

The truth of the matter is most of you who are convicted of a crime, or serving a prison sentence, will not be reading this till after your 3rd or 4th release. Why? Because most of the people who are released from incarceration, have their parole revoked in this period of time, and more to follow in the first week. It is the time when you are most vulnerable; you are at your weakest point. However, most prisoners let arrogance and lack of common sense get in the way at this point, and disregard what everyone has told us, and were looking for 3 things, get laid, get drunk and get stoned. Then in most cases an arrest or parole revocation takes place and the whole process starts all over again.

Immediate steps to surviving the first 48 hours are simple: you need to hang out with your support group. I mean the boring ones that don't do crime and who are very concerned about your welfare and if you actually make it on the outside. The problem is that this seems so awkward and you will feel like a fish out of water. The other problem is that you will feel way too comfortable with the old crowd, and sure hanging out with them will be fun for a bit. You need to move away from that, it is time to grow up now, and get a real life. You will have to move out of your comfort zone.

Another thing you will need to do is follow all the rules of you parole release. You will need to have all your faculties to do this. You cannot do this drunk or stoned, even if you're not alcoholic or drug addicted, you have too much hanging in the balance. Your only worry should be those rules and spending as much time as you can with your support group, and staying away from old influences. Ask questions and do not come across as arrogant or over confident. Follow all the rules to the letter, no exceptions. There is always room at the Crowbar Bar Inn if you find this to burdensome.

The first few weeks are when you should be spending time with your support network, perhaps spending time with family or spouse if applicable. Your focus should only be on following the rules of the halfway house, parole or probation in the first couple months. Depending on how long you have been inside prison, perhaps just talking to people over a coffee, or spending sometime just talking to normal people. You are still going to have the other offenders that are in the halfway house or ones you may know in that area want to talk to you a little, at first be polite, you do not have to run away every time you see someone who you know from prison or the halfway house. However turn down their offers to do something with them that they may ask you to do. Always have an excuse of why you cannot talk to them for too long. Over time this will just naturally distance yourself from them, and soon you won't even talk anymore.

Questionable Activities or Associations

Getting out of prison early for some may take months or years of work, programs, counseling and tremendous efforts. Only too often to be thrown away, by associating with the wrong crowd or being in the wrong place. It takes an enormous amount of foresight to stay out of prison and guard your freedom, especially when first released and on parole. Do you know how hard it is to go back to prison? Do nothing. This particularly true when you are released and sent to a halfway house or just injected back into the community, especially the same area where your crime was committed. It never fails there is always people at the halfway house you knew in prison or associated with while there, and quite often you will be invited to do things with them. Even if you are not facing that and go to a whole new place where no one knows you, sometimes you will not feel like you fit in with regular people. Some people refer to this as sliding backwards, I don't like that term, simply because you were never a head enough at this point to slide back.

Perhaps an example of some of the simplest things I have seen that caused guys to return to prison will help. I have met a lot of convicts in the halfway house, who didn't have drinking restrictions on them (imposed conditions of parole). They felt that they were then safe to go to the bars, come back to the halfway house drunk or smelling of liquor. Over and over again I would see guys get there parole revoked over incidents that was only precipitated by drinking or being in the wrong place. I recall a person who was allowed to drink. He come back to the halfway house one evening smelling of liquor and another convict there, pushed his buttons. Why? He was jealous he was not allowed to drink, he never came right out and said that, however, he started a fight with the fellow without restrictions, and of course both of their parole releases were revoked. Another would come into the halfway house and be nasty to the staff, he soon found himself being arrested for drunk and disorderly. Another person who was at some friends of his, who were all known criminals, was sent back for associations with them, after the police were called for loud music to the residence. Upon opening the door the police could smell marijuana and investigated further. He was not smoking it, he just happened to be there. Parole didn't quite see it the way he did, and his parole was revoked.

The problem is when you are on parole you cannot just watch yourself; you have to be careful of others as well. Parole is like defensive driving, you just do not follow the rules of the road, you also much watch what the other drivers are doing to avoid an accident. Once the cars are smashed up or someone is hurt, it really doesn't matter whose fault it was, the aftermath and annoyance will be much the same for both. You will need to keep past criminal associations at an arm length; you will need to avoid areas where questionable activities can happen. You do not have to do it forever but the first year this is a must, regardless of parole restrictions or not.

I could sit and write a book just on people who had their parole revoked for stupid reasons. Like an argument with the parole officer one too many times, or hanging out with people who got caught doing something wrong, even if the person was not doing it.

Do not be one of them, guard your freedom and treat your parole as what it really is, a conditional release that can be revoked at any time. You are better off spending the year alone and adjusting to

society, until you can make some real friends and contacts. Take it slow one day at a time, and one situation at a time. Learn to predict what could happen if you make some wrong choices and avoid it.

One other point that should be brought to your attention is there are quite often a few women who hang out with others at the halfway house, or seem to be around there a lot. I am not talking about women who work there either, no matter how long it has been, stay away from them. They quite often have been passed around by most of the guys coming out and have more diseases and psychological problems than what you need or require. I have seen some really good guys, who were trying, end up going back over involvement with these women. I know I have gone through it, your thinking I am just going to get my rocks off and that is it, because it has been so long, what could happen? I understand completely, but do not do it, because they will hound the hell out of you afterwards and create many problems for you.

Dealing with Addictions | Drugs & Alcohol

If you have addictions such as alcohol or drugs and have to go to meetings, well that is something you will need to do. However, it is the same thing everywhere you go to these types of forced NPB (National Parole Board) restrictions that are placed on you. You need to be careful whom you are associating with while you are there and whom you befriend take your time getting to know people there. A lot of people who go there are like yourself, and the last thing you want to do is have a sponsor who does not have his/her own act together. Make sure your sponsor has a fair amount of years of sobriety, is not involved in any type of criminal activity. Also here is another important point, make sure he/she is not using other forms of drugs, this happens a lot in A.A. (Alcoholic Anonymous) and N.A (Narcotics Anonymous). Someone who is an alcoholic will now use drugs/pills and vice versa. Trust me, this person does not have their act together and you need to keep them at arm's length. So take a little time, you do not need to say much the first few meetings; just listen and you will learn more by listening. In fact use that rule for the first few months, shut up and listen.

Dealing with Real Life Situations

The first month if you make it that long is going to be the hardest. You are going to have to walk away from temptations; I would like to say this is going to be easy; however it is going to be hell. You are starting a new life and want to move away from your past; however your past is stapled to your ass and follows you around. It will cramp your style like you never thought possible. In fact the whole first year is going to be very hard but the first month sets the groundwork, then all you have to do is keep doing what you doing. Just image you meet someone nice at the coffee shop, he/she has no idea, but your hitting it off well, guess what, you have to check in at the halfway house. Just have to go for a minute and do the sign in and visual. So you say I have to run for a minute, I could be back in about 20 minutes if you are still here", He/She replies, "I must be running anyways, I would like to talk to you later, do you have a number I could reach you at?" Well you do not have a job, you live in a halfway house and maybe you do not have a phone. The best thing you can do is buy a pay as go cell phone, trust me. Every room in the halfway house has a phone, but I would avoid using that while meeting new people. As I am writing this I am laughing recalling certain situations that have happened. I remember a guy giving a

woman he meant the number to the wing (an area where 2-8 guys live in). She called looking for him, I was sitting there and one of the other guys answers the phone. I heard him say, "No I am not his roommate, this is a halfway house". Trust me when I say get a cell phone and never use the in-house phone to call anyone that does not fully know your situation. I recall when I was first out for about maybe 4-6 months or so, I was asked by one of my new friends that we should go over to my place and watch a movie. I really didn't know what to say, just that I could not do it tonight. You could be dating someone, and he/she will ask why do you never stay the night? The circumstances and situations that I encountered in the first year go on forever. I am sure yours will as well. It is like you have to go through a period of time where you will need to make new friends, contacts and adjustments. However you very much are living a double life and it is really hard for anyone who is serious and wants to make new friends and have a real life. If you make it the first year you will understand what I mean when I say, that your past is stapled to your ass.

Another thing that I avoided, often the halfway houses will have passes for gyms, cabs, etc. I avoided using any of them, I purchased my own gym pass and it was the best thing I ever did. It allowed me to just be a normal work out guy, everyone that used the passes, it was only a matter of time before everyone in the gym knew where you lived and you were a convict. Sure the guys or gals at the halfway house will talk some, but do not put a sign on your own forehead if you can avoid it.

Some of the stuff that they offer could be a tremendous help to you, like counseling, you may or may not be big on that, but you really need it at first. I use to look forward to it and actually continued it long after my prison sentence was over. I know that is a hard concept for some of you to grasp; I only did it for me and not parole or how it would look. You have to get over the thought process of how things look or your doing it so you can get parole, TA (Temporary Absence) or some other thing. You need to shift your focus, not on what you can just get at the moment, but what will help in the long run, and from never going back to prison. If you come out of prison with your main goal as never going back you will start to look at things much different. I was denied for every parole hearing, every TA I asked for, and in fact anything that NPB (National Parole Board) controlled I was denied for. I was released after 2/3 of my sentence, which is normal, if you do not get parole. I was forced into a halfway house, which was the best thing for me, now looking back. When I was in prison it took me 4 years to get the support of my Case Management team, after numerous CMO's (Case Management Officer), after that they would grant me anything they could, it was limited as the NPB had more power, and the NPB were not on my side. My point to all this is that I looked at it much differently then most convicts, my goal was not to just get out of prison as most are, mine was to stay out of prison. I am not saying getting denied for everything was easy, but I do recall telling the parole board that they can only deny me for the moment, I have a date and I am going to beat this system by getting out and staying out, and whatever decisions you make today will not effect that as I already have a departure date. Actually they did make a difference in my life by denying me for everything, it made me stronger and more determined to make it on the outside. So in a reverse psychological way I could say they helped, however if I did not have the personality that I do, I would have only left prison to end up re-offending. I really do feel they could have done a lot more to help me, however I am one of those unique type of people who can take a negative and turn it into a positive. It was nothing less then a huge gamble on their part.

Halfway House | Provincial or Federal

A halfway house can also offer you a place to stay, food and a little money in your pocket. There are two types of halfway houses, Federal sponsored and Provincial sponsored. The difference may not be a lot as far as the rules go, but it is quite a difference in structure and lifestyle. Often the Provincial ones provide cooked meals and often have a lot of stuff done for you, and I do not think many of them give you spending money. They are often full of a lot of offenders there with more minor offences so in some cases may be less scary than the Federal ran ones. I went to a Federal sponsored one, and to be honest I found it a much better option. I just spent the last 6 years in prison eating what they called food. At the Federal ones you are given a weekly allowance, they do not cook meals for you so this money is for your necessities, in turn you can buy your own food and whatever you need. It is not a lot of money, so you need to learn how to budget (which is what we all do). You do your own laundry and take care of yourself. There are more programs there and services to help you as well. I found it helped me more, because in the real world no one takes care of all your needs, as you will need to learn how to take care of yourself. Most of us do not leave prison with a lot of money or a job, so this gives you a few bucks in your pocket and you can eat and cook your food the way you want it. Might not sound like a big deal, but after eating that prison food for 6 years, it will!

Understanding the Dynamics of your Offence

The Dynamics of your offence, I know you have heard this one so many times by now you're sick of it (I was). However it is really important for you to understand this if you want to make it on the outside. For those of you who do not know what this means, it is complete understanding of why you did what you did, and thus preventing future offences. In fact you will never make it on the outside unless you fully understand this. If you do not know why you did what you did, there is a good chance it will happen again. You are doomed to fail and will be in and out of prison all your life. The biggest issues I have with this, is many convicts in prison are often medicated or have to be fitted in a specific area of support or diagnoses. Here is the problem, they only have so many types of programs so if your crime or issue does not fall into this area, and you're shit out of luck. I have seen many people in prison get drugs by trickery or by faking symptoms just because they wanted to get high. Often ones with deep-rooted psychological issues are sent to A.A- Alcoholics Anonymous (which is a very good group). Alcoholism is often only the symptom of another problem. You cannot just treat the symptom and expect it to work. It would be like going to the doctor with cancer and him/her giving you a painkiller and sending you on your way. It might scare you to know that less than 20% of the people leaving prison have a good understanding of the dynamics of the offence, that means there are 80% who do not. To people who are on the outside and say who cares if they get help or not, they do not deserve it. You are right we do not deserve it. I agree with you 100%. However you do not deserve to be or someone you love be the next victim of our crime either, especially when this person could have been helped and the act of crime prevented. My main goal for this site is to prevent future crime, and that makes it worth it. I am not saying that programs like AA or NA or anything like that do not work, they are big assets and very helpful to the offender and any other type of self help groups as well. The fear is when you treat the symptoms you do not fix the real problem, it only masks it. I am not saying you are doomed and will fail and end up back in

prison; you just need to take the steps to find out why you committed the crime. You need to look deeper than just the surface, so talking to a good psychologist who is provided for you through CSC (Corrections Service Canada) would be a very good idea. In my own struggle I did not find the psychologist in the prison to be much help for the first 4 years, later when a new one came in I did find him to be a great help. My saving grace was the chaplaincy; I went there as soon as I could and signed up for counseling and it was not long after the work started. The best thing was he made me face who I was and what I did head on. It took me years to understand the dynamics of my offence, and he was a huge help in this process. If you are serious about staying out of prison and making it, you are going to have to be proactive, you cannot just sit there and wait for things to come to you. Stop coming up with reasons why you cannot obtain this and start focusing your efforts on helping yourself understand to the best of your ability. You do not owe this to yourself; you owe this to the victim of your crime.

Prison Code | Honor among Thieves

Let me put it this way, if you are living by the code on the outside of prison, you will not be out of prison that long. To anyone who has not been in prison, the code means a set of rules among thieves. However, it is not always followed and often twisted to fit someone's advantage. In simple terms it means you do not rat (tell what someone did) on anyone or give up your co-accused of a crime, or other offenders, even if you were the victim of the crime. The code prohibits you from stealing from one prisoner or another (that one always made me laugh) an oxymoron at best. Let me put it into context, if you see someone murdered in front of your eyes you are not to help or assist the police in anyway. It would be one thing on the outside but in prison you really are better off not to say anything. I know that may be difficult for some to grasp; however if you were in prison for awhile you know what I am talking about. It can keep you alive and well inside prison; however this line of thinking will destroy you on the outside of prison. You cannot follow that code on the outside and be a normal law abiding citizen. I am not saying you have to run around and tell on people for every little thing, however, if your home is broken into, you have to do what regular people do call the police and let them handle it. If you follow the prison code, you would have to seek vigilantly justice on that person or persons reasonable; you just cannot live like that on the outside and get away with it over and over again. The code that you live by to survive inside prison is the very thing that will put you back in prison. This process will take more time for some than others and it is hard to kick. The reasons it is so hard to get this way of thinking out of your mind is that the punishment for disobeying inside prison can be very malicious in nature, it could be anything from ostracism, sexual assault, aggravated assault, a string of brutal assaults, and in some cases murder. If you get labeled a rat in prison it will follow you forever, even if you do not get physically hurt you will never live it down. If you get beat with sticks or pipes or stabbed, by several convicts and survive. You are better off not saying anything, why? When you get better, you will return to the population and people who hurt you. If you say anything and they do ship the other guys to another prison, their friends will take care of you first chance they get. Not only that, often you go back out when you are not even fully healed and can't defend yourself as well as before the attack. Your other option is going to PC (Protective Custody). Sounds great right, NOT! You are locked in a cell 23 ½ hours a day. Sure you are physically safer than you were, however you are more likely to commit suicide after a period of time. I can recall being thrown into segregation one time over something

stupid. I was only in there for 5 days; you do not see daylight, the only way I knew it was night was because they gave a mattress for 8 hours and yanked it back out in the morning. It was a cold, cement type room. Your meals came through a little hole in the door, you had to ask for toilet paper, and so if no one was there to hear you and you had to go, well you guessed it. After about 3 days you start to hear voices, and become delusional. I cannot image living like that; there are some situations in life that I think death could only improve. I am explaining that mostly for people who were never in prison, so they can get some concept of why it is so hard to get away from this line of thinking.

Over time the prison code will slowly work its way out of your thoughts as you work on socializing yourself and working and doing what you should. It will still have some benefit to you in the halfway house, but you will need to learn to limit it and should be in the process of being open to other ways of thinking.

Employment | When do I need to get a job?

Quite often when guys/gals get out of prison, they try to obtain a job fairly quickly. That is the reason why I am writing about this. Everyone needs to work and have money, we all understand that. However, if you have been inside prison for awhile you should not focus on getting a job right away. The biggest mistake you can make is trying to be too normal, because you are not yet. I do not know if anyone has told you that yet. Most of us have problems with just basic functions of life and real life situations. You need to learn how to do that first before you can put the pressure of a job, or school on top of it. You need to learn the basics of life first, like it or not, you might think you know how to do that, but most do not. You did not go to prison because you were good and following the laws. Depending on the person it takes about 6-12 months before you are ready to handle the stress and responsibility of a full time job. The focus must be on making yourself better and moving to a point where you can function in a day to day society. Doing programs as required, following the rules of parole and the halfway house are a must. Employment is good, however if you are not able to handle the day to day stress and regular problems, a job will only cause you more stress and eventually could lead you to the breaking point if you move to quickly.

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Social Community for ex-cons and victims of crime

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Cons Helping Cons is online support community for anyone who has left prison, jail, penitentiary, correctional facility, halfway house, or anyone dealing with the aftermath of a criminal past or criminal record. It is only for those who want to live a law abiding, honest lifestyle, of whom wish to seek help and understanding or assistance in dealing with the day-to-day obstacles we face. We welcome you to post comments, create groups, blogs, events, albums, share your struggles and hardships, and make friends. We are also working on getting employers to post more Jobs/employment listings for ex-cons in the classifieds.

The community is also for families of offenders, friends, and anyone who may have come into contact with the effects of crime. Crime can make victims of us all including the families of the offender and they are often always the ones in the middle with little or no support offered. We also welcome victims of crime, who have dealt with their victimization and have become healthy survivors.

The community is a great place for volunteers who work with prisoners or offenders on the outside, or families of offenders, etc. Groups or individuals who offer programs and assistance to offenders and ex-offenders, such as cognitive skills, drug and alcohol, anger management, violence, domestic violence, sex offenders, as well as programs for special needs, female offenders and Indigenous offenders, etc. Non profit or organizations in this field we welcome you to join the community and promote your services on the community. We need to have a place where an offender or family members can find access to all these services in one location.

Once you signup you will have access to resources and others in the same situation, people who understand. The community is complete with forums, classifieds, polls, events, groups, blogs, chat, etc. If you offer any type of legitimate services for ex-offenders or families you may promote your services on this community, in fact we encourage it.

The Social Community welcomes anyone from Canada, United States and United Kingdom. Our issues and concerns as ex-offenders and families of offenders often transcend the borders of our countries. Please enjoy yourself, relax no one is going to judge you there.