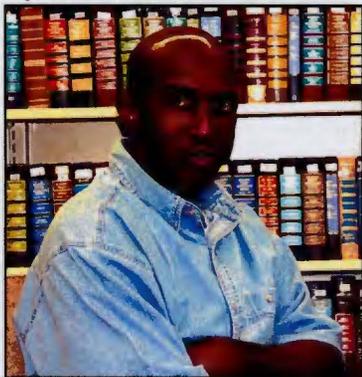


Combating the Circumstances and Nature of Recidivism

by Ronald Marshall



What is recidivism? It is the act of reengaging in criminal offending despite having been punished for a previous offense. In an age of mass incarceration and felony disenfranchisement, success is no longer measured by wealth and fame, especially for an

ex-felon. It is measured by how long an ex-felon can hold onto his civil liberties after exiting prison. Every single day an ex-felon remains free is a successful day. Simply stated, prison means failure; freedom means success.

The day to day effort to maintain a successful twenty four hours is not easily managed. The nature of recidivism resides in every ex-felon, burning with a stubborn eagerness to alter good intentions into criminality. The circumstances of recidivism have pitched camp right outside the prison wall, in communities, in homes, lurking to convert patience into desperation, visions of a good life into chaos and confusion.

Once labeled an ex-felon, the label authorizes systematic discrimination in housing, employment, education, public benefits, the denial of right to vote, etc. Felony disenfranchisement is a cruel hand dealt to an ex-felon; its consequences are devastating, influential and designed to publicly humiliate all ex-felons with discriminatory tactics and flunk them right out of society. The label informs the general public, potential employers, institutions of education, landlords, loaners, and government institutions for welfare benefits, that 'felons are not wanted here.' Those are the circumstances that could possibly determine the success or failure of an ex-offender.

So, how does an ex-felon combat the nature and circumstances of recidivism? Criminal justice experts have examined policies and strategies with demonstrated success to help offenders transition

smoothly into society and combat recidivism. Their goal is balanced between protecting society and finding viable solutions to deter released offenders from continued criminal behavior. Their strategies include sophisticated risk assessments, meticulous reentry planning, and post-release supervision carefully tailored to each offender's circumstances.

In recent years, Rayburn Correctional Center (RCC) implemented a policy to provide reentry services to offenders housed specifically at RCC. The Reentry Accountability Plan (REAP) is designed to meet the individual needs of each offender. The

REAP will identify the needs of an offender based on education/vocation, work assignment, substance abuse, mental health, medical, therapeutic, identification needs, family reunification and faith based. Those offenders who meet a Track-1 assessment will receive first priority; those assessed as Track II-IV will follow in priority. The goal of REAP or any reentry program is to equip the offender with education, job skills, and other basic services to improve the odds that an offender will not reappear at the prison gate. Those are good faith efforts taken by the Department.

But the success of their efforts to reduce recidivism while protecting society starts with the individual felon. No amount of reentry planning or post release supervision can prevent men from acting out his heart's intent, ultimately by any means necessary and ultimately to the detriment of others. Men released after serving x amount of months or years must possess a deeply rooted desire to avoid at-risk criminal behavior at all costs. A man must renew his mind in order to change his circumstances.

Only he knows the state of mind that influenced his criminal behavior. Only he knows the circumstances that led him to the prison gates. On any given day, those circumstances could return: unemployment, wanting to fit in, drugs, lack of education, lack of community support, lack of morals, lack of discipline, lack of vision, immaturity, misuse of alcohol, fast money, bad decision making. The

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number of circumstances is countless.

Again, how does a man combat the nature and circumstances of recidivism? Each man must answer that question for himself, for the circumstances an individual man will face upon release are unique. One thing is for certain, as the adage says: failure to plan in advance is a plan to fail in the future.

Each man upon release has a duty to avoid re-engaging in criminal behavior. He owes it not only to himself, but to the family who supports and believes in his ability to live a successful lifestyle. However, that ability must be undergoing construction now while in prison, before he is branded ex-felon. After release, a time will come when the ex-felon will be expected to fend for himself. Figuring out how, exactly, to do that is no easy task when felony disenfranchisement operates to stifle day to day success.

So, how does an ex-felon combat the nature and circumstances of recidivism? By not succumbing to depression, anger, frustration and all the other destructive emotions that many recidivists have blamed for landing them back in prison. The most remarkable fact about the hundreds of thousands of people who return from prison to the communities each year is not how many fail, but how many manage to survive and stay out of prison. Only the strong survive. Think strong. Feel strong. Be strong. Society is the coliseum of strong men competitions.

About the Author: Ronald Marshall was wrongfully convicted for armed robbery and is serving a 50 year sentence in Louisiana's Department of Corrections. He has entered his seventeenth year on incarceration; he's a self-taught legal assistant and unpublished author of several urban novels. Upon his release, he plans to publish his books and launch his own paralegal service, specializing in criminal law, post conviction relief and federal habeas corpus practice. He hopes to create a relief generating engine for deserving prisoners and eliminate the practice of duplicitous attorneys who exalt financial gain over ethical obligations owed to the legal profession. He intends to partner with a licensed attorney whose passion and commitment for criminal justice is strong and determined as his own.

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