

I am currently residing in the Arizona Department of Corrections, located in Tucson, Arizona. I am serving a sentence of 9.25 yrs, and will not be released until 2024. After having served 3 prior terms in D.O.C I have unfortunately become accustomed to the living conditions and way of life for those who experience incarceration in the Arizona Department of Corrections. The system itself has always been divided by the way that it is meant to be run, how it is ran, and the way the population runs it. Being able to survive through each of these classifications has not only allowed personal growth for those who seek it, but has also allowed myself to create a fourth classification of how I personally run it. Throughout my time served change has always been the goal but finding the wiggle room to obtain this change has not always been as easy as one might think.

From truly not worrying about change, to only focusing on my personal change, has been a struggle due to limitations set forth by peers, who at times, through prison rules and politics have deemed themselves the rulers of their environment. For me to be able to create my own path I had to find a way out, so that I can focus on myself. I believe when people think of change or self evaluation, they can't help but have a strong sense of hope. The dilemma I now face is coming to terms with having come to the conclusion, that no matter what I have missed as a free man, the time I have had to find myself in order to be who I'm meant to be has been worth it, in that I would have no choice

but to do this all again. The pain, hurt and sorrow must be willingly repeated to continue on the path I am now on.

Understanding and having full appreciation for the great gift of life, has brought me to a point in my journey where I must ask myself the most difficult of questions in order for true freedom to be obtained.

There is a saying that many are familiar with that states "Absence makes the heart grow fonder". That saying I feel is completely true. The separation from loved ones, and a free life in general are a couple of things I miss dearly, and not a day goes by in which I don't recall precious moments and fond memories. However that same saying says nothing about what absence does to one's mind. I have a great sense of pride in not only my recovery, but in my new outlook on life, but with that - speaking for myself - I also feel a sense of fear. A fear that comes from knowing that while I have ample time to think and focus, and prepare for my re-entry into society, by goal setting, educational and occupational planning, along with a new and positive thought process. I could be at this same moment distancing myself from my fiancée and children. So much in the free world is to be done by parents and it only makes it harder when one parent is on their own. The daily tasks alone are numerous when raising children. A single parent must feed, clothe, protect, and educate all while handling 100% of the responsibilities such as rent, bills and everyday living expenses so that they are able to provide the best possible life for their children. It's hard for me to

imagine at what time this single parent would have a fraction of the time that I have to think of their personal well being. Stress, anxiety, fear, and loneliness are some factors that can only hurt someones feeling of hope, or opportunity for growth, so while I commit my time to change and growth I fear that upon release it will have effected my relationship, because I will be in a new train of thought and because of my past decisions the person I love so deeply will not have that same train of thought only due to having to be on their own, not that my train of thought automatically makes my thoughts better, but just different from before, in short, I fear the same change I seek, so the question I ask myself is do I stay my course, knowing what I might lose if I succeed?

The next question I ask myself is, will the opportunities available to me while incarcerated be the beginning or end of me? And will the person I become be able to carry the load, that the person I am now has created?

Through my experience here in D.O.C there are many routes I can take, such as College Correspondence courses, HVAC, Automotive, Masonry, Construction, and Plumbing, There are also college credit courses I could take and have taken in the past, Just recently an outside source has offered a training course in becoming a Recovery Support Specialist, which comes with an Arizona State Certification, that I or anyone who completes may utilize once released, I have chosen the latter, I currently hold classes on Recovery, and also hold one on one sessions with anyone

who is in need. I have chosen to help others to the best of my abilities and give back to those who may need someone who understands what they are going through, with hopes that with such help they will have an opportunity sooner than I ever had. With my commitment to help comes the reason for my questioning in that, in order to give my all I must not give up on myself or anyone for any reason, no matter their background or beliefs. I am accepting the load of my peers, their concerns, problems, and their pain. Through this offered program I am learning the tools needed to overcome obstacles I was unable to in the past. I have seen suicide, assaults, and hopelessness. I have seen relapse, sickness, and fear. So being confident in myself at this moment to take all this on is an accomplishment I never thought I would see.

The working conditions in the Department of Corrections through my experience has been to me a building block in creating my own personal standards and work ethic, having a job and responsibility, no matter the job description, or the pay - that is an issue in itself - helps me to prepare for re-entry and teaches me how to budget and save.

As for others however it can be more of a negative ordeal to go through. A pay of 10¢ an hour is what most have to live off of. However the pay does range up to 50¢ an hour for skilled positions, but nonetheless the struggles one faces when barely getting by can be overpowering causing one to turn to other methods of making money, that may cause problems for those individuals.

Hope I believe is diminished when someone due to their lack of education or skill is left to provide for self. These people then turn to other things in order to feel any sense of self-worth or accomplishment, when in actuality it does nothing more than add to the negativity in the environment we live in. There are so many programs and mandated things we must do, but I feel without individualism, and consistent after care nothing will be changed in the way we the prison population live. The potential in the individuals that live here is endless, but at the same time wasted. There is a great deal of learned helplessness, which only fuels the same cycle we are trying to break.