

Dortell Williams
H45771 / A5-101
P.O. Box 4430
Lancaster, CA 93539

CHANGE IS WITHIN US ALL

I have been teaching my peers for over a decade. Yet I quickly became a student when I came to realize how dynamic human beings can be -- even prisoner human beings. In 2007 I was asked to instruct peer-led classes here on the Progressive Programming Facility, in Lancaster, CA. What I learned is that all of the creativity, intelligence and capacity for innovation I could ever want or need is right here, within reach.

Once we got past all the gossip, war stories and superficial, anti-social traditions of prison culture, we were able to see the unlimited potential and dynamic worth in each other. Want an awesome painting, a life-like portrait, or to be taught either? We got that. Need to learn about financial planning, or want some real estate tips, or perhaps guidance on how to overcome stress and traumatic events? Yep, we got that, too.

There's so much gift and talent here, and surely at other penal institutions -- because people are fantastic and awesome -- when we spend the time to develop their gifts and invest in the apparatuses they need to grow. When I see Rick helping others transform in phenomenal ways, or John paint master pieces, or Fred publish books that are both educational and transformative, I am compelled to ask why they're even in here. Of course, it then dawns on me that they, like the rest of us, made some bad decision in

their past. And perhaps their own realization of this fact propels them to make amends in the amazing ways they do. Not to mention, that is really what every taxpayer and perhaps crime survivor should want -- change in a positive and productive way. These guys on the Progressive Programming Facility are taking responsibility for their offenses, passing on what they are learning by teaching others -- paying it forward -- not only for their futures, but for the future of their communities.

They practice giving back in this very restricted and confined community, and simultaneously giving back to larger society in the form of charitable donations. After having taken so much for granted, they now practice and participate with purpose, drive and enthusiasm. The only thing locked up on them now is their bodies. Their minds, their spirits, and their souls are free. They are no longer held captive by faulty thinking, drug addiction or unresolved childhood trauma. And that is precisely what keeps them out of trouble, the distraction of pro-social activities and personal growth.

Maslow was right, self-actualization can be a powerful motivation in and of itself. If we can do it, a majority of guys sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, then anyone can do it. Whatever your endeavor, whether confined or in society at large, but manacled in some other form, believe me, change is within you, change is within us all.