

As a "lifer" in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and as an individual with 10 plus years of first-hand experience and observation of the American prison system I want to explore why the recidivism rates are astronomical, and why violence and illicit activity is so rampant in American prisons. How is it that we make up 5% of the world's population, but house over 25% of the world's prisoners? How is it that the population of inmates serving life sentences today in America exceeds the entire American prison population of 1970? Are we that inept at rehabilitating our aberrants, our criminals? Or has greed and capitalism taken such firm root and priority, that we are willing to sacrifice the well being of millions of human lives, and their families, in exchange for a few dollars?

I will attempt, in the next few pages, to lay out a paradigm of a Justice system, or, rather, a system of justice, that will completely eliminate or drastically reduce the recidivism rates, quell the violence in our prisons and reduce illegal activity substantially. While at the same time, boost our economy significantly, bolster the American workforce exponentially, and create a safer and morally sound society by lowering the crime rates. All this with minimal effort, complication, and costs; Just a channeling of our resources already being expended to different and more productive means. How many billions of dollars are spent incarcerating Americans, from our youth all the way to the elderly? How many more billions are lost due to crime, with property loss, policing, and medical costs incurred? The figures are staggering. Some would say astronomical. So why hasn't our government, and corporate powers, come together to solve this problem? This festering sore on the American Justice system. So without further ado...



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A little about myself. I'm a 36 year old white male, serving a 51-life sentence under California's 3-Strike law for a series of "armed" bank and business robberies. No one was killed. Or maimed. Or even touched. Physically. In fact, fake weapons were used to ensure no one was hurt. Of course, that doesn't negate the psychological harm inflicted; It was a terroristic act, for which I deserve to be punished for, but with my life?

I grew-up severely abused as a child, physically and verbally by my mother, who was left alone with 4 small children after my father was sentenced to 16 years in state prison for a string of residential burglaries. My mother ran an escort service to provide for herself and her children, going from one abusive relationship to the next. She was also a survivor of severe child abuse, physically and sexually. I witnessed her attempt suicide multiple times, watched her get beaten severely by her boyfriends, watched her do illicit drugs, and in turn, was abused severely by her, as all my siblings were. I was raised indoctrinated with the belief that the authorities and police were no friend of mine.

I grew up with severe anti-social personality disorders, I didn't feel comfortable in my own body, and suffered other mental disorders that stemmed from my child abuse. I started self-medicating with a variety of illegal substances, from hallucinogens, meth, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, and opiates. Not in that order, but they allowed me to interact socially without wanting to crawl inside a cave and hide. At the time, I thought I was just a hopeless addict, like my parents. I



thought it was genetic. I didn't receive any counseling or therapy whatsoever.

I became a hope-to-die heroin addict, and was eventually convicted of 2 counts of bank robbery, committed to support my crippling addiction, and was sentenced to 7 years 4 months in state prison, with 2 "strikes". Now, one would think that being a 2-strike felon, heroin addict, bank robber, who suffered PTSD from a lifetime of abuse and trauma, that it would have been mandatory and prerequisite to attend counseling and therapy for my addiction, and the underlying causes of my addiction, and been required to obtain a higher education, and a marketable trade or skill, in order to parole, to insure I was productive and a responsible citizen upon my release. No. I was put in a 6'x12' cement and steel cage for 7 years to wrestle with my demons, my addiction, my PTSD, alone, expounded by my incarceration. I was 26 years old, and the only people I had to socialize or congregate with was other criminals, individuals in the same position I was in, with the same problems, and the same defunct ways of thought. I was never offered, or even made aware of, any opportunities for drug counseling, therapy, higher education, or trades and skills, nothing. I asked half-heartedly and unenthusiastically once, and was told there was a year long waiting list, so good luck. I never tried again. I never heard back. I smuggled drugs, and had my family support me for the next 7 years, with what little they could afford.

In prison, the highest paying jobs are topped out at .50¢ an hour. And the state takes 55% for any fines, restitution, or administrative fees owed.



Usually, you are required to work for free, under penalty of a disciplinary infraction, which you lose your "good time" for. You aren't taught responsibility in prison. You don't learn how to work for decent wages, pay taxes, spend your money wisely, or support your family. No. If you want to be a "have", rather than a "have not", you either break the law or the rules, or you are supported by your family. Either way, it's a lose/lose situation. So, is it any surprise, that after 7 years, I walked out the front gate of a state prison, paroled with \$200 and no marketable skills, and 120 days later, was arrested for more bank robberies, facing 105 years-to-life?

I tried to go straight, but only half-heartedly; The stigma of being a convicted felon essentially bars you from any meaningful employment, or any employment at all, especially with no skills. And felons are a prideful lot, believe it or not.

There is no rehabilitation in prisons anymore, although I have seen much progress in that way in the last 5 years. But I have also actively sought it out. So, imagine this: Imagine a system of justice where the length of time you serve is of secondary importance to the amount of rehabilitation required of you before you are allowed to parole. Serving hard time has a purpose; It makes an individual reflect deeply upon his deeds. But when does the punishment stop, and the rehabilitation, and it solely becomes a means of warehousing our criminals? From my personal experience, 5 years is pushing the envelope, and more than 10 only serves to make a man bitter.



First, we need to make basic education, and higher education, a priority. Earning a trade certificate, learning a marketable skill, a college degree, highschool education. That should go hand-in-hand with counseling and therapy to address the root cause of the errant behavior in the first place. And it needs to be implemented at the first exhibitions of aberrant behavior. Your first misdemeanor, you are required to obtain your GED or HSET exam in order to be released. Or an associate degree your second time in trouble. No degree, no parole or release. All the while, you are receiving counseling as well. How many of you want to bet there would be very few 3rd time offenders? 1 year and your GED; even if you complete and pass your GED in 4 months, you still serve your year. 5 years and an associates degree, and intensive Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. So on and so forth.

This leads us to the 2nd and most pressing question: How will we pay for this? Education is expensive. Give inmates fair wages, not the prison slave labor that dehumanizes, demoralizes, and puts a drain on their families and ultimately society. Do you know why most drug-smuggling in prison happens? Because they have no means to support themselves or their families. There is no such thing as a job that pays fair wages in prison. Do you know why most violence occurs in prisons? Over drugs. That are smuggled in. That can't be paid for.

First, this alone would add 2 million or so people to the American workforce; paying taxes, spending money. All of a sudden, you have a huge boost to the economy. You have men and women working



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to support themselves, and more importantly, their families, who are largely left on their own to support themselves and their incarcerated loved one. We wouldn't give them unchecked power to spend what they earn indiscriminately. No. you put a hand on the majority of their earnings, to pay for the mandatory education and counseling requirements, to better themselves. Funds could be released for family obligations, such as child support, alimony, clothing and food, rent, and daily living necessities. This teaches them responsibility, and at the same time, improves morale, and eliminates the need to break the law and rules by smuggling in contraband. They feel good about themselves. They are contributing to society, all while earning a degree or learning a marketable trade or skill.

So far, this sounds great, right? Give all of America's prisoners fair wages, and make them use it to better themselves. And this may be the biggest obstacle of all... Who is going to employ a bunch of prisoners? Convicted criminals serving actual sentences. Ex-offenders have a hard enough time finding employment, let alone current felons, serving hard-time. Where will the money come from? First off, Prison Industry Authorities and similar branches of prison goods manufacturers receive millions, if not billions, of dollars in subsidies for the free prison labor inmates perform to keep the prisons they are caged in operative. To manufacture the everyday goods required for daily living inmates receive at no cost. What if even half that money was used to pay inmate wages, in order for them to purchase the daily necessities from the American economical market (GDP), they would



Otherwise be receiving for free? It's the same services rendered, except this way, the funds go to the economy, and prisoners learn how to live responsibly, instead of everything provided at no cost.

Second, imagine a coalition of corporations, companies, and manufacturers, that could come together with the sole objective of providing prisoners with paying jobs. Bring their outsourced manufacturing plants in other countries back to the U.S.A to create jobs in a prison environment. Company warehouses built on prison grounds. Agricultural, Textiles, Automotive, assembly line, warehouse and shipping, tech. Industries. The possibilities are endless. With a little imagination and creativity, the sky is the limit. Some will say it's simply not feasible, even if we could put a coalition of that sort together. The loss in net profit would be enormous, off-setting, due to product loss, worker unpredictability, theft, quality control; That would most definitely be true if we were talking about unpaid, prison slave-labor. Except we're not. We are talking about incentivized workers, making a decent living, supporting themselves and their families, with as much to lose as they do to gain.

We would teach them accountability, just like a job on the streets. When you incentivize a job well done, and your workers are happy, the results are usually pleasantly surprising. There would be opportunities for promotions, wage increases, and bonuses. Same for unreliability, there would be wage cuts, demotions, and termination. You steal, you're fired. You show up late or not at all, you're warned. It happens again, you're fired. A real job. You're held accountable for



your actions. All company jobs would be part-time. All prison jobs would be part-time. College and vocational training would be part-time. Part-time counseling and therapy. Everyone contributes and everyone gives back. Prisons wouldn't be prisons anymore. They would be healing and education centers. Communities of rehabilitation, teaching aberrants how to be productive, responsible citizens once they re-enter society. And everyone would have a real chance at one day entering society again. Once they served their time, if and when they ~~achieve their~~ complete and achieve their rehabilitative requirements.

This paradigm would give hope to the hopeless; It would give those who truly want to change, who truly want to better themselves and redeem themselves, a real chance. Prisoners wouldn't have the time, energy, or motivation to break the law or rules if they worked part-time for wages, part-time volunteered to run the "healing and education center" - Not prison-, went to school part-time, to have a successful career upon release, and attended counseling and therapy.

I personally don't believe there's anyone who truly wants to be a criminal, who enjoys pain and hardship, violence. I believe many are seemingly forced into a life of crime, or were never shown an example of legitimate success. And of course, there may be those who can't, won't, or just plain don't want to change or do good for themselves or anyone, who have nothing to offer society, no matter how much training, counseling, and education they are provided, and for them, we most certainly will have a place for them. It's called prison.



But honestly, I don't believe it for a second. I've walked the yard with and befriended members of the Aryan Brotherhood, Mexican Mafia, Black Guerrilla Family, Muslim Brotherhood, Hell's Angels, Crips, Bloods, and too many other criminal factions to list, and the majority of them are actually brilliant businessmen; kind, caring, funny, charismatic individuals who have a great deal to offer humanity. But their mental acuity has been honed into a razor sharp blade of criminality. Their whole lives, they were never shown a paradigm of success. Or rather a skewed one. That same mental sharpness, if channeled the right way, if used for a good purpose, for positivity, instead of negativity, could make them capable of running multi-million dollar corporations, or let them become some ideal-espoused, world-changing politicians and activists.

I recently met a man in prison who couldn't read, save for a kindergarten level storybook. He had been in and out of penal institutions since a youth, and he was going on 30 years old. Do you have any question to what is going to happen when he paroled? And I have met many other men who are quite illiterate, or can't perform even the most basic math equations, required in everyday life. How is this allowed to happen in America? And then, there's men, like me, who for one reason or another, struggled with addiction or some other mental problems their whole lives, and after many encounters with the Justice System, and many failures, ended up committing a crime that carried a life sentence. Brilliant men; Artists. Writers. Architects. Technology wizards. Musicians. And maybe they



have healed, and have come to realize the futility and ugliness of their aberrant ways, but may never again be given a chance at life and to offer society the greatness inside of them. And maybe they are still struggling with their problems, and if only they could get the help they so desperately need, they could be an asset to humanity.

The man I met who couldn't read, I taught him, in the short time I knew him, how to read and write a little better, because that's our duty, as human beings, to give back. I was able to give the man a hand up. Just by sharing my knowledge, guiding him in some small way. If we all lived in that mindset, of helping the next man, if he wants to help himself, we could, and would, live in a beautiful world. But it all starts with you. And you. And you. A monsoon starts with a single raindrop. If you can think it, you can create it.

I wish when I was a young man, headstrong, struggling with addiction, wanting to jump out of my own skin, reckless and wandering, that I would have been made, required, to pursue an education or marketable skill. I had been to jail at least half a dozen times before ever coming to prison. Imagine if I had been mandated to obtain an associates degree my 2nd time in jail, after I was arrested for petty theft with a prior, and had been given intensive therapy and counseling for my addiction and PTSD. I can tell you without a doubt that I wouldn't be serving a life-sentence for



armed bank robbery. I would probably own my own corporation, a couple houses, and have an amazing and fulfilling life.

I know that some will say that it's just too complicated to pull off, it's not cost effective, it's too much work; besides, it's only criminals we're talking about. NO. These are human lives. Sons, brothers, fathers; Mothers, daughters, sisters. Can we put a price tag on a human life? How about a million human lives? This is the future of uncountable, brilliant, determined, hurting souls. We can't turn our backs on humanity. On America. On forgiveness. Compassion. We can't put a limit on the effort we will put forth to turn this slave ship of negativity, hate, and ignorance around, AT ONCE! As I write this, there are hundreds, MAY, thousands, of Da Vincis, Shakespeares, Tarantinos, Jobs, Kennedys, Beethovens, Obamas, and the like, languishing in the American prison system, all because they grew up in a living hell, and wrestled with their demons alone, and lost the fight.

And once again, they are alone, battling their inner demons, in a small cage of cement and steel. Let us stand by their sides, help them to vanquish their demons, show them they are not alone, help them heal, so they, in turn, can help the next man heal. Let us turn this cycle of prison and recidivism into a cycle of healing and creativity. positivity begets positivity. Negativity begets Negativity. Like attracts like. I choose humanity. Love, Compassion, Forgiveness. Creativity. Success. There's always another way, A better way. Thankyou for taking this time and



letting me share my thoughts and ideas with you.  
I invite and implore you to expound on these ideas,  
to create with me, with us, to take part in the  
revolution of love and compassion and forgiveness.  
It can't be done without you. And you. And you.  
We are all one. Thank you. Take care yourselves.  
Light, love, and positivity.

Truly,

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