A System Flawed

Sometimes I wonder how we can look at this system of imprisonment and think it works. Today, I see a man prepare to go home after being in prison for 34 years. He was locked up in 1987 at the age of 16, given life and sent to the federal prison system. At 16! Because of his possible release they kept him locked up in the SHU (the hole), like he did something wrong; for a whole year. What is this system meant to correct? I talk with a man everyday who is a year older than me; 39, he has been in prison for 14 years. He was given 6 life sentences plus 35 years for being a pimp. Now, I’m not a pimp and I really don’t condone it. My thing is this though. A pedophile will get 36 months which is way worse than a pimp, 6 life sentences plus 35 and no one died. What are they correcting with this man? You come to prison as a punishment to help you see the error of your ways and provide you with tangible things to help you make your life better, not worse. Yes, they provide programs but those programs hardly work because the people who run them look at us as if we are the bottom of the barrel; they are here for a paycheck. I cannot and will not throw all the blame on their shoulders.

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because we inmates carry the majority of the fault. This, however, is a two-way street. On one side, the teacher, should have a passion to teach it and unbiased eyes looking at the student. On the other side, the inmate should have a real desire to learn and an open mind to what's being taught as well as a good amount of humility. I'll tell you a secret. The one person to be the hardest on the inmate is the inmates themselves. We have the most regrets because when we sit in prison cells and start to become clean, we look back on our lives and see all the things we missed, all the times passed that we can never get back. Our children grow, our loved ones leave us, our parents pass away, our property is thrown in the trash. I've missed so many birthdays, so many first days and even some last days as they've passed. No program that I've ever been in has taught me how to deal with the regrets. Those are the things that overwhelm our lives when we step out those walls. Probation and parole officers don't care about our regrets. They are sometimes worse than correctional officers in how they treat us. Look past the charge, look at the person. Understand that only on the exterior is there a hardness that seems needed to get passed. We really want to relax and open up and get
the help you think we need. However, the system and the environment that we just came from and how we are belittled and mistreated by staff. And then, how we have to fight and protect ourselves from other inmates. We are left with the only option of developing that exterior and presenting that façade of hardness to the world. Prison administrations always say they provide us with plenty of opportunities to be successful on the outside. They say they provide job skills and life skills and drug treatment. They do, but, at the sacrifice of other things. Here's an example. I can't join the apprenticeship program and get into the drug treatment program at the same time; why not? What if those are two of my greatest needs to be successful outside? They tell us we need to prioritize and learn to sacrifice. Also, they make it so hard to do these programs sometimes. For instance, the apprenticeship program you have to work on that particular jobs crew for 6 months. Then you have to have no write ups in the last year and you have to have at least 4 years left to do the program. I understand the need to incentivize the program but, any man who at least gets in the program can; if they happen to get out of prison before the 4 years is up can easily get his training transferred to
another journeyman or the outside to continue their training. I for instance was denied getting into the apprenticeship program after working all the criteria because once my time from my last shot was up even though I had 4 years left till my release date they said I didn't. But if you do the math 2020 - 2024 is 4 years on any calculator I've ever seen. I need the apprenticeship program because I have never really held a job for long in my entire life. I need a skill that will sustain me in the world. I also need the drug treatment program because it not only helps me to understand my addictions but helps me deal with certain aspects of my life. Another aspect of how this is not really an institution of correction or real rehabilitation is this. Education is the real number one reason people come back to prison. We don’t come into the system with thousands of dollars. Hell, we barely come in with hundreds of dollars. We owe fines, fees and, restitution. Then to get further education on a college level we have to pay for it ourselves. I feel if we are a ward of the government that the government should do everything possible to prepare us and educate us prior to release just to help reduce the recidivism
rate of the inmate population. Where does all this government funding for prisons go to? Hell, they can't even provide us with boxer shorts in shit at the prison I am in and haven't since June at least 02.21, and here it is now August 24th. They can't even provide us with enough soap and we have to wash our same two pairs of boxer shorts that we have had for months. Now we have to make real decisions like do I have enough soap today to wash my underwear or take a shower? You can only do one or the other because you only get 1 two ounce bottle twice a week of liquid soap. I don't know why I mentioned that. Maybe it was out of frustration. Back to education. If we spend tens of years some of us locked in prison the world changes. Some of us come in as teenagers; lil more than kids. Our families struggle to help us through these years. We come in with barely a high school education some of us and are supposed to go through a process here that rehabilitates us and prepare us for the outside world. I think you would want me to fail if I've been locked up for tens of years and you don't properly educate me for the world and the times I am released releasing into. If
I came in to prison in the 80's and you release me in the 2000's it's imperative that you teach me how the world has changed. Teach me with the technology that is being used so that I don't go out and become overwhelmed and close in on myself and block possible opportunities, or worse, come back to prison. Treat us and educate us like the people you want to see us become. Be assertive, be firm but be honest with us. Have the same amount of faith in me as you would want us to have in you. I'm human, I err and make plenty of mistakes. I want to further my education right now but do not have the means. I just want a chance.

I'll be honest, I have never really given myself a real chance. I have never seen myself in the light I see myself now. It's because of the many inconsistencies I have seen in this flawed system that has made me re-evaluate myself as what I want to define me. I read a quote, I can't remember by who. But, it said, "The smartest man in the world is the man who can admit he knows nothing." I know nothing but I am humble enough now to admit it and willing enough to learn. That's what I think that quote means and what a person should take from it. For anyone
reading this, prison life sucks. It's only so glamorous on television never in real life. Here a person's life can change in the space of 2 or 3 minutes. In one instance you can go from getting out the next day to never getting out at all or, you can go from having 3 months left before release to losing your life the next day. It's all about choices. About being educated about the choices you have to make so you can choose wisely. I don't have too long left in prison. I also don't have much too look forward to when I do get out but I'm optimistic enough to know there is a path that if I find it I will be a success. I'm always willing to hear other opinions if they are willing to write, my names Isaih T. Belcher.

*Note* I already have a PQ on file and previous work that I have done.

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