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Three Problems With Being A Rehabilitated Offender

By Tyler Bowman

1) No one believes you're rehabilitated

As the old adage goes: Actions speak louder than words. No one is going to believe that someone who is incarcerated has changed for the better by simply saying so. You cannot just tell people, you have to show them, and unfortunately there are not many opportunities provided by the prison system to do so.

I've witnessed prisoners who have changed for the better over the course of years. To the point where one could reasonably argue that they've been "rehabilitated" according to society's standards. Unfortunately, I've also had to bear witness as these men attempted to convince family and loved ones, through short phone calls and visits, who are not privy to the vulnerable and personal moments that they've endured while incarcerated, only to have their words fall on deaf ears, accompanied by looks of contempt.

Perhaps those family members and friends are familiar with this song and dance, having seen and heard it before. Or, however unlikely, the prisoner has genuinely been rehabilitated. The problem is: whose going to believe it?

2) Forced to continue living in an environment that is no longer suitable

Now, for arguments sake, let us acknowledge that a prisoner has in fact been rehabilitated. Whether it be through

their own cognition, had help from prison programs, or even from a combination of the two. Well, that's fine and dandy for the prisoner being released soon. But what of the convict who still has years or decades remaining on their sentence? How about those with no release date? What is their incentive to conform to society's demands or standards?

From my own experience a prisoner wishes to change himself for the better, rehabilitate, if you will, because he wants to, not because he was told to. It's his own desire that pushes him forward, to make better decisions, and face new challenges. There are those of us that do grow weary of the insanity, making the same choices, hanging with the same guys, committing the same crimes, then expecting a different outcome.

The sad reality is, once that change has been made, we're still in prison, haunted daily by the ghost of our former selves.

3) You're likely to fall victim to your old self

Even though a prisoner may have been rehabilitated, they are still expected to continue living in the hostile and pessimistic environment known as prison. Because of this, they are at a high risk of becoming - once again - a product of their environment. They may feel as though they must resort back to their old ways in order to survive.

Here's an analogy: You take a demon and turn him into an angel, but force him to remain in hell.

How long do you expect he'll remain an angel?

In Conclusion:

Many people who are incarcerated wish to change, or to some extent, have changed. But because those seeds of change are often trampled upon in an environment that is unfertile, those seeds don't typically take root. On the rare occasions that they do, it's still an uphill battle for survival. A battle that, all too frequently, doesn't last long.

There are the few, however, that do, against all odds, take root and grow. I imagine those prisoners with wills similar to that of the lone tree growing upon a cliffside. Or the weed whose resilience allows it to edge itself through a crack in the pavement. I imagine that is how they must feel, because that is how I feel. At the end of the day we must better ourselves for the sake of ourselves. No one else.