

PREFACE

My name is Michael Santos, and I am the founder of Prison Professors. I am writing this self-directed workbook to offer guidance for people who are going through different stages of the criminal justice system. My hope is that readers will learn practical steps they can take to prepare for the journey ahead.

Too often, people believe they must hire professionals to guide them through the journey. Obviously, a person will need a defense attorney to navigate the judicial process. But no one needs to hire a so-called prison consultant who promises insight without providing substance. That is wasted money, except for those who need hand holding and happy talk to get through the scary times.

In my view, people need to develop a strategy. They need to learn how to build a body of work that can strengthen mitigation efforts, support self-advocacy, and show why they are working toward a better outcome at the stage they are in right now. In this era of AI, people can get all that information for free from our website. Each person needs to build through every stage. The stages of the journey will change, but the commitment to build must continue.

The lessons in this workbook come from many leaders who taught me how to think differently. I'll share what I learned from them, but if I get things wrong it's entirely my fault. I will do my best to describe how those lessons shaped my life, and why I believe a good strategy can help others through their own crises.

As readers will learn in the opening chapters, authorities arrested me on August 11, 1987. I was 23 years old. I had no guidance on what to expect, and I was entering the system at the beginning of the War on Drugs. Because of my role in leading a criminal enterprise, authorities placed me in solitary confinement at the start of my term.

It was there that I began to change the way I thought. I learned that I could not expect a lawyer, or anyone else, to save me from the consequences of my decisions. If I wanted a better future, I would have to build the path myself. To do that, I relied on lessons I learned from leaders whose ideas shaped the way I thought about responsibility, discipline, and preparation.

I concluded my obligation to the government after 9,500 days, on August 12, 2013. The lessons I learned in prison helped me return home with my dignity intact and with opportunities to serve others. Like anyone else, I had to learn how to become a good steward of resources, time, and opportunity. This workbook is my effort to share those lessons with others.

In this preface, I also want to express gratitude to the many leaders who have helped me deliver these messages to people in prison. It takes courage to support a person with my history, and I must continue proving myself worthy of that trust. Before the end of 2026, I intend to write another book. I'll share the *Lessons I Learned from the Billionaires I Met in Prison*. There were many, and they all taught me the importance of personal leadership, discipline, and the importance of living with a CEO mindset. It will take a full book to express gratitude for the many ways that they helped me grow.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Changpeng Zhao, known around the world as CZ. He is the founder of Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange. I encourage readers to study his book, *Freedom of Money*. Through that book, he shares his life story, which I had the privilege of hearing directly from him. Since releasing his memoir, CZ has publicly expressed support for Prison Professors. Although he is not from the United States, and our country wrongfully incarcerated him, he still chose to donate millions of dollars to support our mission.

In *Freedom of Money*, CZ wrote about his extraordinary journey, including the time he spent in prison. Since he was not a US citizen, CZ endured harsher conditions of confinement than others. For example, he did not receive the benefits of the First Step Act, and he had to endure complications from wrongfully imposed detainers. In my view, he never should have gone into the system in the first place. Readers of his book will learn of the many injustices he endured.

Our mission is to improve outcomes of the system, so that all people, regardless of national origin, can earn freedom through merit. We want to bring changes that will incentivize the pursuit of excellence.

Because of CZ's global influence, thousands of people have become aware of Prison Professors Charitable Corporation. His book, *Freedom of Money*, became a global number-one bestseller as soon as it hit the market. Although he mentioned Prison Professors only once, a single mention from such an influential figure can

ignite hope. A community emerged that began using Web 3.0 technology to support our nonprofit.

Neither I nor CZ know the people who organized that movement. I am an amateur when it comes to Web 3.0, and I have no role in managing or directing any community other than Prison Professors.

Yet I am grateful that others got so inspired by our work that they formed a new community, using Web 3.0 tools to support our mission. I didn't know what they were doing or how, but I was deeply moved when hundreds of anonymous people began expressing encouragement with donations to support our nonprofit.

As a result of their efforts, thousands of dollars in donations began flowing into our system. I didn't have an understanding of how that was happening. Within three days, more than \$250,000 had been deposited into our nonprofit's donation wallet.

The donations came in anonymously, and built up in small increments, from thousands of generous people. They were using Web 3.0 tools, making a use case, with smart contracts that expressly supported our nonprofit. Since I do not know who made those donations, and I do not know how they learned about us, I cannot even reach out to thank them personally.

All I can do is express my gratitude to anyone who supports our mission, and pledge that we will use those resources to fulfill the mission statement in our nonprofit's bylaws; we record every donation on our website, and we're launching a mechanism to show how those resources are furthering our mission.

We will continue giving all books, lessons, and courses away at no charge to people or the government.

Because I do not have sufficient knowledge of Web 3.0, and because I am not involved in organizing or running the growing community that supports Prison Professors through those channels, I must keep an arm's-length distance. It would be inappropriate for me to claim responsibility for the remarkable growth of a community that I neither control nor fully understand.

All I can do is remain faithful to the lessons I learned from leaders like CZ by staying mission-aligned. My mission is clear:

PRISON PROFESSORS CHARITABLE CORPORATION

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- » To offer free lessons and resources that help people work toward earning freedom through merit.
- » To gather data that we can use to support changes that we believe would bring better outcomes for all people who go into the criminal justice system.
- » To work toward changes that would keep people from ever going into a prison, when a civil remedy or home confinement would be more than adequate to serve justice.

We will continue using our resources to support the mission, including distributing thousands of copies of our books and lessons, and building our web platform. Beginning in April, 2026, we will distribute thousands of copies of the *Playbook: Become the CEO of Your Life*. We believe this resource will help onboard more people into our system, and they will use our platform to show how they're working toward better outcomes. All participants should develop a record that shows why they are extraordinary and compelling.

Those who use our resources and platform will develop an asset that shows why they are serious, and why they are worthy of consideration for better outcomes. Every person in prison should become a Prison Professor, developing a personal curriculum that will advance him as a candidate for a higher level of liberty, and new opportunities.

If they choose to develop a profile, as described in the chapters that follow, their stories may help us advocate for a broader expansion of incentives under the First Step Act and other reforms that reward genuine preparation.

- » I cannot promise that the changes we hope to see will come.
- » I promise that I will work hard to become the change I want to see.

As a person who served 26 years in prison, I think a great deal about the people who are still inside. I believe that by building our platform at Prison Professors, we show why society should support reforms that reward excellence, discipline, and preparation. We create pathways to employment for people who return home. We also hope to build resources that empower others and, through their stories, their effort, and their documented progress, contribute to ending intergenerational cycles of recidivism and poverty.

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We need your help. Build your profile in ways that show you are much more than what the government wrote in a charging instrument, or PSR. You're the CEO of your life, and we believe in you.

Respectfully,

Michael Santos

Founder, Prison Professors



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