

3. BECOMING THE CEO OF YOUR LIFE

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

I titled this lesson Becoming the CEO of Your Life because that idea changed how I understood responsibility while incarcerated. When I entered prison, I quickly realized that the system would control nearly every aspect of my daily existence:

- » where I lived, when I moved,
- » what I wore, and
- » how I communicated.

What the system could not control—unless I surrendered it—was how I thought, how I planned, and how I chose to respond to those constraints.

This lesson is about that distinction.

Many people believe that leadership requires authority, freedom, or resources. Prison strips those things away, which is why so many people conclude that leadership is impossible while incarcerated. I reached a different conclusion. I learned that leadership begins with ownership. Becoming the CEO of your life does not require power over others. It requires responsibility for yourself.

During my sentence, I learned that every person inside prison is running an enterprise, whether they recognize it or not. That enterprise is their life. Some people allow the system to manage it entirely. Others decide to manage it deliberately. The difference between those two approaches compounds over time. One leads to stagnation. The other leads to preparation.

This lesson explains what it means to take ownership of your decisions, priorities, and direction while incarcerated. It builds on the earlier lessons about preparation and learning, and it moves toward action. You will learn how to define success on your own terms, align your daily behavior with long-term goals, and hold yourself accountable for the outcomes you want to influence.

Becoming the CEO of your life does not mean denying hardship or pretending the system is fair. It means refusing to live passively. It means deciding that even with constraints, you will think strategically, act intentionally, and document your

progress. That mindset allowed me to endure a long sentence without surrendering purpose. It is the same mindset I encourage you to develop.

Like the previous lessons, this one is self-directed. No one will supervise your work. No one will grade your responses. The value of this lesson depends entirely on your willingness to take ownership of your time and decisions. If you are prepared to do that, this lesson will help you begin managing your life with clarity and intention—right where you are.

BECOMING THE CEO OF YOUR LIFE

Understanding What the System Controls—and What It Does Not

When I entered prison, it became clear very quickly that the system controlled almost everything external. It controlled my movement, my schedule, my environment, and my access to people and resources. That reality can feel overwhelming, especially at the beginning. Many people respond to it by surrendering internally.

They tell themselves that since the system controls so much, their own decisions no longer matter.

That belief is false.

While the system controls conditions, it does not control strategy. It does not control priorities. It does not control how you use your time, how you respond to setbacks, or how you prepare for the future. Those decisions remain yours unless you give them away. Becoming the CEO of your life begins with recognizing that distinction.

A CEO does not control the market, competitors, or economic conditions. What a CEO controls is how the organization responds. In prison, your life is the organization. Your habits are the operating system. Your decisions are the strategy.

OWNERSHIP IS THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership begins with ownership. Before I could influence anyone else, I had to accept full responsibility for my own decisions. That did not mean ignoring injustice or pretending the system was fair. It meant acknowledging that my future



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would be shaped more by how I responded to constraints than by the constraints themselves.

Many people confuse responsibility with blame. They believe that accepting responsibility means excusing what happened to them or minimizing unfairness.

That is not what I mean. Responsibility means recognizing that your response to circumstances determines whether you stagnate or prepare.

Once I accepted that ownership, my thinking changed. I stopped asking what the system would do for me and started asking what I could do despite the system.

DEFINING SUCCESS ON YOUR OWN TERMS

One of the most important decisions a CEO makes is defining success. Without a clear definition, effort becomes scattered and inconsistent. Inside prison, many people allow the system to define success for them: avoiding trouble, counting time, or waiting for release. Those measures are passive. They do not build readiness.

I defined success differently. I asked myself what kind of person I wanted to be when I eventually encountered opportunity—whether that opportunity came through law, work, education, or advocacy. That definition shaped every decision I made afterward.

Success, as I defined it, required education, contribution, and credibility. It required discipline in how I used my time. It required documenting effort so others could see more than my conviction. Once success was defined, decisions became easier. Every choice either aligned with that definition or moved me away from it.

ALIGNING DAILY DECISIONS WITH LONG-TERM GOALS

Becoming the CEO of your life requires alignment between what you say you want and what you do every day. Inside prison, that alignment is tested constantly. Frustration, boredom, negativity, and peer pressure can pull you off course if you are not deliberate.

I learned to evaluate my decisions through a simple lens:

- » does this action move me closer to or farther from the person I am trying to become?

That question eliminated many distractions. It also exposed habits that felt harmless but were inconsistent with my goals.

CEOs do not manage by emotion. They manage by metrics. Inside prison, your metrics are your habits: how you read, how you write, how you speak, how you respond to adversity. Over time, those habits compound into outcomes.

ACCOUNTABILITY WITHOUT EXTERNAL ENFORCEMENT

One of the hardest aspects of self-leadership in prison is the absence of external accountability. No one is going to remind you to study. No one is going to check whether you are writing, learning, or planning. That responsibility belongs entirely to you.

I built accountability into my routine. I set goals. I tracked progress. I reflected on what worked and what did not. I treated my time as an asset rather than something to be endured. That approach required discipline, but it also created momentum. Small, consistent actions became habits. Habits became identity.

Accountability is not about perfection. It is about consistency. CEOs adjust strategy when conditions change, but they do not abandon strategy altogether. I learned to evaluate setbacks as information, not failure.

MANAGING RISK AND MAKING DELIBERATE CHOICES

Every decision inside prison carries risk. Some risks are obvious. Others are subtle. Becoming the CEO of your life requires learning how to assess risk intelligently rather than react emotionally.

I learned to think several steps ahead.

- » How would this decision look on paper?
- » How would it appear to someone evaluating my record later?
- » Would it support or undermine the narrative I was building?

Those questions guided my behavior.



Risk management is not fear-based. It is strategic. It requires thinking beyond the immediate moment and considering long-term consequences. That mindset separated deliberate preparation from impulsive reaction.

BUILDING A RECORD THAT REFLECTS LEADERSHIP

Leadership inside prison is quiet. It does not announce itself. It is reflected in consistency, restraint, and focus. Over time, those qualities become visible through documentation, behavior, and communication.

As I progressed through my sentence, people began to see me differently—not because I demanded respect, but because my actions were aligned with my goals. That alignment built credibility. Credibility opened doors.

Becoming the CEO of your life is not about control over others. It is about control over yourself. It is about managing your time, energy, and decisions with intention. That discipline allowed me to endure a long sentence without surrendering purpose.

THE CORE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CEO

At its core, becoming the CEO of your life means accepting one responsibility: no one else will manage your future for you. The system will manage your confinement. It will not manage your preparation.

That responsibility can feel heavy. It can also be empowering. Once you accept it, every day becomes an opportunity to act with intention. Every decision becomes part of a larger strategy.

This lesson is not about motivation. It is about management. If you are willing to take ownership of your life—even within constraints—you can begin building readiness for opportunities you cannot yet see.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Becoming the CEO of your life requires more than motivation. It requires clear thinking and precise language. The words you use shape how you understand



responsibility, how you explain your decisions, and how others interpret your actions. Strong leaders develop the ability to think and communicate with intention.

In the previous section, I used several higher-level words that appear frequently in leadership, business, legal, and professional settings. These words help you describe strategy, accountability, and decision-making with clarity. You do not need a dictionary to learn them. Each word is defined below and used in a sentence connected to prison life and long-term preparation.

As a self-directed exercise, study these words, write them by hand, and practice using them in your own sentences.

1. Ownership

- » **Definition:** Acceptance of responsibility for one's actions, decisions, and outcomes.
- » **Example Sentence:** Ownership begins when you stop blaming circumstances and start managing your decisions.

2. Strategy

- » **Definition:** A planned approach designed to achieve long-term goals.
- » **Example Sentence:** Developing a strategy for how I would use my time helped me stay focused during my sentence.

3. Alignment

- » **Definition:** Agreement or consistency between actions, goals, and values.
- » **Example Sentence:** My daily habits needed to be in alignment with the future I was preparing for.

4. Accountability

- » **Definition:** The obligation to evaluate and take responsibility for one's behavior and results.
- » **Example Sentence:** Accountability means measuring your progress honestly, even when no one is watching.

5. Discipline

- » **Definition:** The practice of consistent effort and self-control over time.
- » **Example Sentence:** Discipline allowed me to keep preparing even when motivation faded.



6. Prioritize

- » **Definition:** To decide what is most important and act accordingly.
- » **Example Sentence:** I had to prioritize learning and growth over distractions inside prison.

7. Consistency

- » **Definition:** The quality of behaving or performing in a steady and reliable way.
- » **Example Sentence:** Consistency in my routines mattered more than occasional bursts of effort.

8. Evaluate

- » **Definition:** To assess or judge something carefully in order to improve it.
- » **Example Sentence:** I learned to evaluate my decisions instead of reacting emotionally to setbacks.

9. Risk

- » **Definition:** The possibility of loss or negative consequences from a decision or action.
- » **Example Sentence:** Managing risk required thinking about how today's choices would look in the future.

10. Intention

- » **Definition:** A clear purpose or aim guiding one's actions.
- » **Example Sentence:** Acting with intention helped me avoid choices that worked against my long-term goals.

SELF-DIRECTED VOCABULARY EXERCISE

- » Write each word by hand.
- » Write one sentence using each word, based on your current situation or future goals.
- » Revisit these words when writing journals, letters, or reflections.

Leadership begins with how you think and how you communicate. Developing your vocabulary strengthens your ability to manage your life deliberately, even under constraint.



SELF-DIRECTED APPLICATION QUESTIONS

The purpose of this section is to help you apply the idea of becoming the CEO of your life to your daily adjustment inside prison. These questions are not tests. There are no right or wrong answers. They are prompts designed to help you evaluate how you are managing your time, decisions, and priorities.

You may answer these questions in writing, think through them privately, or revisit them over time as your circumstances evolve.

1. Ownership of Decisions

This lesson emphasized that while the system controls conditions, you control strategy.

- » In what areas of your life inside prison are you fully taking ownership of your decisions?
- » Are there areas where you may be giving up responsibility by blaming circumstances or other people?

2. Defining Success

Becoming the CEO of your life begins with defining success on your own terms.

- » How do you currently define success during this stage of your sentence?
- » What behaviors or habits would reflect that definition more clearly?

3. Alignment Between Goals and Actions

CEOs evaluate whether daily actions align with long-term goals.

- » Which of your daily habits support the future you want to build?
- » Are there habits that feel small but may be working against your long-term preparation?

4. Accountability Without Supervision

Self-leadership requires accountability even when no one is enforcing it.

- » How do you currently hold yourself accountable for using your time productively?
- » What system could you create to evaluate your progress more consistently?

5. Managing Risk and Thinking Ahead

This lesson discussed evaluating risk rather than reacting emotionally.

- » When making decisions, how often do you consider how those choices might be viewed later?



- » What questions could you ask yourself to make more deliberate decisions?

Revisit these questions over time. As you strengthen your sense of ownership and clarity, your answers may change. That change reflects growth. Consistent reflection, paired with intentional action, is how leaders manage themselves effectively—even under constraint.

DOCUMENTING YOUR WORK AND BUILDING A PROFILE

Becoming the CEO of your life requires more than intention. It requires a record. CEOs make decisions, track performance, evaluate results, and adjust strategy. Inside prison, documentation is how you do that. It turns daily effort into evidence of ownership and discipline.

Many people work hard without leaving a record. They read, avoid trouble, help others, and try to improve themselves, but none of that appears on paper. When opportunities arise, decision-makers evaluate what they can see. In the absence of documentation, they rely on records created by others. When you document your work, you take control of your narrative.

That is why building a profile matters.

A profile on Prison Professors is a tool for organizing and preserving your work as the CEO of your life. It is not about self-promotion. It is about accountability. Through a profile, you can define who you are beyond your conviction, explain how you are using your time, and show how your daily decisions align with your long-term goals.

Your profile allows you to document:

- » Your biography, describing who you are and what you stand for
- » Journals, reflecting on how you are managing your time and decisions
- » Book reports, showing what you are learning and how it shapes your thinking
- » Plans, explaining how you are preparing for future opportunities

Over time, these entries form a body of work. That body of work helps you evaluate yourself honestly. It also gives others a clear window into how you think, how you plan, and how you hold yourself accountable.



There are several ways to begin a profile, depending on your circumstances:

If you or your family have internet access:

1. Visit PrisonProfessors.org and follow the links to build a profile. A family member or trusted person can enroll on your behalf.
2. If you have email access: Send an email with your name, registration number, and facility to Interns@PrisonProfessors.org, requesting to start a profile.
3. If you do not have internet or email access: Write a letter requesting to build a profile and send it to:
 - » Prison Professors Charitable
 - » PO Box 50996
 - » Irvine, CA 92619

The method does not matter. The decision does.

Once your profile is started, documentation becomes part of how you manage your life. You are no longer reacting day to day. You are tracking progress, evaluating habits, and adjusting strategy. That is what CEOs do.

Documentation is not about predicting outcomes. It is about preparing for them. By recording how you think, plan, and act, you build credibility that can support opportunities later—whether those opportunities involve programs, recommendations, work, or higher levels of liberty.

When opportunity appears, your profile allows you to meet it with confidence. It shows that you did not drift through your sentence. You managed it deliberately.

REINFORCING THE LESSON BY TEACHING OTHERS

One of the clearest signs that someone has begun to think like the CEO of their life is their willingness to teach what they are learning to others. Teaching requires ownership. It requires clarity. It forces you to explain ideas in a way that makes sense, not just to yourself, but to someone else.

During my sentence, I learned that teaching was one of the most effective ways to strengthen my own discipline. When I explained concepts like planning, accountability, and long-term thinking to others, I had to live up to those standards myself.



Teaching became a form of self-enforcement. It helped me stay aligned with the person I was trying to become.

You do not need a title or authority to teach. You teach every time you explain an idea calmly, help someone think through a problem, or share a lesson that helped you adjust. Inside prison, this kind of leadership matters. People notice those who think clearly, speak responsibly, and act with consistency.

Teaching is also something worth documenting.

When you record how you are applying this lesson and how you are sharing it with others, you create evidence of leadership and contribution. You show that you are not only focused on your own progress, but that you are using your time to elevate the thinking and behavior of people around you. Over time, that record strengthens your credibility.

Your profile is the place to document this work. You can write about:

- » How you explained the idea of becoming the CEO of your life to someone else
- » What questions others asked you and how you responded
- » How teaching reinforced your own accountability
- » What you learned from trying to articulate these ideas clearly

Teaching is not about telling others what to do. It is about modeling responsibility. It is about reinforcing your own discipline by living the principles you are studying. When you teach this lesson to others and document that effort, you move from learning to leadership. You demonstrate that you are managing your life deliberately, not waiting passively for circumstances to change.

That is what it means to be the CEO of your life—inside prison and beyond it.

