

6. ADMISSIONS AND ORIENTATION

A MESSAGE FOR PEOPLE ENTERING FEDERAL PRISON

If you are just entering the federal prison system, I want to share a message about how important your decisions will be from this point forward. My name is Michael Santos. I am the founder of Prison Professors, and I served 26 years in federal prison. I now work full time to build more pathways for people to earn freedom through merit.

I want to be clear about something from the beginning:

- » I cannot succeed in this work without the help of people who are currently incarcerated.

Prison Professors exists to help people inside prison demonstrate, through their actions and documented effort, that they are on a self-directed pathway to prepare for success upon release. All of our programs are free. Anyone can participate. There are no waiting lists, no applications to be approved, and no requirement other than a personal decision to begin building an extraordinary and compelling record.

During my time in prison, I learned that while the system controls many things, it does not control how you choose to live each day. Every decision you make compounds over time. Those decisions influence your disciplinary record, your opportunities inside the institution, and how others will evaluate you in the future.

Many people enter prison focused only on release dates or laws they believe may or may not apply to them. Some assume that because of their offense, sentence length, or background, nothing they do will matter. I understand why people feel that way. I also know that meaningful reform does not happen because of hope alone. Reform happens when people demonstrate, through consistent behavior, that incentives for excellence work.

That is where your role becomes essential.

Through Prison Professors, we build lessons, courses, and offer books. We work to collect real evidence that people who choose to live with intention are less inclined to engage in disciplinary problems and more likely to build self-directed pathways that prepare them for success upon release. This evidence allows us to advocate

for reforms that expand opportunities, increase incentives for merit, and recognize people for the work they are doing while incarcerated.

Participation in Prison Professors does not require perfection. It requires commitment. It means avoiding trouble, staying away from drugs and conflict, and using your time to learn, reflect, document your growth, and contribute to others. It means living as if you are the CEO of your own life, even while confined.

Our programs focus on helping you document who you are beyond what appears in a Presentence Investigation Report. By writing about your biography, your learning, your goals, and the steps you are taking to prepare for the future, you build a record that shows growth, accountability, and purpose. Over time, that record can support your candidacy for programs, lower levels of security, work opportunities, and reentry success.

This work is not easy. It does not happen through talk or promises. It requires daily effort. But it is work that compounds, and it is work that helps bring about the reforms we all want to see.

If you want to be part of the solution, today is the day to begin. Today is the day to decide how you will use your time and what kind of record you want to build. That is what Prison Professors exists to support—and we can only do it together.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- » What decisions can I make today that will help me build a better record tomorrow?
- » How do I want others to see me when they review my file months or years from now?
- » What steps can I take to avoid disciplinary problems and use my time productively?
- » How can documenting my effort help me prepare for success upon release?
- » What kind of example do I want to set for others inside this institution?

You do not need to answer these questions all at once. Revisit them over time. The way you answer them through your actions will shape your journey.



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