

THE STRAIGHT-A GUIDE INTRODUCTION

I often refer to the Straight-A Guide because it's central to the lessons I teach people in prison. Just a couple of days ago, I finished building an extensive follow-up course to complement that guide. I'm calling it Triumph: Building Bridges to Success. I plan to add Triumph to our nonprofit's platform so people can learn how decisions they make today lead to better opportunities in the future.

REFLECTING ON THE STRAIGHT-A GUIDE

I remember how the Straight-A Guide came to be. During my time in prison, one of my mentors, Lee Nobmann, came to visit me at the Taft Federal Prison Camp. Lee is not only my mentor and a friend, but he's also a self-made billionaire businessman.

I feel incredibly fortunate to learn from leaders like Lee. He built a privately held company generating annual revenues that exceed \$500 million. The businesses Lee found provide jobs for more than 1,000 people. They generate taxes that fund entire communities.

Besides all of Lee's business success, he also lives as a portrait of good citizenship and humility. No one who meets would know of the enormous wealth that he created for his family and for others. That is why he has always been a role model for me.

When Lee visited me in prison, we frequently spoke about the career I wanted to build upon my release. He offered an opportunity for me to work with him. Yet I wanted to pursue a plan that had begun at the start of my sentence, when I was serving that first year in solitary. I wanted to share lessons that I learned about overcoming adversity, and working toward a higher potential.

Around that time, I'd been reading Ten-Ten-Ten by Suzy Welch. She was married to Jack Welch, the legendary CEO of General Electric. From him, Suzy learned how anyone could live as the CEO of their own life. They would simply make decisions by thinking about every decision's impact in:

1. The next ten minutes,
2. The next ten months, and
3. The next ten years.

Lee liked the concept. He used it in building his own businesses. But he had the wisdom to help me accept that I would need to develop my own framework. I still had more than five years to serve when I had that conversation with Lee in a prison's visiting room.

I returned to my housing unit, went through my usual “stare-at-the-wall” process—just thinking deeply about how to create a teaching strategy. That reflection led to what I now call the Straight-A Guide. It's a ten-part framework that helped me guide decisions while I served my sentence.

1. Define success
2. Set clear goals.
3. Move forward with the right attitude.
4. Aspire to become part of something bigger than your life.
5. Act in harmony with how you define success.
6. Create accountability tools to measure progress.
7. Stay aware of opportunities, and make others aware of your commitment to succeed.
8. Be authentic, showing how you plan, prioritize, and execute.
9. Celebrate incremental achievements.
10. Appreciate your blessings and live with gratitude.

I've built many courses around the Straight-A Guide, and so have many others. It's a framework that anyone can use to make better decisions.

The newer courses expand on these principles, showing how each step can lead to opportunities and greater fulfillment—even from within the confines of prison. I follow these principles today by planning my projects, reflecting on my progress, adjusting as needed, and holding myself accountable.

The video below shows more of my commitment to teaching the Straight-A Guide, even while on vacation in Rome:

» [Climbing steps to a cathedral in Rome: https://youtu.be/uWzIRRqS3b0](https://youtu.be/uWzIRRqS3b0)

REFLECTIVE QUESTION

- » In what ways will you be able to show the thought that went into your strategy for bringing value to your community?



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