

SECTION III

In this third section of Preparing for Success after Prison, we invite participants to join our coalition for reforms that would expand the concept of “earning freedom” by incentivizing excellence.

- » In Section I, the first five hours of our Preparing for Success after Prison course, we provided the construct for living a values-based, goal-oriented adjustment.
- » In Section II, we endeavored to show a practical application for the next ten hours of the course. I used the Straight-A Guide as a compass to prepare for success upon release.
- » In Section III, we offer an additional 15 exercises on personal development. These final 15 lessons involve more writing and critical thinking; participants should use critical thinking to memorialize their personal growth and preparations for success.

Purpose:

Throughout this course, I’ve written that I would offer guidance that I learned from leaders. Those leaders taught me the importance of life-long learning. If we’re always preparing, we’re living more intentionally.

We must identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. I pledge transparency and would never ask anyone to do anything I’m not doing. Subsequent lessons will show how I’m still using these strategies today.

Since completing my prison term, in August of 2013, working toward prison reform and sentence reform has been like a ministry for me. Every day, I advocate for reforms that include:

- » Expansion of incentives that would allow all people in prison to earn higher levels of liberty through merit and reconciliation.
- » Access to work release for people in federal prison who qualify.
- » Meaningful access to commutations and compassionate release.
- » Reinstatement of the US Parole Commission.



To succeed with such efforts, I need help from people in prison. When more people show that they're building release plans and using those plans to guide their preparations for success, we become more successful at persuading administrators, business leaders, and citizens on the need to expand the use of incentives in prison.

We invite participants to subscribe to our newsletter. If you haven't done so already, consider becoming a part of our community:

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LESSON 16: VENI, VIDI, VICI

Some participants may have heard the Latin phrase “Veni, vidi, vici.”

Scholars attribute that phrase to Julius Caesar, a Roman general, and statesman. He lived during the first century BCE (Before the Common Era). We can translate the phrase into English as follows:

Veni:

This word translates to “I came” or “I arrived.” It refers to the act of arriving at a particular place or situation.

Vidi:

This word means “I saw.” It represents observing or perceiving something with one’s own eyes.

Vici:

The word Vici says “I conquered” or “I overcame.” This word signifies achieving victory or triumph over a challenge or opponent.

History tells us that Julius Caesar used this phrase when he wrote a letter to the Roman Senate around 47 BCE. He wanted to describe his swift and decisive victory against another king succinctly. Over the following centuries, others have used the Veni, Vidi, Vici phrase to express a concise statement of a successful accomplishment or a display of confidence.

I used Veni, Vidi, Vici when drafting the manuscript for *Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term*. The book would become cornerstone content for the career I wanted to build upon release: I aspired to persuade leaders of the need for reforms that would allow people to earn freedom through merit rather than turning calendar pages. Since the book would have to cover multiple decades in confinement, I needed a logical section to engage readers.

Veni: The first section of the manuscript shows a young man going in to serve a multi-decade term.

Vidi: The penultimate section shows what he saw and how preparations for success led to an effective release plan that focused on results rather than the process of serving time.

Vici: The final section shows how an effective release plan could open opportunities and deliver a higher potential for people who return to society.

As I learned from the life story of Frederick Douglass, I started with a plan:

A book, or series of books, would help me tell the story of how preparing for success after prison led to an effective release plan. Writing that book became a priority and a part of an overall plan.

With the book, I hoped to open opportunities and persuade citizens that incentives would lead to improved outcomes of America's criminal justice system.

The book led to invitations to teach in a university, publishing in peer-reviewed journals, and creating advocacy campaigns to advance the plan's next steps.

We would need to collect data to influence people to join a coalition for reform.

Collecting data could show how preparing for success upon release improves outcomes. That data would counter opposing voices with a vested interest in repealing laws that encouraged people to work toward milestone credits or earn-time credits.

We developed resources to hire a social scientist from UCLA. With her data, she could profile how incentives lead to hope and that hope leads to more effective release plans, and more effective release plans lead to lower recidivism rates, lower costs, improved cultures, and better outcomes for citizens.

To spread the program further, we would need to expand our coalition to include prison administrators, employers, and people in prison. Together, we anticipated that we could build more support for reforms that would include:



Expansion of incentives for all people in prison,

Access to work-release programs,

Opportunities to pursue compassionate release, furloughs, or sentence commutations when appropriate.

As a personal-development exercise, write responses to the following questions.

**PLEASE ALLOW YOURSELF A TOTAL OF ONE HOUR
TO RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

What does the phrase “seek first to understand, then to be understood mean to you?”

What did you observe when you came to prison?

What thoughts did you have about preparing for higher levels of liberty while you served your sentence?

How would you have defined success at the start of your sentence?

What goals did you put in place to advance prospects for success?



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