

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?



PREPARING FOR SUCCESS AFTER PRISON
BE THE CEO OF YOUR LIFE

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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AFTERWORD

Build a Record of Your Progress

On behalf of everyone at Prison Professors Charitable Corporation, thank you for working through this course.

Our nonprofit provides free educational resources to help justice-impacted people prepare for success. We encourage participants to use their time intentionally, develop useful skills, and create a written record of their growth.

During the 26 years I served in federal prison, I learned that personal development becomes more powerful when we document it. I earned academic degrees, wrote books, developed release plans, and preserved evidence of the work I completed. That record helped others understand how I was preparing for success.

You can build a similar record through a free Profile on PrisonProfessors.org.

What to Include in Your Profile

Use your Profile to document:

- » Biography: Describe your background, the lessons you have learned, and how you are preparing for success.
- » Journal Entries: Record the decisions, habits, and actions that demonstrate continued growth.
- » Book Reports: Explain what you learned from each book and how you will apply those lessons.
- » Release Plan: Describe your plans for housing, employment, education, finances, health, family responsibilities, and community support.
- » Accomplishments: Record courses, work assignments, certificates, commendations, and other evidence of progress.



A Profile does not guarantee any particular outcome. It gives you a way to show the work you are doing and the person you are becoming.

How to Create Your Profile

Ask a family member or trusted friend to: Visit PrisonProfessors.org.

Select Profiles.

Follow the instructions to create your Profile.

Save the login information securely.

Add the written work you send to them.

Your family member or trusted contact may update the Profile on your behalf.

Points and Leaderboards

Participants may earn points when they add written work to their Profiles. The leaderboards recognize people who consistently document their progress.

Profile participation is optional. Profile points do not determine First Step Act eligibility or the award of First Step Act time credits. Building a Profile is separate from completing Preparing for Success After Prison under the supervision of an authorized facilitator.

When You Need Assistance

If you do not have a family member or trusted friend who can help, contact our team. Email: Interns@PrisonProfessors.org. Or use the US Post office:

Prison Professors Charitable Corporation

1205 BMC Drive, Suite 706

Cedar Park, TX 78613



When writing, include:

- » Your full name
- » Your registration or identification number
- » Your institution
- » Your return mailing address
- » A clear explanation of the assistance you need

You may also send biography updates, journal entries, book reports, release-plan sections, and other written material for your Profile. Keep copies of everything you send whenever possible.

Continue Building

Your past will always remain part of your story, but it does not have to control your future. The decisions you make today can influence how others perceive you and what opportunities may become available later.

Do not wait for an opportunity before beginning to prepare. Build the record now.

With hope and respect,

Michael Santos

Founder

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