

“Having a plan helps....”

A number of years ago a young man who had been in prison wrote me a letter reflecting on his prison experience. He had this to say:

Since you are interested in my future plans, I thought it only fair that I explain why I was in prison. I was 18 years old when I received a prison sentence. Another person in the neighborhood held me up and took my gold chain. I got my posse and we went after his posse. I hurt him and he ended up in the hospital. I was convicted and went to prison.

He continued in his letter to explain how his life had changed in the prison experience:

While I was incarcerated I had several friends who were released before me. And many of them had dreams and goals of earning college degrees or starting their own business. But soon after they were released I'd get word that they were back in the prison system with a long sentence, or that they were smoking crack, or, in some cases, died a violent death.... I think that some of them went wrong because they had dreams and goals but no idea whatsoever, of how they were going to achieve them. They had no plans. Just dreams. They knew where they wanted to go but they had no idea who they were going to get there. I guess it's something like being lost without any direction or map.

I think that having a plan helps. At some point during the last two years of my sentence, I bought a note pad from the commissary. On the pad I wrote down my goals. I listed the goals that I wanted to achieve after I was released. I didn't stop there. I also wrote down the methods I was going to use to achieve those goals. But most important I wrote down the sacrifices I was going to make in order to achieve those goals – because nothing comes from nothing. And to this day, I write down all my goals – both long-term and short-term. And I write down the methods I will use to achieve those goals and the sacrifices that must be made.... One should always have plans as well as goals. And they shouldn't just be in a person's head. They should be written down. When a man writes his goals and plans on paper, he is reaffirming what he has already thought about and is coming one step closer to making his dreams a reality.