

## NETWORK

Often covering the nervousness and fear generally felt by those of us who've been released is invigorated confidence & expectations. We come out feeling that we have an edge over others. After all, the time helped us think of better ideas than them, the separation from free life allowed us to attain more focus than them & the experience left us stronger & with more insight than them. But if you believe any of that you're a dumb ass.

We tend to let our relatively limited worldliness & social circles confine our understanding of people. However, we can't judge the quality of anything as it compares to our friends, our former selves & experiences or especially, the cats that surrounded us in prison. I cannot emphasize enough how many not only equally smart, tough & determined but credentialed, well recommended & criminal record free people there are with plans identical to or better than ours.

Success requires that we do not delude ourselves about both the competition & our abilities. Unfortunately, we may very well have to play catch up for some time, which, particularly for us, means we almost definitely will have to start at the bottom. Fortunately, however, we have a lot to gain from this.

So much of success, of fulfilling ambition, comes from who we know, & so many of the greatest relationships start in the most basic, unexciting places, such as menial jobs. But we will surely miss these life-changing unexpected opportunities if we hold the baseless & illogical idea that things ought to be easier or better. Why miss potential diamonds while waiting for gold?

Just as a fun house mirror affects our vision, prison has a way of distorting what our minds see. We begin to confuse hopes & dreams for some authoritative script describing our future. However, there is no such thing as should be; there is only what was, what is & what will be, and we do nothing more than surrender our chances at what will be when we continue to live in prison dreams instead of reality. (If you don't believe me, ask or read about successful people who didn't grow up privileged; the willingness & patience to start anywhere & any how- legally, of course- is key. )

Ultimately, no matter how boring or frustrating, first steps are just that, a temporary bridge to something loftier. So get in where you can, embrace your second ( or third, or fourth, etc) chance & keep your eyes & mind open for the next step.

Remember: just because we see clearer doesn't mean the path ahead suddenly is as well