

(UN) SUITABLE
<unsuitable behavior in public>

UNSUITABLE: Not suitable. INAPPROPRIATE, INAPT, UNFIT.

This is a heavy thing to be labled. This is the status of a prisoner. A person who is unfit to live within society, a person who is considered a danger to the public. To be told you are an unreasonable risk to persons and property by people who don't know you is very disheartening. Two people will spend 1 or 2 hours to review a file of a persons life (as it appears on file in the form of criminal history and period of incarceration), then has a disc~~o~~ussion with the person for several hours asking ambiguous questions. After which time these 2 people believe they can predict ones future actions. Based on this opinion you will be found SUITABLE or UNSUITABLE to return to society.

It is truly important to know as best as one can, who is a danger to the public. No one should want a dangerous individual free among the public, risking harm to people or property. However, doing it right; being just; and using sane measures should be the status of predicting recidivism. A sweeping generalized description of prisoners are "they are all criminals" and "they are the worst of the worst." This could not be more untrue. As you will soon see.

The truth is, some prisoners are more violent than others; some are higher recidivism risk than others; some are worse than they were before they came to prison; and some are no longer criminals (Yes. You heard correctly. Some prisoners no longer commit crimes and have not done so in over 20 or 25 years). The scary part of all this is, the ones who are really unsuitable are the ones being released back into society. Some of the toughest laws have come to prevent crimes based on cases committed by non-lifer ex-cons. Someone who was released from prison without doing any self work. The ones that are suitable and least likely to reoffend, are being denied parole and held in prison based on the severity of the crime they committed decades ago. Where is the public protection? Where is the best interest of justice? Where is the mo^oality/sanity of civilization?

I do not pretend to have all the answers. I do not attempt[?] to challenge the system as it is today. I simply want to share what it feels like to be called unsuitable and why I and others are so frustrated, when we know that we are truly different people and that statistics prove that we (LIFERS) are the least risk factor in prison. I want to share that a large number of prisoners are more than suitable for parole and are really going to be positive implants in society. Yet, we are being held in prison for political reasons. The polititions say that releasing dange~~f~~ous criminals back into society will be a risk to the public. Then they use the case of murders who have been in prison 20, 25, 30 years now and are no longer the people they were then. They use that to justify keeping us locked up or to change/make new laws. Only to release^{30 called low risk} offenders who did nothing in prison to change who they were. They go back out into society and commit ALL THE NEW CRIMES. These are the ones who are truly UNSuitable.

In California there are 2 types of prisoners. Indeterminate Sentenced Inmates (ISI). These are Term-to-Life, Life without, and Condemned prisoners (Whom we call LIFERS). And Determinate Sentenced Inmates (DSI) All other prisoners (Whom we call SHORT-TIMERS).

ISI's are capital punishment crimes i.e. Murder, Attempted Murder, Kidnappings, 3 Strikes, etc.. DSI's are non capital crimes whose sentences have a maximum date and an early possible release date. The major difference between the two. DSI prisoners have only to do the time they are sentenced to. Survive and go home. They do not have to work at changing their behavior or nothing. They have no pre-evaluation to determine their state of mind, learned skill set, or emotional health. They are released back into society only having been in prison wasting time.

ISI prisoners are different. LWOP's and Comdemned prisoners have no right to parole. I want to focus on the term-to-life prisoners. These are lifers who have a liberty interest in parole and can earn a second chance at freedom. These prisoners must do a certain amount of time of their term. 15 to life, 25 to life, 30 to life, etc..If one has 15 years to life. They have to serve about 7 to 10 years before they become eligible for parole (25 to life do 16 to 17 years.)(Except those convicted after 1994. They must do the number first)). At which time the prisoner will appear before a board panel of at least 2 commissioners who will determine whether or not the prisoner is SUITABLE or UNSUITABLE to be paroled back into the public.

There is not a clear prescriptive standard as to what a prisoner must do to prove his suitability. It is all subjective and at the discretion of the commissioners. Things are becoming a bit more clear as to what is needed and to what measure, to be found suitable. Yet, it is still in need of some adjustments.

Most lifers have been doing years in prison and have not just been sitting around playing Dominos, Spades, Poker, Chess, Basketball, or simply working out. Most lifers that have served at least 10 years or more in prison. Have done something to make him/her self a better person, intentionally or unintentionally. I want to focus on the ones who intentionally strive to be better people than they were before their incarceration. Some lifers strive to become better people so they can be found suitable for parole and set free. Some lifers strive to become better people so they can finally be who they always knew they were. They just had to fix a thing or two. Nevertheless, MOST LIFERS BECOME BETTER PEOPLE.

I am not saying that ALL lifers become better people. I am not saying that ALL non-lifers don't become better people. I am saying that most lifers have to work on themselves to show the board they are suitable. As a result, prison is riddled with lifers who no longer commit crimes; no longer lose control of their anger; no longer use drugs or sell drugs; no longer have a problem with impulsivity to break rules; no longer use alcohol to cope with life. Prison is riddled with lifers who have great insight into who they are today. They have insight into their causative factors, superficial behavior, internal, external and sensory triggers. They can better recognize and label their emotions and are equipped with tools to deal with emotions and circumstances as they arise, in a manner that is best for all involved.

The average person in society does not have this kind of insight into themselves or the tools to deal with major problems. It is a fact that the average citizen is more likely to commit a crime than a lifer who has spent 20, 25, 30 years in prison. Lets go here for a second. The legislative intent for sentencing of capital crimes is DETERRENT. 15 to Life, 25 to Life, Death. These sentences are to deter individuals from committing these kinds of crimes. It deters. Just not as anticipated. There are thousands of prisoners in county jails waiting to come to prison to serve their terms of capital punishment. Most of these thousands of people have been to prison for prior crimes. These kinds of crimes are happening everyday. Of all the thousands of new capital sentences. Only 1 (maybe 2) were once lifers who served more than 10 straight years in prison. This tells me that the deterrent works only after one has served a long stretch. Only a fool not in his right mind would commit another heinous crime after serving 20, 25, 30 years straight in prison.

REALITY: Across the country. 98% of parolees are non-lifers. Of this 98%, 89% recidivate (meaning they commit another crime within 3 years of paroling). On the other hand. The 2% of Lifers that are paroled 0.2% recidivate (and even less for violent crimes). A person who has served 25 straight years in prison. Is less likely to commit a crime than a non-lifer who has been to prison, and less than a person who has never been to prison at all. The average person does not have the experience of doing a long prison term to use as a deterrent.

I am not saying that prisoners are saints after serving long terms. I am not saying prisoners should not have to serve long terms for the crimes in which they committed. I am also not saying that non-lifers should do more time. I am saying that Lifers should be given a better chance at parole because of all the personal work they have done. I am also saying that society should look to benefit from lifers being out. Especially for companies that hire ex-cons. You will find ex-lifers to be very valuable.

I admit. I was at one time Unsuitable to be in society. I was lost to myself. Therefore, I was a danger to the public. That was over 26 years ago. I have become a completely different man today. I have grown up, matured, and most importantly, I found myself. I am not sitting in prison wasting my time. I make use of my being daily. This is how I attempt to make amends. However, I could do so much more and be more useful in the free world. Where I can also make a more direct amends to all those I harmed.

Prison Insight: Level II prisons keep a particular percentage of lifers on certain yards to better manage the yards. Lifers set the tone of the yards. Most lifers at level II prisons have been down for at least 10 years and are more concerned with going home than anything else. They are done playing with their lives. They don't want to just come home. They want to make a difference in the lives of others. They get their practice here. They take the time to help guide some of the youngsters that come threw. They can see themselves in them when they were the same age. They attempt to deter them or at least have them do some kind of personal work on themselves. One can only plant the seeds. This is a product of a person who truly has changed, seen the destructive path he/she took, takes responsibility for his/her actions and wants to make amends best way possible. The prison knows this and takes advantage of the lifers value. The public is being put at risk so that the prisons can be safer. What the.....?

Anyway. I simply wanted to share this. I truly believe I and most other lifers can make a positive difference in the communities in which we will be paroling to. If only given the chance. We honestly and wholeheartedly want to make a positive difference in the world. For this reason, it is hard to be called UNSUITABLE. Especially by the ones who are not that honest themselves. Here at the prison I am now. The Warden here was fired from his job for Embezzlement and Sexual Harassment. He's got years in the system, yet only one year as the Warden. Yet, this prison is full of lifers who want to make life better in anyway they can.

Enclosed is the writings of a friend of mine. He too is a lifer and has been working on himself for years also. He was compelled to write what was on his mind. He asked me to read it and critique it. It compelled me to write this and share both.

Mr. Washington and I have known each other since 2001. We have been apart of substance abuse programs, therapeutic communities, and behavioral modification programs as mentors and group facilitators. We have led Lifer groups and continue to teach men about being men. Hopefully sharing this will help someone or enlighten someone.

I also hope to go back to using prisons for their original concepts. Prisons were designed to remove a dangerous person from the public. Keeping them safe. Then rehabilitating the prisoner. Once the prisoner served enough time to satisfy the public and was truly rehabilitated. He/she was reintroduced to the community. At which time the prisoner is given a chance by the community to prove he has learned his/her lesson, has changed and is willing to make amends to the individuals harmed by his/her actions. This is the model of my future hopes.

Well, thank you for allowing me to share this with you. I feel a little better now:) I go to the board soon. I hope to be able to show them that I AM SUITABLE for parole. May your days be filled with wonder and joy.

HUMBLY SUITABLE,

MICHAEL

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