

Important Stuff to Know

By Dave

A good friend recently shared some information with me about his experiences with parole hearings, employment, and reentry issues in general. His desire to 'do it right' impresses me and reminds me that the path to successful reentry is, quite truthfully, a one day at a time journey. - Bob

Parole Hearings

For a parole board to release a person they look at three main things:

1. Has institutional programming (SOT) been completed?
2. Was "enough time served"?
3. Where are you going to live?

With regard to everything else they want or say they want, much is unobtainable, such as a job or an apartment lease because they need a credit check, a background check*, a job, or references from previous landlord(s). Some want a letter of reference from current employer**.

* I have found that some jobs and rental places do a background check and the pass/fail is based on "Did you tell us up front what we will learn in your background check". I have even been told it doesn't matter what is there, as long as you have told us, perhaps an exercise in honesty and transparency?

** I also found that a letter from a most recent/previous employer works, so if a person is on work release, go back to that employer and ask for a letter. That's what I did and the people there were more than happy to help.

Lots of people understand making a mistake and a second chance. However, they don't buy the "poor me" thing and not taking responsibility.

Otherwise I think the pre-parole list of "to do" and/or "must have" is a combination of getting you to think, to actually do something to show how much you are interested in success after release, and perhaps even items to use as ammo to back up a 'No Parole' decision.

For example, a parole agent I saw once wanted me to develop a monthly budget. The process, I think, was to get me to think about what it costs to live and how I was going to manage my money. When it came to employment, the agent admitted finding a job from within a prison setting was highly unlikely, but that it was important to at least develop a list of where I *might* be able to work. Of course they say "You need this when we meet again if you want to get released." The implication is that IF you have a completed list you WILL be released. In most every situation this is simply not the case, but when on the inside wanting to be out, one will do many things to gain freedom.

Sadly, those in charge don't honestly tell you and your family what is *really* needed. So my advice is to suggest that an inmate's family contact the assigned parole agent to discuss what actually is needed, when it is needed, and the realistic possibilities for release with or without having completed all the required steps. In some cases, the inmate's parole agent and contact information is obtainable from his/her prison social worker.

Church

With regard to church, the parole agent will most likely want to establish the inmate's real or potential 'risk to re-offend' level before allowing church attendance. The parole agent might also require a "safety contract" which requires the person meet face to face with the pastor and/or an elders board. Again, unattainable, but an exercise of putting in thought as to 'where and why.'

Outings

With my agent, when she objected to my outings and her asking why I felt they were appropriate activities, I now think that this was two fold. First, recognizing *what* I was doing and second, wanting to get me to think about *why* I was really wanting to go to these events and places. She wanted me to consider who would be there along with the potential temptations, pitfalls, and opportunities that would be present. When I had been somewhere that she did not sanction or approve, however, she didn't say I was prohibited from going back to those places or similar places/events.

Polygraph Tests - Testing

My parole agent had once told me "If you pass the polygraph, I will put you in for reduced supervision - report once every three months, call in every month." Then, just prior to the polygraph, my agent told me that I was being assigned to a different agent. Maybe that was nothing at all, but maybe it was a test. After all, despite the promise of reduced supervision (perhaps a carrot or temptation), the current agent could easily say, "I never promised that."

It seems that the testing and behind the curtain shenanigans don't end once you are released. They are a part of daily life inside *and* outside, so one must pay attention and always make the best decision while at the same time not being afraid to ask someone for help.

Smartphone

When I was given permission, I went with a Smartphone but the screen on it is quite small, 5.3" diagonally. The phone was and remains a bit frustrating to figure out how to work everything. I had wanted to keep my flip phone until I had the new one figured out (perhaps for a week or two) but the deal I got was a free phone when I brought in my current phone number. To activate the Smartphone I had to deactivate the flip phone. I survived but my Sunday was a very frustrating day to say the least. So my suggestion, if at all possible, is to get your new phone a week before the old one expires and you can at least call for assistance. If it's not possible, keep paddling!

Internet

My agent wants me to tell her who I want for internet at home and what I want to buy for a computer. That part is daunting. But again, is an exercise in thinking and planning. Things to consider: how expensive, how fancy, and how extravagant. Sadly, they put all of us into the same box. It is up to us to get out of the box and demonstrate that we are out properly and appropriately. It's about having to continue to prove yourself everyday, just like everyday since one's arrest and/or conviction. Not impossible, but not freely given either.