



My name is Michael G. Santos and I'm with the Michael G. Santos Foundation. I want to show those who work with offenders how our organization can serve as a resource. With that end in mind, I'm providing a synopsis of our work, using the following format:

1. **Background:** I've written an abbreviated version of my background to explain the value I can provide for those striving to motivate offenders to prepare for law-abiding lives.
2. **Straight-A Guide:** I'll follow that personal background with a brief description of our Straight-A Guide Life Skills Program.
3. **Research:** I write briefly about efforts I'm making to obtain evaluations that will lead to evidence-based status.
4. **Status:** I report on where we stand at the four-month mark since my release after 26 years of imprisonment.
5. **Process:** I briefly describe our process.

### Background

A reckless transition between my youth and adulthood led me into problems with the criminal justice system.

As a consequence of selling cocaine, I went to prison for 26 years and I served my sentence in prisons of every security level. While in the county jail, before sentencing, I made a 100 percent commitment to reconcile with society for the bad decisions of my youth. A three-part plan guided my adjustment, requiring my pledge:

- To educate myself.
- To contribute to society.
- To build a support network that would have a vested interest in my success upon release.

That principled plan led to my earning an undergraduate and a graduate degree during my incarceration. I contributed to society by publishing chapters and books that university professors used to educate students about our criminal justice system. I returned to society precisely as taxpayers would want every offender to return: as a law-abiding, contributing citizen. Indeed, I concluded my obligation to the Bureau of Prisons on August 12, 2013 and three weeks later I became a lecturer at San Francisco State University. Those who want validation of my work may watch the four-minute video profile that NBC news produced:

**Link:**  
**NBC News Bay Area Proud**



I spent each of the 9,500 days that I served building and testing a strategy that would prepare me for success upon release. Since returning to society, I packaged the strategy into a life-skills program that I call The Straight-A Guide. It's a values-based, goal-oriented course that facilitators may use to teach offenders how to:

- Reject criminal lifestyles
- Find and nurture mentor relationships
- Develop critical-thinking skills
- Strengthen communication skills
- Take incremental steps toward five-year plans

I designed the Straight-A Guide by creating 10 separate modules. Each of the modules includes five separate lessons. Our open-ended course has the advantage of accepting students at any time. In other words, students do not need to begin and end with a specific cohort of students. They may begin to participate in the self-directed course at any time. Although we designed 50 individual lessons, facilitators have the flexibility to teach the program in one-hour segments or they may expand the lessons to teach in four-hour segments. Accordingly, depending on institutional need, facilitators may teach the Straight-A Guide Life Skills Program in as few as 20 hours or as long as 200 hours. Each lesson adheres to a uniform format as follows:

**Video Segment:** Facilitator plays video segment from DVD in which I narrate the strategies I used to navigate my way through a quarter century of confinement or where I'm interviewing other offenders who describe their adjustments through prison and return to society. Depending on the lesson, these videos last between seven and 20 minutes. They provide students with insight and show them that an individual can pursue a deliberate path to prepare for success upon release, regardless of external influences or past decisions.

**Vocabulary Segment:** Each module emphasizes the power that comes from developing strong communication skills. Accordingly, all of the lessons challenge the participants to build their vocabulary skills in methodical ways. Each lesson includes five words that come from the reading assignments. Participants strive to learn each word's definition, part of speech, and to use the word in a sentence.

**Critical-Thinking Segment:** Following the vocabulary lesson, the curriculum asks a series of open-ended questions. Those questions challenge the participants to contemplate appropriate responses to the types of practical problems that offenders face as they proceed through the prison experience. The lessons help the participants develop an appreciation for the relationship between decisions and opportunities.

**Group-exercise or Breakout Segments:** Each lesson concludes with an opportunity for the facilitator to engage participants with exercises that challenge them to apply the lesson.

## Videos / Books Lesson Plans

Besides the 50 different video segments and the fully developed 50 separate lesson plans, The Straight-A Guide Life Skills program includes several books I wrote to help participants grasp the discipline necessary to transform their lives into law-abiding, contributing citizens. Those books include the following:

***Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Term***—By describing the journey from the day of my arrest until the day I walked out of prison, *Earning Freedom* provides readers with insight into how to sustain discipline, energy, and focus while traversing longer than a quarter century in prisons of every security level.

***Prison! My 8,344th Day***—In *Prison!* I show readers the discipline and deliberate thought process that carried me through a typical day. It tells the story from the moment my eyes opened until the time I went to sleep, explaining the reasons behind every thought, every conversation, every action, showing how they related to how I wanted to emerge from prison.

***Triumph! The Straight-A Guide to Conquering Imprisonment and Preparing for Reentry***—Through *Triumph!* I show readers the importance of establishing a clear value system, identifying clearly stated goals, and committing to a plan for success in a deliberate, systematic way.

**Success! The Straight-A Guide for At-Risk Youth**—In Success! I narrate the lessons of the Straight-A Guide through stories that I wrote specifically for at-risk youth.

Each book offers learning resources for facilitators and for participants. Facilitators appreciate the structured, step-by-step guide that shows how people can make decisions that prepare them for successful, meaningful lives despite the bad decisions of their past. Participants find hope in the message. Through the books and other literature of the Straight-A Guide, individuals read about an individual who was locked in prison cells for 9,500 days. Yet while inside, he rejected criminal lifestyles and focused on preparing himself for a better life. Through those books, inmates see a path that they can follow to transform their own lives.

### Quantitative / Qualitative Research

Although I am living, breathing evidence showing that an individual who adheres to the Straight-A Guide Life Skills program can transform his life, I also recognize that administrators want to see evidence-based programs. Since I've only recently been released from prison, I've had to bootstrap this program. I lacked the resources to hire a team of social scientists and statisticians who would design research instruments, collect data, and measure outcomes. Yet with sponsorship from The California Wellness Foundation, Sierra Health Foundation, and The Cornerstone Project, Justin Paperny and I have begun building relationships with facilities that serve at-risk populations. Through those pilot programs, we're collecting anecdotal evidence and professional references that validate the value our Straight-A Guide Life Skills Program provides to institutions.

I am currently in discussions with two research professors. Dr. Elizabeth Brown works with me in the criminal justice school at San Francisco State University. Dr. Brown shows interest in evaluating the influences our Straight-A Guide Life Skills program has on inmates locked in the the Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall. She will meet with the principal of the juvenile hall in January to discuss next steps for conducting a quantitative research project that measures specific outcomes.

Website: [MichaelSantos.org](http://MichaelSantos.org)

I'm also in discussions with Dr. Jennie Singer, from Sacramento State University. Dr. Singer is exploring options of applying for a research grant from The National Institute of Justice for the purposes of evaluating the Straight-A Guide Life Skills Program.

In 2014, I expect that we will have found the path that leads our Straight-A Guide to achieve status as an accredited evidence-based program. For now, we continue working to build relationships with organizations that will implement our program into settings that serve at-risk populations.

### Initial Client List

1. National Guard's Sunburst Youth Challenge Academy
2. Center for Opportunity Re-Entry and Education (CORE), Orange County Department of Education
3. Boys and Girls Club of Venice
4. Santiago Creek School, Orange County Department of Education
5. Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall, Osborne School
6. Franklin County Jail
7. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Twin Towers Jail
8. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Pitchess Detention Center
9. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, CRDF Lynwood

We will provide contact references for anyone who asks about the value our Straight-A Guide Life Skills Program has on institutions.

### Process

We secured our current list of clients by reaching out to describe our product. The next step has been for me to make an in-person presentation to the client's team and in some cases presentations to the population of offenders. Administrators may purchase one-year license agreements for our Straight-A Guide Life Skills program for \$5,000 on a per-institution basis. That price covers the costs for the 10-module video course; 50 fully developed lesson plans; and PDF versions of each book. For an additional fee, we offer additional products and services that include training days, books, and additional copies of the DVD module sets.