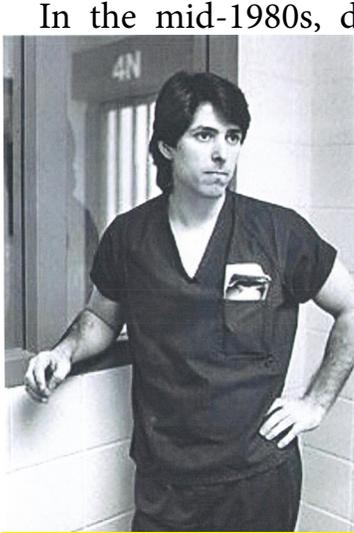


What can people in your organization learn from a man who served a 45-Year Prison Term?  
**A Lot!**

**M**y name is Michael Santos. On August 12, 2013, I finished serving a 45-year sentence inside the Federal Bureau of Prisons. This brief biography describes the bad decisions that led to my troubles with the law and the lessons I learned from great leaders. Those lessons empowered me to conquer decades of imprisonment. I now teach others how they can use those same lessons to reach their highest potential.

**Background:**



At time of my arrest, in 1987

In the mid-1980s, during a reckless transition between my youth and adulthood, I made the bad decision to sell cocaine. On August 11, 1987, federal authorities arrested me. At the time of my arrest, I wasn't ready to accept responsibility for my bad decisions. My lawyer convinced me

that I could beat the charges. I believed him. I only cared about getting out of jail. Instead, a jury convicted me on every count.

After my conviction, the totality of my circumstances began to sink in. I faced a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. I began to pray and those prayers led me to an anthology that exposed me to the story of Socrates. As I read about Socrates' imprisonment and his response to the death penalty he received, I began to appreciate what it meant to live with dignity, in accordance with a social contract. Those readings influenced me to work toward reconciling with society during my time in prison. I visualized a better life and made a three-part plan to guide my journey. I would work to:

- Educate myself,
- Contribute to society,
- Build a support network that would have a vested interest in my success upon release.



Despite my not having a history of prior incarceration or violence, at sentencing my judge imposed a term of 45 years. Since I couldn't comprehend what such a sentence would mean, I focused on the first 10 years. During that first decade I set clear goals: I worked to earn a university degree, to contribute to society through publishing, and to build a support network by bringing at least 10 mentors into my life. That strategy made all the difference in my adjust-

ment through prison. Ultimately, the strategy prepared me for a successful return to society.

In 1992 Mercer University awarded my undergraduate degree and in 1995 Hofstra University awarded my graduate degree. I was enrolled at The University of Connecticut in pursuit of a Ph.D. until a warden blocked me from completing that program. He claimed that my continuing studies interfered with the security of the institution.

I then turned my attention to writing, as I wanted to help others understand more about prisons, the people they held, and strategies for growing through confinement.

The support network I built from within prison boundaries included some of America's leading penologists. They invited me to contribute chapters for their books about criminal justice or corrections. Eventually, editors offered to publish books I wrote. Wadsworth (now Cengage) published *About Prison* (2003) and then



Speaking at 2014 State of Silicon Valley Conference



Greenwood/Praeger published *Profiles from Prison* (2003). I then wanted to write for a trade audience, and St Martin's Press published my book *Inside: Life Behind Bars in America* (2006). Later, I published *Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term*.

Following the release of *Inside*, I began writing books to help more people in prison understand the importance of preparing for law-abiding, contributing lives upon release. The California Wellness Foundation funded the development of those writing projects as part of a vision I had to build a career around all I learned through my journey. I believed that people in custody would be receptive to the message I conveyed because they would identify with my journey through prison.

### **Returning to society:**

On August 13, 2012, I transitioned from federal prison to a halfway house in San Francisco, where I served my final year as a federal prisoner. During that year I began working more closely with the Michael G. Santos Foundation (MGSF), a 501(c)(3) that my friend Justin Paperny established during my final years in prison. Justin works with me to build a brand

around a human message that anyone can become more than past decisions or current circumstances. We're working on several fronts to launch efforts that will help more offenders prepare for law-abiding lives upon release, including:

- We've developed cognitive skills development programs that teach people how to think differently. We offer these programs through literature, curriculum, and videos. Facilitators use our Straight-A Guide program to teach people from at-risk populations how to reject criminal lifestyles and prepare for law-abiding lives.
- We've developed a program to provide a bridge for the formerly incarcerated to transition into the labor market.
- We're working to open opportunities that allow us to spread more awareness about why our society should reduce a disturbing reliance on mass incarceration. This policy results in a great social injustice that our organization is determined to improve.





**PBS NewsHour Filming as I teach  
in San Bruno Jail**

- In addition to working with the MGSE, I'm a lecturer at San Francisco State University. I teach a course called The Architecture of Incarceration to help criminal justice students understand more about America's prison system and why we must reform it for the good of our nation.
- Our organization strives to open opportunities that will allow us to deliver our human message for conquering adversity to business, professional, and government audiences.

On August 12, 2013, I concluded my 26-year obligation to the Bureau of Prisons. Three weeks later I began teaching my first class at SFSU and I'm currently well into my second semester of teaching.

Our organization has placed the Straight-A Guide Cognitive Skills Development Program with several different institutions that work with offenders or at-risk youth. Our clients include the following:

- National Guard's Challenge Academy
- Orange County Day Reporting Center
- Santiago Creek Alternative School
- Boys and Girls Club
- Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall
- Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department
- Franklin County Jail (Pennsylvania)
- San Jose Gang Prevention Task Force
- Washington State DOC

Besides those programs, we're also bootstrapping an effort to open more job opportunities for the formerly incarcerated. In fact, we welcome opportunities to meet with as many community leaders as possible. We suspect that many would share this vision of the role we can play in building a better society. With the employment component in mind, we've built a staffing company. That way, employers who are reluctant to hire the formerly incarcerated could use our staffing company to test those we recommend for employment.

I attach links below to videos of presentations I've made. The first video is from an NBC news feature that profiled our work.

- [NBC Bay Area Proud](#)
- [2014 State of Silicon Valley](#)
- [UC Berkeley Presentation](#)
- [Violence Prevention Keynote Speech](#)
- [Additional Videos](#)
- [MichaelSantos.com](#)
- [Straight-A Guide YouTube Commercial](#)

If you would like to learn more about how our work can contribute to your organization, please contact me.

Sincerely,  
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