

The Value of Second Chances

By: Lossou Wallace

How many people do you know made it to the championship in their first year playing a sport? Did you know Snoop Dogg was on Death Row before becoming a very influential artist worldwide? As you try to rack your brain for the similarities, I can tell you they both lie in second chances. A concept I believe is very important and should be offered to all within reason. While obstacles, barriers, and outside forces are all inevitable factors, having a second chance gives us an opportunity to overcome the circumstances or situation that stand before us. But a second chance is more than just another attempt at trying to achieve something. It's a way to learn and grow from one's past mistakes or errors to improve into a better version of oneself.

Growing up in a single-parent household, my mother embedded this mantra of education first in me along with my two brothers. Although we grew up in a neighborhood ridden with all sorts of negativity, my mother tried her best to steer us away from that sort of lifestyle. But the influence was too strong. Over time I would continue my involvement in these activities until it landed me in the last place I would ever want to go to at nineteen years old: jail.

Being incarcerated was a gift and a curse. Being stuck miles away from my family with little contact, surrounded by unfamiliar faces, and not being able to move freely as I used to, played a toll on my mind. Not knowing when I was going to be able to see them made me sick. However, I was also able to use this limitless amount of idle time to sharpen my knowledge about various things. From credit building and real estate to stocks, the list of things I have learned while incarcerated is long. I told myself I wouldn't let this bump in the road hinder me from achieving the goals I've set forth for myself.

Since being home, I have used my time and resources to maximize my opportunities during my second chance phase. With the vast amounts of programs, companies, and organizations that are openly willing to help people such as myself reacclimate into the real world, it was close to impossible to not put myself in a better position coming home. For me, it started with the Georgetown Pivot Program. Putting me in the rooms with the right people and offering the

proper curriculums, this program aims to introduce me and all of its participants to the principles of business entrepreneurship, providing us with an opportunity to develop our own professional goals with their business classes and teachings. The program even gives out a business certification upon completion.

Negotiation Works was another very impactful program that helped me get adjusted. Understanding that almost all aspects of life require proper negotiation skills makes this program all the more useful. I have learned how to not only negotiate effectively, but beneficially, to produce better results in my dealings with others.

The large number of opportunities with different organizations and programs in D.C. puts us at an advantage over a lot of other states. I want to help raise awareness among people going through this reentry phase so that making it out is possible. With programs like Negotiation Works, the Georgetown Pivot Program, Voices for a Second Chance, and MORCA [Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs], there are people here to help. They get up every day and get paid to help us, so I believe we should all take advantage of these resources because they may not come around again. But like they say: Knowing is half the battle, so it starts off with awareness. Getting the word out and letting people know about these tools that D.C. has to offer is something I plan on doing, and hopefully it can start here.

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