

Excerpt from
The Double You:
The Person You Are and The Person You Want to Be
(Book One of the *Putting the Bars Behind You*
series) by Ron Mendlin and Marc Polonsky

Introduction:
Why “Double-You”?

You have more than one person inside you. There is a person who sits here today, reading this book, and another person that exists in the future, who wears your body and your name, who has your soul, and who is living a free, fulfilled, dignified, and productive life in the world outside of any prison bars.

The Person You Are, Part 1

Who are you?

You are a strong person. You have survived prison. You are strong enough to make a new start, to create your life as you see fit. It takes an enormous amount of strength to restructure your life, to overcome the brutality of prison and all the sad stories that led up to your crime and arrest. But you have the strength to succeed.

You are a courageous person. It takes courage to survive prison. It takes courage to face the world again, to look people in the eye, to take responsibility for yourself, to put one foot down in front of the other, to be determined to have the life that you deserve, despite obstacles, despite temptations, despite bad memories, despite fears. It takes courage to read this book.

You are a good person. Believe it. It doesn't matter what you have done in the past or where you've been. Even if you've caused harm, that is over now. You have something valuable to offer the world.

Mistakes

You have made mistakes in the past. You will make more mistakes in the future, like everyone else. Mistakes are okay. In fact, mistakes are necessary. “He who never makes a mistake never makes anything.”

Mistakes are our best teachers. In fact, the bigger the mistakes you've made in your life, the bigger the lessons you've learned. Of course, you should try to avoid serious mistakes, especially ones that cause harm to others or to yourself. But the most important thing is to learn the habit of bouncing back. When you fall, you must get up again, always, over and over.

The World Wants You to Succeed

Do you think the world is against you? Do you suppose, because you will be an “ex-convict” once you’re on the outside, that nobody will hire you for a job, and that society will be rooting for you to fall apart?

Let’s look at the situation logically.

There are over two million people in prison in the United States today. The cost is unbelievable: hundreds of billions of dollars for prison construction, operation, and maintenance. Therefore, it is completely in society’s interests for you to succeed in the outside world, for you to avoid prison and become a productive, contributing citizen.

There are ways in which the government’s interests can be served by your success. Politicians look good when crime rates go down. Even prison wardens, according to a nationwide survey, are concerned that the prison population is exploding out of control. That’s why the system is willing to shell out money for books like this one, in hopes that it will serve their interests by inspiring you to not have to return to prison. For them, perhaps, it’s all about dollars and cents. That’s fine. For you, it’s life and death.

Your parole officer will be happy to see you succeed. Your p.o. will have hundreds of cases, so you can help out your p.o. by simply not causing problems. The more you get your life together, the easier life is for your parole officer.

Business and industry are open to working with you. Companies usually don’t want to come out and say that they are hiring ex-offenders, but they know that ex-offenders are highly motivated to restructure their lives, and are often more dedicated than the average employee.

If you have someone on the outside who cares about you, you know that this person (or people) will be strongly rooting for you. If you believe in a higher power, then you know that your higher power is on your side.

Most importantly, *you* are on your side. Beneath any bad feelings you have about yourself, you know that you deserve better than prison.

Beliefs

“Most of us build prisons for ourselves, and after we occupy them for a period of time we become accustomed to their walls, and we accept the false premise that we are incarcerated for life.” -- Og Mandino

Prison is harsh. It can make you feel worthless and hopeless. But you have the power to change your thinking, and when you change your thinking, you change your life.

There is an old story of a baby eagle that fell into a chicken yard and was adopted by the chickens. He spent his life pecking and scratching at the ground, until one day a mighty eagle flew over and spotted him. The eagle swooped down and told him, “You are not a chicken; you are an eagle. You belong up in the skies, soaring through the clouds, not down here pecking at the ground.”

You are like that baby eagle. Prison, drugs, neglect, heartbreak, and violence have damaged your self-respect and clouded your view of yourself and the world. Now you must rethink your beliefs.

Beliefs are very powerful. What you believe will have a big impact on what you do, what you say, and how you feel. Watch your thoughts. Notice the voices in your mind. Talk back to them. Question them. Ask yourself *why* you feel the way you do about situations or people. Ask yourself why you behave as you do.

To change beliefs, you first have to know what your beliefs are.

“You must live intensely, each moment, recognizing new feelings and new ideas about you and the world around and perceiving those with the innocence of a child and the vigor of a wise man.” -- Jimmy Santiago Baca, after having served five years at a maximum-security prison in Arizona.