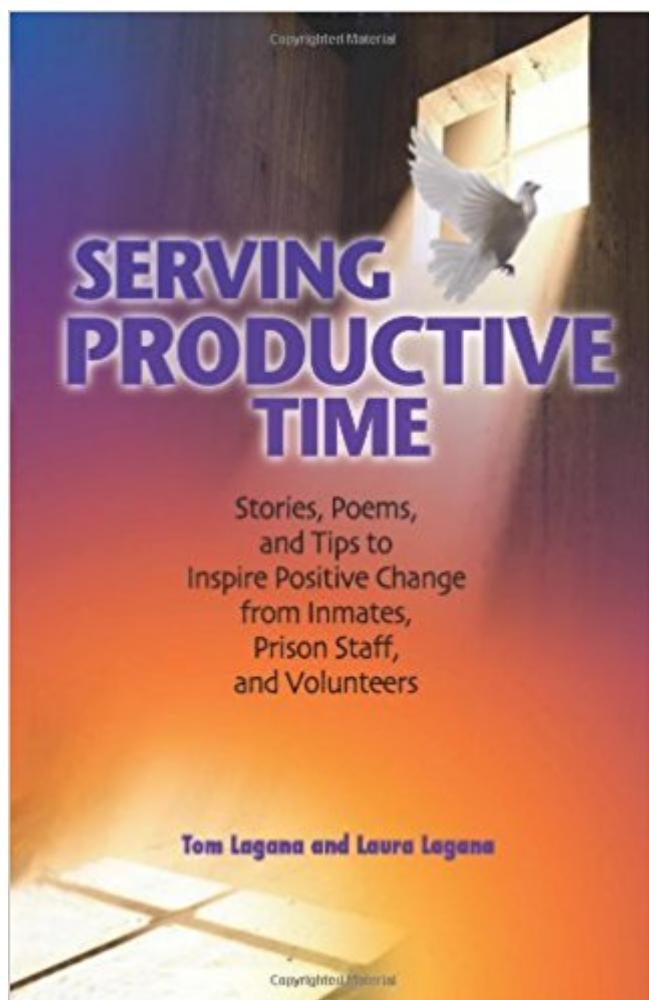


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Serving Productive Time: Stories, Poems, And Tips To Inspire Positive Change From Inmates, Prison Staff, And Volunteers



Synopsis

Are you or have you ever been incarcerated? Do you have a loved one in jail or prison? Do you work or volunteer at a correctional facility? Have you ever been the victim of a crime? Do you understand that we all share the responsibility of helping others? No matter who they are, where they live, or what they have done? If so, you understand that incarceration affects everyone and that only through positive change can people begin to heal and grow. In *Serving Productive Time*, you'll read about extraordinary people who are taking tangible steps to make positive changes in their own lives and who are reaching out to help others do the same. Some stories will help you gain a new perspective on those who are incarcerated. Some will help you understand the need to prepare inmates for release and to support them afterward. Others will help you appreciate your freedom and remind you that we all make mistakes. And still others will reaffirm the fact that, although many of us might be imprisoned in some way (either by a limiting belief, illness, or other situation), we all need a helping hand at some point in our lives to lift us up and show us the path to a new life. *Serving Productive Time* will leave you with a renewed appreciation of the need for all of us to use our time wisely to make ongoing, positive changes in our lives and to bring others along with us in the process—whether we live or work inside or outside the razor wire.

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Customer Reviews

Book Review: *Serving Productive Time* by prisonfellowship.org Incarceration affects everyone. It directly affects every one in 33 residents of the U.S. who has been or is currently incarcerated. It affects the estimated 6 percent of those sent to prison who are actually innocent. It affects the

families—parents, children, spouses—of those incarcerated. And it also creates jobs at correctional facilities and a need for volunteers in prison ministry. But there is one more group of people that incarceration affects—a group that, often times, isn't aware it is involved in the process at all. That group is made up of every person in society not mentioned above. Together, that means all of us. Tom and Laura Lagana had all of us in mind when they compiled short stories, poems, cartoons, and quotes for their book *Serving Productive Time*. As volunteers in prisons, the Laganas share a passion and a vision for reaching out to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families to effect positive change. Their work as professional speakers and authors gives them the opportunity to inspire others in society to latch onto that vision as well. Hidden inside the inspirational stories of their book is a hope that America will come to see prisoners as people who—if given the proper support—have the ability to become contributing members of society upon their release. Often the first step toward bringing about positive change is forming an accurate perspective of the incarcerated and their families. In the first chapter of the book, screenwriter and songwriter Bob Pauly challenges readers to realize that people who have been in prison are all around us—including those we might least expect: 'I'm the man who bags your groceries, the waitress who brings you coffee, and the kid on the bike down the street. I've been to your house before: as a plumber, an electrician, even the installer of your security system.' Pauly invites the reader to ponder further, 'Do you know me? You may not realize it, but . . . yes, you do!' The Laganas effectively select a number of specific, real-life stories—some more convincing and concise than others—to prove to readers that positive change can take place for those who filter through the prison system. These accounts show the necessity of prison staff and volunteers who are dedicated to helping inmates spend their sentences in programs and classes that will benefit them when they return to their communities. *More Like Us Than One Might Think* Contributing author and corrections employee Laurie E. Stolen recollects the start of her career in the jail system in 1998. She describes the chasm separating the perceptions that people have about prisoners, and the reality of who they are. 'The movies I'd seen confirmed my belief that this place was filled with nothing but bad people who had done horrid things; it was jail, the clink, the big house, the slammer, with a bunch of hardened, tattooed, violent criminals locked up for their assorted crimes.' But after Laurie worked at the jail for a few weeks, she began to see things differently. 'The majority of people who fill the space between these walls . . . are fathers, brothers, sons, and daughters. They are neighbors, coworkers, or even our relatives. Often they are people who get caught up with the wrong crowd, succumb to addictive behaviors, or have mental health issues for which they can't afford to seek treatment. They laugh and cry just like you and me.' A

quote by Dave E. Ritzenthaler, managing editor of Prison Living Magazine, highlights Laurie's point that society shouldn't make assumptions about prisoners, but should instead consider giving them a second chance: 'Having hired many ex-felons, I have found them to be some of the most outstanding citizens, competent workers, and excellent employees. So, we need to be careful about making judgments of people until we get to know who they really are.' Serving Productive Time also includes stories from inmates, such as 16-year-old Courtney, who warns others not to make the same mistakes she did. She describes the loneliness and the daily struggle to keep a positive attitude while incarcerated, and advises her peers 'that life is too precious and rewarding to spend it in jail.' Stories like Courtney's caution people to avoid actions that lead to incarceration in the first place, but Serving Productive Time also focuses on encouraging inmates to make choices that will keep them from returning to prison. The accounts of ex-prisoners who spent their sentences furthering their education, growing in their relationship with God, and working to make themselves more successful when released serve as constructive examples for current inmates. Using Prison Time for Good One of these examples is Bill Riggs, who writes about how God transformed his life while he was in prison. After running away from an abusive home, sleeping on the streets, enlisting in the Marines, divorcing twice, and landing himself a spot in prison, Bill came to know Christ through a prison ministry volunteer who showed him what unconditional love was. This volunteer inspired Bill to earn his associate's degree while serving his sentence. Because of the effort he put into changing his life while incarcerated, Bill was able to obtain his electrician's license after his release. He has been married for 17 years, has bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology, as well as a doctorate in education. He now serves as president of Free and Forgiven Ministries— a faith-based education program for ex-offenders. At the end of Bill's account, the Laganas list the contact information for Free and Forgiven Ministries, just as they do for other organizations mentioned in stories throughout the book. The availability of this contact information increases the book's potential to bring about positive change. When readers identify with a particular story, they then have a way to get involved with related organizations. In addition, there are descriptions and contact information for each contributing author listed in the back of the book, making it more interactive than many books. Readers can e-mail the authors to get advice or give encouragement. The Laganas include short exercises at the end of each chapter, specifically to benefit prisoners. These exercises range from questions about the importance of forgiveness to advice on creating an action plan for success. Not only are the stories inside Serving Productive Time inspirational models of success, but they are also ways to discover assistance that will lead to the same success in the reader's life. The Influence of Those Working Inside As Bill Riggs's story

emphasizes, volunteers and staff who interact with inmates can make a great impact on them. Serving Productive Time provides tips for prison staff to help them do just this. Carla Wilson writes, 'As a correctional officer at roll call, I frequently attempt to tell each inmate who they are, before they show me their wristbands. When they know that I have taken a personal interest to learn who they are, it adds to an overall sense of community.' Small things like this create a more constructive atmosphere in which inmates are more likely to thrive. Laura Lagana takes the role of narrator as she tells a story that she heard years ago—âcone that demonstrates how volunteers can help inmates as they search for forgiveness. Kelly's 17-year-old daughter was stabbed to death in a fight over drugs. As a Christian, Kelly knew that God would use the tragedy for a greater purpose, and she was right. Kelly felt called to become a volunteer in the prison system, and while conducting a Prison Fellowship Bible study she met an inmate named Jay, serving a life sentence for murder. Kelly shared with him how she had forgiven the man who killed her daughter. Touched by Kelly's story, Jay decided to ask the forgiveness of his victim's family at his pardon hearing. Kelly, who also attended the hearing, told the family, 'If my daughter's murderer could turn his life around someday, the way Jay has, I would want him to be released.' Although Jay was not forgiven or pardoned that day, Laura writes that 'he is hopeful that one day someone will recognize that today he is not the same young man who devastated so many lives . . . Jay knows that God has forgiven him, and if someday his victim's family chooses to forgive him, that forgiveness will be the greatest gift he will ever receive.' Kelly's difficult choice to forgive her daughter's murderer and help people in his situation provided Jay with an example of God's forgiveness toward him. When selecting contributing authors for Serving Productive Time, the Laganas also included family members of inmates. As they share their often tragic experiences, they remind others with an incarcerated family member that they are not alone in their fear, hurt, and disappointment. But most importantly, sharing these experiences reminds families that they have the ability to encourage positive change in their incarcerated family member. Grace Clark remembers the disappointment she felt in 1979 when her oldest son was taken to jail. Newspaper headlines read, 'Methodist Minister's Son Arrested.' Grace and her husband felt so alone and embarrassed. They didn't know what to do in this situation. 'Do we take out a loan for our son who was arrested when we didn't take out loans to help our other children who needed tuition?' Grace asked the family's bishop. After gleaning advice from him, Grace and her husband were able to turn their decisions over to God. 'Through it all, we finally stopped acting like a minister's family and became what he needed the most: his parents.' Now Grace works with Kairos Outside, a support group for the families of prisoners and ex-prisoners just like her. When Serving Productive Time is read from cover to cover, the stories inside piece

together the big picture of constructive change that all the groups of people affected by incarceration can bring to society. While most of the stories touch on one or two specific groups of these people, there are a few stories that have a little something for everyone in them. All of Us Can Make a Difference 'Tough Questions, Honest Answers' written by SuEllen Friedländer is a devoted prison volunteer for the past 35 years. This is perhaps the most potentially influential story in Serving Productive Time because it demonstrates the teamwork of different types of people in creating a productive result. Twenty-five years ago, SuEllen started a self-help program for Kansas inmates and introduced the program to the community through an essay contest on violence. She asked several inmates to judge the essays. Eventually, the inmates became interested in the source of violence in their lives and its effect on their families, so they looked to professionals who could aid them in learning more. From this group of prisoners sprouted the Inmate Speakers Panel. This is a group of inmates that travels to high schools and juvenile detention centers to speak about violence prevention and the prison experience. 'They address the loss of choices about food, clothing, phone calls, and the shame they have inflicted on their families,' writes SuEllen. She witnessed the healing that took place in the inmates as they shared their life stories repeatedly and used them as tools to deter the next generation from participating in activities that can lead to incarceration. The inmates on this panel are prime examples of what it means to serve productive time. With the help of their families, prison staff, and volunteers, the inmates warn the kids in Kansas communities to avoid violence and the consequences that come with it. SuEllen writes, 'Year after year, incarcerated men and women in Kansas lay their vulnerabilities on the line in hopes they will touch one soul and keep one youth from hearing the sound of the unyielding Iron Gate as it slams shut on the outside world.' To show the statistical productivity of the Inmate Speakers Panel, SuEllen notes that the inmates who participate in the program have an 11 percent recidivism rate, compared with the usual state and federal rate of upwards to 60 percent. What started as an essay contest turned into more than SuEllen could have ever imagined. The Laganas collect a strong variety of stories that represents the firsthand experiences and the unique perspective of every group of people affected by incarceration. Therefore, all readers will be able to find a few quick-to-read stories that they can easily identify with. Whether they are reading to learn new things about the impact of incarceration or to be encouraged during a difficult time in their own lives.

'... inspiring stories and thought-provoking insight by a cross-section of people touched by incarceration, enriching our world on both sides of the razor wire.' — Jack Canfield, Co-creator of the Chicken Soup for the Soul® series

I ordered this book last month for a prisoner in California, and he has already sent me a review of it. This is what he wrote:"I just finished reading 'Serving Productive Time' and the stories are inspiring - some of them are very much like things I could say about my own life and stirred emotions in me (yes, he cried!). At the end of each chapter there is a questionnaire/exercise that you can do, so the reader can interact with the book. The book is well-written and put together, and while it has a lot of Christian stories, there are also secular and other religious viewpoints acknowledged, so even a non-Christian could read the book without taking 'offense'. The book has contact information for most of the people who contributed stories to it, which is good, as even though some are in prison there are a few that I plan on contacting. Each chapter also has contact info for outreach programs (a few that I am also contacting) and short sections on topics such as 'selecting a college or university'. I enjoyed reading this, it was very uplifting and I recommend it for other prisoners that want idea's on how they can serve their time productively. I only wish I had more copies of it to share with other inmates - my copy is already being passed around!"

This book was recommended by my partner in our local jail ministry. It helped to give me a better understanding of prison life and the challenges that inmates face. It had inspiring stories of people who used their time to make positive changes in their lives. It also had interactive sessions at the end of each chapter to help and encourage readers to apply the themes from each chapter to make changes to their lives. It included contact information for various programs mentioned such as kairos, pro-literacy worldwide, etc.

I used to work in a Juvenile Correctional Facility. I bought this for the boys to read. We based assignments off this book. The boys came up with some great ideas of things they could work on while incarcerated and they seemed to enjoy reading the book.

I ordered this for my son who is incarcerated and I downloaded a copy to my Kindle. This book has helped me to understand things/feelings he is going through on the inside of the razor wire and allowing me to understand where I can better encourage him during our visitation time. I would recommend this book to anyone. We all need to understand others better and help where we can.

This is an excellent book. I have a story in the book and I was responsible for editing some of the stories. I have donated this book to several prisons on the West Coast and receive correspondence

every now and then from inmates.

It is difficult to find things that can inspire or motive offenders to be positive during their time away from family and friends. This compilation of stories and poems can be beneficial.

I sent it to my son who's doing time in federal prison and he liked it and is sharing it with his cell mates.

Great information to help those in this situation.

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