

Bringing About True Change

No matter how much experience you have in the marketplace or in ministry, inmates will not trust you initially. You will have to build a relationship of trust with them. They are looking for you to be genuine. Here are some suggestions for building a relationship that will move them toward true change.

Present yourself as an equal with authority.

- Be honest – don't present yourself as someone that has it all together all the time in all areas. That is not realistic, and they know it.
- Treat them with respect, and expect them to treat you with respect.
 - If they are disrespectful, you will need to remind them firmly but lovingly.

Hurt but don't injure.

- Occasionally, you may want/need to point out areas of weakness in an inmate.
- Do it lovingly, though. Do not call them names or apply labels to them.
 - Example: Say – “That may not be the wisest way to handle that problem.” Don't say: “Now, that is stupid” or “You are so stupid.”
- Inmates put on a tough exterior for survival, but they are extremely sensitive.

Take them to the root of the problem.

- Inmates tend to give “cop-out” answers to tough questions.
- You may need to push them to dig deeper.
- Sample question: “In what areas of your life do you need God's help?”
- “Cop-out” answer: “All areas.”
- Push them to be specific (anger, forgiveness, parenting, addiction, etc).
- Until they identify the root of their problems, they cannot expect change.

Establish boundaries.

- If you want to maintain contact with an inmate outside the walls of the jail/prison, guard yourself and your family.
- Think through the consequences of:
 - Giving them your phone number(s)/address(es)
 - Having them visit your home or workplace
 - Giving them money, rides, gifts
- One general rule to keep in mind: remember where you are and with whom you are dealing.

Be willing to get hurt emotionally.

- They will say things that will hurt/disappoint you.
- They will not always appreciate what you are doing.
- You will see some victories, but you will experience a lot of disappointments, too.