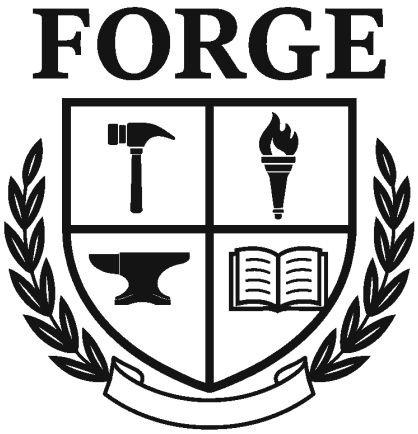


FORGE Your Success

A guide for men coming home

FORGE Successful Reentry
Positive Outreach Development Society

This book belongs to _____

MY ELEVATOR SPEECH

"FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth and Empowerment. I'm home, and I'm building a new life — one where I lead by example, keep my word, and make a positive impact on my family and my community. My goal is simple: to turn time served into time that serves others. My purpose: to show what a second chance looks like — through honest work, real accountability and service — and to help the next man coming home do the same."

Learn it by heart. The class says it together at the start of every class.

FORGE: Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment.

This book goes with the FORGE Your Success class at the POD Reentry Home. It is yours. Write in it, and take it with you when you leave.

Copyright © 2026 Positive Outreach Development Society, Inc. All rights reserved.

Contents

Before you start	Welcome Home	4
Before you start	The FORGE Way	6
Before you start	Your Reentry Plan	8
Your first week	Your First Week Home	11
Chapter 1	Thinking Under Pressure	21
Chapter 2	The Officer and Other Authority	27
Chapter 3	Getting Hired: Your Story in Two Minutes	35
Chapter 4	Keeping the Job	43
Chapter 5	Money on the Outside	51
Chapter 6	Coming Home to Family	59
Chapter 7	Old Friends, Old Places	67
Chapter 8	On Guard	75
Chapter 9	Recovery and the Stages of Change	83
Chapter 10	When It Goes Wrong	92
Chapter 11	Giving Back	100
Chapter 12	Your Next Address	108
At a glance	Your Tools	116
Keep reading	Books for the Road	119
Keep this page	The Numbers You Need	121

Welcome Home

You made it out. That is not a small thing. Now comes the part nobody can do for you: building a life that keeps you out.

This book is for that part. It goes with FORGE Your Success, the weekly class at the POD Reentry Home, but it is written for you to read on your own, at your own pace, in the house and after you leave it. It is yours. Write in it. Fold the corners. Keep it.

What this book is

Every chapter takes one skill and puts it to work on one part of life out here: the job, the parole office, the family table, the paycheck, the old neighborhood, the bad days. If you did FORGE inside, you will know a lot of these skills already. The test now is using them out here, under pressure, when nobody is grading you. If you never did FORGE, every chapter starts from the beginning. You don't need anything but this book and the willingness to try.

Each chapter has the same parts:

- **The big idea:** what the chapter is about and why it matters.
- **The tool:** the skill, step by step.
- **Out here:** examples from life after release.
- **Watch for:** the traps men fall into, and how to get around them.
- **Try it:** questions and worksheet pages to write in.
- **After you leave the house:** how to keep using it on your own.
- **Remember:** the short version, for a quick look before a hard day.

How to use it

In the house. Read the chapter before or after the class on that topic. Bring the book to class. Write your answers in the "Try it" pages and talk them over with your mentor.

On your own. You don't have to read it in order. Having trouble at work? Read chapters 3 and 4. A hard call with your family coming up? Chapter 6. Feeling like you're about to lose it? Chapter 8, and the tools at the back of the book.

After you leave. The back of the book has the tools at a glance, a page for the numbers you'll need, and a list of books other men have used to build their lives. Keep this book where you can find it.

The people on your side

In the house you will have a **mentor**, who meets with you every week about your plan. You will have **peer helpers**, residents a few months ahead of you who have been where you are. And you will have the men in your class, every one of them working on the same thing you are.

Asking for help is not weakness. It is one of the skills in this book.

A promise worth making

At the end of every class you will write one action into your Reentry Plan and say it out loud. Small, specific, doable this week. One step, then the next one. That is how this works. Not one big change. A lot of small ones, kept.

Today's date _____ **My move-in date** _____

The FORGE Way

FORGE stands for **Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth and Empowerment.** Inside, it is a nine-month program that trains men to know themselves, build others, and lead and serve in their dorms. Out here, the same five ideas will carry you through the first months home. Every chapter in this book comes back to them.

1. You are a stakeholder, not a passenger

Inside, FORGE teaches men that the people in a dorm shape what happens there. How conflicts get handled, whether a new man gets tested or helped: it's up to the men. Out here it is the same. You shape what happens in your house, your job, your family and your neighborhood. Nobody is coming to do it for you. And nobody can stop you from doing it.

2. Think, feel, act

Between every situation and every reaction, there is a thought. The thought, not the situation, drives what you feel and what you do. Catch the thought and you can change what happens next. Chapter 1 is all about this, and every chapter after it uses it.

3. Own it, with no "but"

Accountability means owning what you did fully: "I did it. It caused harm. I'm doing it differently now." Not "I did it, but..." Your history explains how you got here. It doesn't excuse what you do next. Chapters 3, 6 and 10 put this to work.

4. Trust is earned

With your family, your employer, your officer and the men in this house: trust comes one honest moment at a time. You can't demand it and you can't rush it. You can earn it, every day, by doing what you said you would do.

5. Service over self

FORGE's goal is "to turn time served into time that serves others." The man who helps the next man is building his own success at the same time. Chapter 11 is about giving back, and why it is part of staying out.

The FORGE elevator speech

Men in FORGE inside learn this by heart in the first weeks:

> *"FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth and Empowerment. We're building a new prison experience — where men lead by example, support one another, and prepare to make a positive impact — both inside these walls and beyond them. Our goal is simple: to turn time served into time that serves others. Our purpose: to build mentors who create a culture of peace, responsibility, and service — modeling the change we want to see in every community."*

Your elevator speech, now that you're home

FORGE Your Success has its own version, for a man who is home. It keeps the same heart, and says it as yours. It is also inside the front cover of this book. The class says it together at the start of every class. Learn it by heart in your first few weeks, so that when someone asks what you're about (an employer, your officer, your family, a man on the corner), you have an answer ready:

> *"FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth and Empowerment. I'm home, and I'm building a new life — one where I lead by example, keep my word, and make a positive impact on my family and my community. My goal is simple: to turn time served into time that serves others. My purpose: to show what a second chance looks like — through honest work, real accountability and service — and to help the next man coming home do the same."*

LEADERSHIP IS NOT GRANTED. IT IS FORGED.

You don't get handed a good life after prison. You build it: one choice, one week, one kept promise at a time.

Your Reentry Plan

Your Reentry Plan is a map of where you are and where you're going, in eight areas of your life. You write the first one at Orientation, with your mentor. You add one step to it at the end of every class. You go over it with your mentor every week. And when you leave the house, it goes with you.

The eight areas

Area	The question it answers
Housing	Where do I live now, where will I live next, and what's my backup?
Identification	Do I have a state ID, Social Security card and birth certificate?
Work	What job do I have, and what's my path to a better one?
Money	Do I have a bank account, a budget and savings? What do I owe, and to whom?
Health and recovery	Medication, mental health care, recovery support, a doctor or clinic.
Family	Which relationships am I rebuilding, and how?
Supervision and legal	Every check-in and condition; any open legal matters.
Service	How am I giving back?

Men in FORGE learn to plan for the first five (housing, identification, work, health and family) in Phase 2. FORGE Your Success adds money, supervision and service, because those are the ones that trip men up out here.

How to write a good step

A step is something you can do, that someone could see you do, by a date.

Not a step	A step
Get my papers together.	Go to the DDS office for a state ID this week; bring my birth certificate and release papers.
Save money.	Put $25 from every paycheck into savings, starting with this Friday's check.
Fix things with my son.	Write my son a letter this week. Don't ask for anything in it.

Not a step	A step
Stay out of trouble.	Leave work by the side door so I don't walk past the corner.

Small is good. A step you actually take beats a big step you never start.

Going over it

Once a week, with your mentor, look at each area and ask three questions:

1. What did I finish?
2. What's my next step, and by when?
3. What's in my way, and who can help?

When you finish a step, check it off and write the next one. When you move out of the house, write a new plan for your new address and keep going.

My Reentry Plan

Area	Where I am now	My next step	By when	Done
Housing				
Identification				
Work				
Money				
Health and recovery				
Family				
Supervision and legal				
Service				

Mentor _____ **We meet on** _____

Your First Week Home

The big idea

You walk in the door with a bag, a folder of release papers and a phone that won't stop buzzing. Your cousin wants to pick you up on Saturday. Your mother wants to know when you're coming by. Somebody from the old block already heard you're out. You have a check-in to make, papers to find, rules to learn, and a head full of noise.

The first days home are the most crowded days of reentry. Everything feels urgent at once. That's normal. It's also risky, because a man who tries to fix everything in the first week usually fixes nothing, and a man who lets it all wash over him misses the one appointment that mattered.

So the goal of your first week is not to fix your life. It's to **land**. By the end of the week you want three things:

- You know the house agreement, and you've made the FORGE commitment.
- Your Reentry Plan has a first step in all eight areas.
- The two urgent things are nailed down: your papers and your first check-in.

That's it. Everything else gets built one step at a time, starting next week.

You won't do this alone. On move-in day, or as close to it as the day allows, you sit down with your mentor for an hour, just the two of you. That hour is called Orientation. It isn't a class. There's no circle and no role-play. It's a conversation about where you are and what comes next. This chapter walks you through that hour and the week after it, so you can see the whole thing on paper and come back to it when your head is full.

The tool: the FORGE commitment

If you did FORGE inside, you know this idea. If you didn't, it's the one this whole house runs on:

You're a stakeholder here, not a passenger.

A passenger sits in the back and lets things happen to him. He waits to see what the house is like, what his officer is like, what his job is like, and then he reacts. A stakeholder knows that what happens in this house, at his job and in his family depends partly on him.

Whether the house is calm or tense, whether the new man gets help or gets ignored: that's shaped by the men who live here. Nobody is coming to do it for you. And nobody can stop you from doing it.

At Orientation, your mentor reads the FORGE commitment with you. Here it is.

THE FORGE COMMITMENT

By living in this house, I accept both the privilege and the responsibility of being part of a community built on discipline, peace and service. I understand that my actions, words and attitude shape the safety, growth and success of this house.

I commit to: lead by example in every circumstance; respect every person as I wish to be respected; keep this house safe, free from weapons, violence and fear; practice Service Over Self by helping the next resident grow; and live by the principles of Opportunity, Growth and Empowerment.

My commitment is to live with integrity, serve with humility, and mentor with purpose. **I will turn time served into time that serves others.**

Read it slowly. Is there anything here you can't commit to? Ask now. If you sign it, it's not a formality. It means something.

"Mentor with purpose" might sound like a lot when you've been home for two days. It's where this goes. The second time you go through the class cycle, you'll be the one helping a man who just walked in.

If you aren't ready to sign today, say so. That's honest, and honest is the point. You and your mentor will come back to it at your next meeting. When you are ready, sign here, with your mentor as your witness.

I make this commitment	My mentor, as witness	Date

What stays private, and what doesn't

You should never be surprised by who finds out what. So here it is, plainly.

Most of what you tell your mentor stays with your mentor. Your mentor writes down what the two of you agree to do, so the next meeting starts where the last one ended. Your mentor does not report your conversations to your officer.

But there are three things nobody in this house can keep secret:

- If you say you intend to hurt yourself or someone else, your mentor will act on it.

- If you tell about abuse of a child or a vulnerable adult, it will be reported, because the law requires it.
- A new crime, someone's safety, or a house-agreement violation can't be kept secret.

The peer helpers can't keep those secret either, so don't put them in that spot.

The class works the same way. What's said in class stays in class, except when someone's safety is at risk. The facilitator does not report class talk to supervision officers.

What the house shares with supervision officers (your mentor will tell you):

The house agreement

Every house has rules. This one has a house agreement: the rules that let a house full of men coming home live together safely. Your mentor reads it with you, one rule at a time, and gives you a copy to keep. Write the rules here too, so they're in the book you carry.

No.	The house rule
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

If a rule isn't clear, ask. If your mentor doesn't know the answer, your mentor will find out by your next meeting. Agreeing to the house agreement is like signing the FORGE commitment. It isn't a formality.

Your three papers

Three papers open almost every other door: a job, a bank account, an apartment.

- **A state ID**
- **A Social Security card**
- **A birth certificate**

Do you have each one? Where is it right now? Not "somewhere at my mother's." Where, exactly?

For each one you don't have, the first step is not getting the document. The first step is finding out what that office needs to see. Ask before you go, and write down what they tell you, so you don't make the trip twice. Your mentor can help you work out which one to go after first.

Where men in this house apply:

- **State ID:** _____
- **Social Security card:** _____
- **Birth certificate:** _____

Every original goes in your folder, and the folder stays in one safe place. Lose a birth certificate and you start over.

Your first check-in

If you're on parole or probation, your first check-in is the most important appointment you have this week. It matters more than the job lead, the family dinner or the cousin with the car.

Read it off your release papers with your mentor:

- **When?** The date and the time.
- **Where?** The address, and the room or the floor.
- **Who?** Your officer's name and phone number.
- **What do you bring?** Papers, pay stubs, anything you were told to have.

Then plan the trip. How will you get there? What time do you have to leave? Plan to arrive **early, not on time.** Buses run late. Lines are long. Early gives you room.

If anything comes up that might make you late, you **call before, not after.** Call before the appointment, not the day after you missed it.

If you don't know your conditions, or you lost your release papers, don't guess. Your mentor can help you call and find out, and you write down exactly what you're told.

Any legal question goes to POD Society legal services, not to your mentor and not to the other men in the house. The number is on the contacts page at the back of this book. Chapter 2 is all about working with your officer.

If you're not on supervision, use this part of the hour to write down any open legal matters you have, like a court date, a fine, or a case that isn't closed. They go under Supervision and legal in your Reentry Plan, and any questions about them go to legal services.

Your mentor, your anchor and the class

Your mentor meets with you every week while you live here. You look at your plan together: what's working, what isn't, what's next. When something goes wrong, your mentor is the first person you call.

Your anchor is a peer helper: a man a few months ahead of you in the house, on his second time through the class. He sits next to you at your first class and helps with anything that doesn't make sense. At the end of Orientation he comes in to meet you and tells you one thing about his own first weeks here: what helped, and what he wishes he'd known. Listen to that. He was in your chair not long ago.

The class is FORGE Your Success. It meets once a week for 90 minutes. It runs as a cycle of twelve classes, and you can start at any one of them, because every class stands on its own. The first time through, you learn the tools and use them on your plan. The second time through, you help teach them.

Every class has the same shape:

- **Opening circle.** One win since last class, and one challenge. Small is fine.
- **Reentry Plan check.** In pairs, often with a peer helper: one step you finished, one step that's next.
- **Teach.** One FORGE tool, explained from the beginning.
- **Practice.** A role-play or an exercise, so you try the tool before you need it.
- **Commit and close.** You write one action for the week into your plan and say it out loud.

No one is forced to share. Passing is allowed. And what you commit to in that room, you report on next class.

If you did FORGE inside, tell your mentor how far you got. Your FORGE work counts here. The facilitator will ask you to share how you used the tools.

Your first week on paper

Before the hour ends, you and your mentor put your first week on paper, day by day, starting from the day you moved in. In this order:

1. Your check-in.
2. The trips for your papers.
3. Your next meeting with your mentor.
4. Your first class.
5. Anything the house needs from you.

Then stop. Leave room. A first week packed full is a first week that falls apart. Your family will still want to see you next week. The job search goes better with an ID in your pocket.

The last thing your mentor will ask you is this: of everything on that page, what's the one thing you'll do first? Write it at the top.

Out here

Here are four first weeks. Read each one and ask yourself which man you would be.

The man who's flooded. A man moves in after a long ride. He hasn't slept. Halfway through Orientation he can't follow anymore. His mentor is talking about eight areas, and he can't remember the first one. He could nod and say, "I'm good." Instead he says, "I can't take in any more right now." His mentor cuts it to the essentials: the house agreement, where his papers are, the date of his first check-in, and the mentor's name. They do the rest at the next meeting. He didn't fail the first hour. He told the truth about it, and that was his first honest moment in this house.

"I've got it handled." A man doesn't want to look like he needs help. His mentor doesn't argue. The mentor just asks, "Good. When's your check-in? Where's your birth certificate right now?" He thinks about it. The check-in is in two days, and he isn't sure of the address. The birth certificate is "probably" at his aunt's. Nobody had to admit anything. The specifics showed what was handled and what wasn't. Now he has two steps with dates on them.

The five days of pills. A man has five days of medication with him. It feels like plenty. His mentor writes a date next to it on the plan: the day it runs out. His step for this week is a call to a clinic. Five days goes fast in a crowded week. Urgent things like this hide inside ordinary answers. Say them out loud, and put a date on them.

The ride on Saturday. On Day 2, an old friend calls. He has a car, and he wants to take you out Saturday to "see everybody." Your check-in is Monday morning. Thought: "I've been gone a long time. I deserve this." Feeling: excited, restless. Action: you go, and you're out late the weekend before the most important appointment of your week. Or: "My first week is on paper, and this isn't on it. I'll call him back after my check-in." Feeling: a little let down, but steady. The second thought doesn't end the friendship. It keeps your first week standing. (Chapter 7 is about old friends and old places.)

Watch for

"More rules. I just got done with rules." Fair. Here's the difference. Inside, rules were done to you. Here, the house agreement is what lets a house full of men coming home live together safely, and you're one of the men who make it work. That's what a stakeholder is.

"This is just one more institution." To a man coming out of prison, a house with rules and staff can look like that. You don't have to trust it on the first day. Trust is earned, one honest moment at a time, and that includes the house earning yours.

"I don't have any of my papers." That's common, and it's exactly what the plan is for. Your first step isn't getting the documents. It's finding out what each office needs to see. Write that down as the step.

"I did FORGE inside. I know all this." Good. Then you know a commitment is only as good as the next choice. Your FORGE work counts here. And the second time through the cycle, you'll be a peer helper, welcoming a new man into the chair you're sitting in now.

"I don't know my conditions," or "I lost my release papers." Don't guess, and don't let anyone guess for you. Find out with your mentor as soon as you can, and write down exactly what you're told.

"I'm fine." If you're not, say so. Most men arrive tired, wired, or both. And if you ever have thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else, tell your mentor, or use the crisis number on the contacts page at the back of this book. The plan can wait. You can't.

After you leave the house

Some day you'll move out, into your next place. The first week there is a landing too. Do it the same way.

- **Land before you build.** In the first days at a new address, nail down the urgent things first: any appointment with your officer, your papers in a safe place, how you'll get to work.

- **Keep your papers together.** One folder, one safe place. Keep copies apart from the originals.
- **Put the week on paper.** At the start of every week, write down the appointments that matter. Put them in order. Leave room.
- **Keep the commitment.** You signed it in this house, but it was never only about the house. Lead by example. Respect every person. Turn time served into time that serves others. That goes wherever you go.
- **Know your people.** Keep your mentor's number, and the number of a man from the house. The first week anywhere is easier with someone to call.

Remember

- The goal of the first week is to land, not to fix everything.
- You're a stakeholder, not a passenger.
- Two urgent things first: your papers and your first check-in.
- Early, not on time. Call before, not after.
- Know what stays private and what doesn't, so you're never surprised.

Try it

1. My papers. For each one you don't have, the next step is finding out what that office needs to see.

Document	Have it?	Where it is now, or my next step	By when
State ID			
Social Security card			
Birth certificate			

2. My first check-in (if I'm on parole or probation), **and my people:**

Date and time _____ **Place** _____

Officer _____ **Officer's phone** _____

What to bring _____ **I leave at** _____

My mentor _____ **Phone** _____ **We meet** _____

My anchor _____ **My first class** _____ **The class meets** _____

3. My first week, starting the day I moved in. Check-in first. Leave room.

Day	What	Where	Time
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

The one thing I'll do first:

_____

4. My first week. Check each one off when it's done.

- ☐ I read the house agreement with my mentor, and I have my own copy.
- ☐ I know what stays private, what doesn't, and what the house shares with my officer.
- ☐ I made the FORGE commitment, or I told my mentor I'm not ready yet.
- ☐ My Reentry Plan has a next step in all eight areas.
- ☐ I know which of my three papers I have, and my next step for each one I don't.
- ☐ My papers are in my folder, and my folder is in one safe place.
- ☐ I know the date, time and place of my first check-in, and what to bring.
- ☐ I made my first check-in, early.
- ☐ I filled in the contacts page at the back of this book.
- ☐ I met my anchor.
- ☐ I went to my first class.
- ☐ I met with my mentor again and set our next meeting.

5. How did the first week go? One thing that went well, and one thing that was hard:

Went well	Was hard

6. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

CHAPTER 1

Thinking Under Pressure

The big idea

It's your second week on a new job. You've been on time every day. At the end of a long Friday, your supervisor walks up in front of two other workers and says, "Who taught you to stack it like that? This is why I don't like hiring people out of programs. Fix it, and you're staying late."

What happens next has nothing to do with the boxes. It depends on one thing: the thought that goes through your head in the next two seconds.

That's the big idea of this chapter, and of this whole book. **Your thinking drives your behavior.** Not the situation. Not the other person. Your thinking. If you did FORGE inside, you learned this in the first weeks. Out here, it matters more than ever, because the pressure is new, the stakes are real, and nobody is going to freeze the scene and coach you through it.

The tool: Think, Feel, Act

Every reaction you have follows the same chain:

SITUATION → THOUGHT → FEELING → ACTION → CONSEQUENCE

Something happens (the situation). You have a thought about it, usually fast, usually without noticing. That thought creates a feeling. The feeling drives an action. The action has a consequence. Every time.

Here's the supervisor again, two ways.

Thought A: "He's disrespecting me in front of everybody. He thinks I'm nothing because I've been locked up."
Feeling: Anger. Shame. Your face gets hot.
Action: You throw down your gloves. "Do it yourself."
Consequence: You're fired by the end of the shift. Maybe a call to your officer about losing the job.

Thought B: "He's having a bad day, or he talks to everybody like that. I need this check."
Feeling: Irritated, but steady.
Action: "Got it." You restack the boxes.
Consequence: You keep the job. Next payday, you get paid.

Same supervisor. Same words. The only thing that changed was the thought.

Notice something about Thought B. It isn't "my supervisor is a great guy." You don't have to like what he said. You don't have to agree with it. You just have to pick the thought that keeps your plan alive. You can decide later, on your own terms, whether this is a job you want to keep. Losing it in a moment of anger takes that choice away from you.

> **THE FIVE LINKS**
>
> **Situation:** what happened, just the facts. **Thought:** what went through your mind.
> **Feeling:** the emotion, named.
> **Action:** what you did. **Consequence:** what happened because of it.

Thoughts that feel like facts

The thoughts that do the most damage out here don't feel like thoughts. They feel like facts.

- "Nobody's going to hire me."
- "My officer wants me back inside."
- "My family will never forgive me."
- "Everybody is looking at me."

When a thought feels like a fact, you stop questioning it. And once you stop questioning it, it starts making your decisions for you. The man who believes "nobody's going to hire me" stops applying after the second "no." The man who believes "my officer wants me back inside" walks into every check-in angry, and it shows.

Two questions break that open:

1. **Is this a fact, or is it a thought?**
2. **What's the evidence for it, and what's the evidence against it?**

"Nobody's going to hire me." Is that a fact? You've had two "no"s. That's evidence. But there are employers who hire people with records, there are job centers that help, and there's a man in this house who got hired last month. That's evidence too. The fact is: it's hard. The thought "nobody" is the part that will stop you.

STOP: when the feeling is already coming

Sometimes there's no time to think it all through. The supervisor said it, your face is hot, and you can feel the words coming. For that moment, FORGE teaches **STOP**:

- **S — Stop.** Don't say or do anything yet. Take one breath.
- **T — Think.** What's the thought in my head right now? Is it a fact?
- **O — Options.** What are two or three things I could do?
- **P — Plan.** Pick the one that protects my plan, and do that.

It takes a few seconds. You won't get it right every time. Nobody does. The goal for your first week is simple: catch it once.

Out here

Here are three more moments where the thought decides the outcome. Read each one and ask yourself which thought you would have had.

The third "no." You've applied at three places this week. The third one calls back: "We went with someone else." Thought: "It's always going to be like this. Why bother?" Feeling: hopeless. Action: you don't apply anywhere the next week. Or: "Three down. My mentor said it takes a lot of applications. Who's next on my list?" Feeling: tired, but still moving. Action: two more applications.

The changed check-in. Your officer calls and moves your check-in to the middle of your work shift. Thought: "He's setting me up to fail." Feeling: angry, suspicious. Action: you argue on the phone. Or: "That's a problem. I need to solve it." Feeling: stressed. Action: you ask, politely, whether there's another time, and if there isn't, you talk to your supervisor about leaving early.

The family dinner. Your sister brings up something you did before you went in, in front of everyone. Thought: "She wants everybody to see me as a criminal." Feeling: shame, anger. Action: you say something you can't take back. Or: "She's still hurt. I can't fix that tonight." Feeling: hurt, but calm. Action: "You're right that I hurt you. I'd like to talk about it, just us, another time."

Watch for

"It's not my thinking. The situation really is unfair." Sometimes it is. The supervisor really was out of line. The cycle doesn't say the situation is fine. It says your next move comes from your thought, not from the situation. You can't control the supervisor. You can control the thought you act on.

"I don't have time to think when it's happening." That's why you practice. STOP gets faster every time you use it, like any skill. Practice on the small things (the slow line at the store, the bus that's late) so it's ready for the big ones.

"I already know this." If you did FORGE inside, you might know the chain by heart. Knowing it and using it on a hard Friday afternoon are different things. The test now is using it out here.

"Writing isn't my thing." A thinking report can be a few words in each box. Or say it out loud to your mentor. The point is honesty, not spelling.

After you leave the house

The chain doesn't stop working when you move out. Keep doing this:

- **Once a week, write one thinking report.** Pick the moment that bothered you most. Five boxes, five minutes.
- **Before a hard conversation, plan your thought.** A job interview, a meeting with your officer, a talk with your family: decide ahead of time what thought you'll hold onto if it goes badly.
- **When you catch yourself saying "always," "never," "nobody" or "everybody,"** stop. That's usually a thought dressed up as a fact.
- **Call someone.** Your old mentor, a man from the house, someone in your support network. Saying the thought out loud to another person takes away half its power.

Remember

- Between every situation and every reaction, there is a thought.
- The thoughts that hurt you most feel like facts. Ask: fact or thought? What's the evidence?
- When it's already coming up: Stop, Think, Options, Plan.
- You don't have to like the situation. Pick the thought that keeps your plan alive.

Try it

1. A thought that feels like a fact for me right now:

2. The evidence for it, and against it:

Evidence for	Evidence against

3. A thinking report. Pick a real moment since you came home when you had a strong reaction. Write what actually went through your mind, not what you think you should have thought.

Situation	Thought	Feeling	Action	Consequence

A different thought (one that would have protected your plan), and where it would have led:

Different thought	Feeling	Action	Consequence

4. Plan your thought. What's a hard moment coming up this week? What thought will you hold onto if it goes badly?

The moment	The thought I'll use

5. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

CHAPTER 2

The Officer and Other Authority

The big idea

You started a new job three weeks ago, 8 to 4:30. You took the afternoon off for your check-in and got there twenty minutes early with your folder. You've been waiting an hour. Finally your officer calls you in, doesn't look up, and says: "I don't have your payment from last month. And starting next time, you report at 10 in the morning. Anything else?"

You paid. The receipt is in your folder. And 10 in the morning is the middle of your shift.

Your heart picks up. Your jaw gets tight. A sentence is already forming: "You lost it, not me." What you do in the next ten seconds can shape the rest of your supervision.

Right now, the person with the most power over your freedom is probably your supervision officer. That officer can change a check-in time, ask for papers on short notice, or be having a bad day at the exact moment you're having one too. Old habits with authority come back fast in that room. Some men get hot and argue. Some go silent and don't ask the question they need answered. Some stop going, because every visit feels like a trap. All three can cost a man his freedom.

This chapter gives you a better way. It comes from FORGE mentors inside, who learn one position on staff. It travels:

Respect the role, even when you disagree with the person.

The tool: respect the role

Your officer's role is real. Your officer has authority over your supervision. You don't have to like your officer. You don't have to agree with every call your officer makes. But arguing with the role costs you, every time.

Some officers will be on your side. Some won't care either way. Some will be skeptical: they've seen a lot of people say they've changed. All three are real, and you have to be able to work with all three. If yours is skeptical, don't take it personally, and don't try to talk your officer out of it. You can't. What you can do is let your record speak.

Respecting the role doesn't mean disappearing. You can be respectful and still have a presence. A man who won't ask his officer a question he needs answered is at risk too.

Inside, FORGE mentors build trust with staff by being **low-maintenance.** They show up where they're supposed to be. They don't create problems. When they speak, they keep it short, clear and respectful. Out here, that looks like four habits.

Four habits that protect your plan

1. Know your conditions exactly. Not roughly. Exactly. They're on your papers. If one isn't clear to you, ask your officer what it means. Write the answer down in front of your officer, and read it back: "So I report on the 15th at 2, with two pay stubs. Is that right?" If it's a legal question, it goes to POD Society legal services.

2. Be early. Early is on time. On time is late. Plan the bus, the ride, the traffic. Leave room for the line.

3. Keep a record. Get a pocket folder and use it for supervision only. In it, keep:

- a record sheet: every appointment, the date, who you saw, what was said, and what you were told to do next;
- a copy of your conditions;
- the receipt for every payment;
- a copy of every paper you hand in or get handed.

A line on your record sheet can be short: "March 14. Saw my officer. Bring two pay stubs next time. Next check-in April 2 at 2:00." That's enough.

A record isn't about catching anybody. It's so you don't have to remember. When there's a mix-up, a clear record helps you and your officer both.

4. Call before, not after. If you're going to be late or miss an appointment, you call before it, not the day after. If nobody answers, leave a message with five things.

> **THE CALL BEFORE**
>
> Your **name.** The **appointment** (the day and time). **What happened,** in one sentence. **When you can come.** Your **phone number.** Then write down the time you called.

It can sound like this: "This is [your name]. I have a check-in at 2 today. The bus broke down, and I won't make it on time. I can be there by 3:30, or any time tomorrow. My number is [your number]." Don't explain for a minute. One sentence on what happened is enough. Say the time slowly.

These four habits work with anybody who holds power over part of your plan: a case manager, a court clerk, a landlord, house staff, a boss.

Composure at the counter

Now the hard part. You're at the counter. The officer says something that feels wrong. What happens in your body?

FORGE maps it with the **escalation curve.** It has five stages:

1. **Calm.** You're thinking clearly.
2. **Agitated.** Your heart picks up, your jaw gets tight, your thinking starts to narrow. You still have options.
3. **Flooded.** Tunnel vision. Everything feels urgent. This is where most bad decisions get made.
4. **Crisis.** Things get said that can't be taken back.
5. **Recovery.** You come back down. That's usually when the regret shows up.

The further up the curve you go, the harder it is to come back down. So you step in at **Stage 2,** while you still have options. Learn your own Stage 2 signs. For one man it's a hot face. For another it's a tight jaw, fists, a fast heartbeat, or going very quiet. Know yours, so you can catch it early. The tool is the one from Chapter 1, **STOP:**

- **S — Stop.** Don't say anything yet. Take one breath.
- **T — Think.** What's the thought in my head right now? Is it a fact?
- **O — Options.** What are two or three things I could do?
- **P — Plan.** Pick the one that protects my plan, and do that.

When something seems unfair, you have four moves.

> **WHEN SOMETHING SEEMS UNFAIR**
>
> **Stay composed. Write it down. Ask legal services. Never argue at the counter.**

You won't win an argument at the counter, and you shouldn't try. Arguing there is a Stage 3 decision. Writing it down and taking it to legal services is a Stage 1 decision, and you can make it after you've left the building.

Out here

The missing payment. Go back to the check-in at the start of this chapter. Here's how it goes with STOP. You notice your jaw is tight. That's Stage 2. One breath. The thought: "They're trying to violate me." Is that a fact? What you know for a fact is that the payment isn't in their system, and you have the receipt. Options: argue, say nothing, or show the

receipt. Plan: “I have the receipt here. Can I show you?” No edge in your voice. Then the time: “I start work at 8. Is there another time that works, or who should I talk to about it?” Whatever is decided, you write it down and read it back. If 10 in the morning is the only time, that’s a problem to solve with your supervisor at work, not a fight to have at the counter. Notice that staying composed didn’t mean staying silent. You asked your question. You showed your receipt.

The bus that doesn’t come. Your check-in is at 2. At 1:15 you’re at the stop, and the bus hasn’t come. Thought: “If I’m late, I’m done. Maybe I just won’t go, and I’ll deal with it later.” That’s the most dangerous choice you have. Instead, call now. Name, the appointment, what happened, when you can come, your number. Write down the time you called. Then get there as soon as you can. A late arrival after a call before is a very different story from a missed appointment and an excuse after.

The condition you’re not sure of. Say your papers list a curfew, and you’ve heard different things about what happens when a late shift runs past it. Thought: “I’ll figure it out.” Guessing is how a man who’s doing everything right still ends up in trouble. At your next check-in: “I want to be sure I have this right. If my shift ends at 11, what time do I need to be at the house?” Write the answer down in front of your officer and read it back. If the question is a legal one (“Can they do that?”), it goes to legal services, not to the men in the house.

The skeptical officer. Say your officer flips through your file and says, “Everybody tells me they’ve changed. I’ll believe it when I see it.” Thought: “Nothing I do will ever be enough for this one.” Feeling: tired, angry. Action: you stop trying. You show up on time instead of early, and you keep it short and cold. Or: “Fair enough. Then my record will show it.” Feeling: stung, but steady. Action: “I understand. I’ll be here early every time, and my paperwork will be straight.” Then you do it, month after month. A skeptical officer doesn’t come around because of a speech. If one comes around, it’s because of what they watched you do. And if yours never does, your record still protects you.

Other people with power. Your case manager says your paperwork never came in. A court clerk says a fine wasn’t paid. The same habits work. You have a copy of the paperwork and the date you handed it in. You have the receipt. You stay composed, you show what you have, and you ask what happens next. Then you write that down too.

Watch for

"Why am I always the one who has to be the bigger person?" Because you're the one who's changed. And because right now, your officer has more power in this situation than you do. The power you do have is composure, and a record that shows up early every time. Use it.

"My officer is out to get me." Go back to Chapter 1. Is that a fact or a thought? What's the evidence for it, and against it? And even if it's true, the moves are the same: be early, keep the record, stay composed. That's what protects you.

"I'll just keep my mouth shut." Respecting the role doesn't mean saying nothing. If you need to know something, ask. Keep it short, clear and respectful. A question you didn't ask can hurt you more than one you did.

"Should I tell my officer about _____?" That's a real question, and this book can't answer the legal part. Take it to your mentor and to legal services this week. What this book can tell you: don't lie to your officer, and don't try to hide things. Don't let anyone in the house tell you to.

"Writing everything down feels paranoid." It isn't about catching anybody. It's so you don't have to carry it all in your head. When there's a mix-up, the man with the record is the man who can clear it up.

"Can they do that?" Maybe that's the question in your head after a check-in. The men in the house will have opinions. Don't take legal answers from them, and don't give any. Write the question down and take it to legal services. The number is on the contacts page at the back of this book.

After you leave the house

- **Keep the folder.** As long as you're on supervision, every appointment, payment and paper goes in it.
- **Stay early.** The habit that gets you through check-ins will get you through a job, a lease and a court date.
- **Call before, not after,** with anyone who's expecting you: your officer, your boss, your landlord.
- **Plan your thought before a hard meeting.** Before a check-in you're worried about, decide ahead of time what thought you'll hold onto if it goes badly.
- **If your officer changes, start over with the habits.** A new officer doesn't know your record yet. Let it speak again.

- **Legal questions still go to legal services.** Keep that number where you can find it.

Remember

- Respect the role, even when you disagree with the person.
- Know your conditions exactly. Be early. Keep a record. Call before, not after.
- Step in at Stage 2, with STOP.
- When something seems unfair: stay composed, write it down, ask legal services, never argue at the counter.
- Composure isn't silence. You can be respectful and still have a presence.

Try it

1. My conditions, written exactly. First write them the way you remember them. Then check what you wrote against your papers. Circle anything you got wrong or aren't sure of. That's a question for your officer or for legal services. If you're not on supervision, write any other duty you have to someone in authority: a court date, a caseworker, a fine.

My condition	What it means, exactly	Sure?

2. My supervision record. Start it here, and keep it going in your folder.

Date	Who I saw, or what I paid	What I was told to do next	Copy or receipt?

3. My call before. Write it now, so it's ready when you need it. Then say it out loud once, like it's real.

Who I call _____ **Their number** _____

What I'll say (my name, the appointment, what happened, when I can come, my number):

_____

_____

_____

4. A moment at the counter. Think of a time with someone in authority (an officer, a boss, a clerk, a guard) when you went up the curve.

What happened	How high I went (1 to 5)	What I did	What STOP would have changed

5. My questions for legal services. Write them here, instead of asking the men in the house.

_____

_____

_____

6. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

_____

_____

CHAPTER 3

Getting Hired: Your Story in Two Minutes

The big idea

You're in an interview for a job on a warehouse floor. It has gone well for ten minutes. You've talked about showing up on time and working hard, and the manager is nodding. Then the manager looks down at your application and says: "I see you checked the box about a conviction. Tell me about that."

Sooner or later, every man with a record has this moment: on an application, in an interview, after a background check. There are two common ways to get it wrong.

Some men shrink it. "It was just a misunderstanding." "I was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Some men tell too much. Twenty minutes on the case, the lawyer, the judge and the witness who lied.

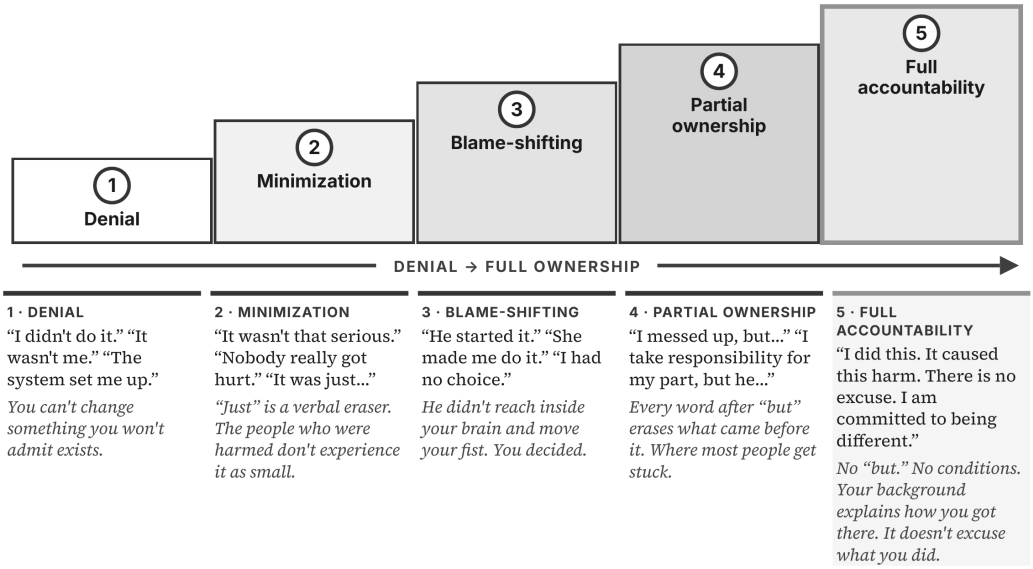
Both cost the job. The person across the desk doesn't need the case. They need to know three things. Do you own it? Has something changed? Can you do this job?

This chapter gives you two FORGE tools for that moment. The **accountability spectrum** shows you how your answer sounds to the person across the desk. And the **elevator speech,** which every man in FORGE learns in the first weeks, becomes your own story, told in two minutes.

Your record is part of your story. It isn't the whole story.

The tool: the accountability spectrum

When somebody asks about your record, what you say next lands somewhere on a line. FORGE calls it the accountability spectrum. It has five levels.



The accountability spectrum, from FORGE Week 7.

1. Denial. "I didn't do it. I shouldn't have been convicted."

2. Minimization. "It was just a little thing." Listen for the word "just." It's an eraser. It makes the harm smaller than it was.

3. Blame-shifting. "I was hanging with the wrong people." "If they hadn't started it..."

4. Partial ownership. "I made a mistake, but the sentence was way too long." Every word after "but" erases what came before it. This is where a lot of men get stuck, because it feels like enough.

5. Full accountability. "I made a choice that hurt people. There's no excuse for it. I served my time, and I spent it changing."

Full accountability has no "but." It doesn't mean the system was fair. It doesn't mean your circumstances didn't matter. It means you own your choices. Your history explains how you got here. It doesn't excuse what you did.

Here's the part that's easy to miss: **full accountability is not full disclosure.** Owning it doesn't mean telling every detail. You don't owe an employer the whole case. You owe them the truth, told briefly and owned.

FORGE draws one more line. **Guilt says, "I did something bad." Shame says, "I am bad."** Guilt can be owned and changed. Shame just hides. When you hear yourself think, "Who'd hire someone like me?", that's shame talking. Come back to what you did, and to what has changed since.

Your story in two minutes

If you did FORGE inside, the first thing you learned was the elevator speech: what FORGE is, in thirty seconds. Why? Because people would ask. Some were curious. Some were mocking. Either way, you had to own it.

Same idea now. This time the story is yours, and the person asking decides whether you get the job. Two minutes, three parts.

YOUR STORY IN TWO MINUTES

1. What happened. One or two sentences. Owned. No "just," no "but," no case details.

2. What changed, with evidence. Things someone could check.

3. What you offer now. What you can do, why you'll be reliable, and why this job.

Then stop talking. Let them ask.

Part 1: what happened. Keep it short. One or two sentences, in your own words, with no eraser in them. You don't have to give the details unless you're asked.

Part 2: what changed, with evidence. "I've changed" is a claim. Anybody can say it. Evidence makes it believable. Evidence is anything someone could check:

- FORGE, or another program you finished inside
- a GED or a certificate
- work you did inside
- living in this house, every check-in made, every class attended
- a mentor who will speak for you

You have more of this than you think, and every week in this house adds to it.

Part 3: what you offer now. What can you do? Why will you be reliable? Why this job? Maybe you ran a forklift, or cooked for a whole dorm, or kept the books for a program. Maybe you've never missed a shift at anything. End here, on what you bring, not on the past.

Then **stop talking.** The silence will feel long. Let it. The manager will ask what they need to know.

It doesn't have to fill two minutes. Shorter is fine. When you practice, check three things. Is it clear? Is it confident? Is it believable? Slow down. Look the person in the eye. Say it like you mean it, because you do.

Finding second-chance employers

Some employers hire people with records, and some say so openly. Three places to find them:

- **The job center:** _____
- **POD Society's employment contacts:** _____
- **The men in this house.** Ask who has been hired since he got home, and where.

Some employers use two federal programs when they hire people with records: the **Work Opportunity Tax Credit** and the **Federal Bonding Program.** You don't have to be an expert on them. Ask a job center about both. A job center can explain them to you, and to an employer.

If you're not sure what's on your record, or what you have to say about it, that's a question for POD Society legal services, not for this book. The number is on the contacts page at the back of this book. If you have an open case or an appeal, talk to legal services before you settle on your words.

Out here

Same man, two answers. Say a man in the house is asked about his record. His first try: "It was just a fight. The other guy started it, and the sentence was way too long for what happened." Count the erasers. "Just" is minimization. "The other guy started it" is blame-shifting. "Way too long" takes back whatever was left. The manager hears a man who doesn't own it. His second try: "Nine years ago I hurt someone in a fight. That was my choice, and there's no excuse for it. I served my time." Two sentences. Owned. Then he moves on to what changed.

Too much. Another man gets the same question. He starts with the night it happened. Then the lawyer who never called him back. Then the witness who changed her story. Eight minutes later, the manager is looking at the clock. Nothing he said was a lie. But the manager never heard the three things he needed: Do you own it? Has something changed? Can you do this job? The fix is the same as for the first man: two sentences on what happened, then the evidence, then what he offers. The rest of the story is real. It's just not for this desk.

The whole two minutes. Here's how that same man's full story might sound:

> *"Nine years ago I hurt someone in a fight. That was my choice, and there's no excuse for it. I served my time, and I spent it changing. Inside, I finished FORGE, a nine-month program where I learned to handle conflict without violence and trained to mentor other men. I got my*

> *GED. I worked in the kitchen for three years. Since I got out, I've lived in a reentry home with a mentor I meet every week, and I haven't missed an appointment. I'm good with my hands, I show up early, and I'm looking for a place where I can stay and grow. My mentor will speak for me if you'd like to call."*

Notice what's not in it: the case, the lawyer, the judge, the sentence. Notice how it ends: on what he offers, and on someone the manager can call.

"How do I know it won't happen again?" After your story, the manager may ask this. It isn't an attack. It's a fair question, and your evidence is the answer. "I understand why you'd ask. Here's what I've done since: the program, the GED, every check-in made. My mentor can tell you the rest." Then stop.

The harder manager. Say the manager adds, "We hired someone from a program last year, and it didn't work out." Thought: "Here we go. He's already decided." Feeling: hot, insulted. Action: "So you're judging me by somebody else?" That's the heat talking, and the interview is over. Or: "He's been burned before. That's a fair worry." Feeling: nervous, but steady. Action: "I understand. I can't speak for him. I can tell you what I've done, and you can check it." Then your evidence, and stop.

Watch for

"It's none of their business." Whether and when it comes up is a question for legal services, and it can be different for each job. When it does come up, you want to be the one who tells it, and tells it well. And don't lie about it, on an application or in an interview. Walk it forward: the background check comes back. What does the manager think now? A lie that's found later costs more than the truth told well.

"My case was unfair." That may be true, and legal services is the place to work on it. In an interview, though, it sounds like denial, and the person across the desk stops listening. Your history explains how you got here. It doesn't excuse what you did, and it doesn't get you the job.

"I don't have any evidence that I've changed." Yes, you do. Look at the list again: a program, a certificate, work you did inside, this house, every check-in, every class, a mentor who'll speak for you. Every week adds to it.

"I freeze in interviews." That's why you practice. The first time someone hears your story should not be the interview. Say it to your mentor, to your anchor, to the mirror, until you can say it without the page.

"If I explain the whole thing, they'll understand." They won't have time to, and they don't need to. A man who has never told his story briefly will tell all of it. Pull yourself back: two sentences. The person across the desk doesn't need the case. They need to know you own it.

"I can't say it out loud." Some charges are hard to say in a room. Practice with "[my charge]" in place of the words. Then practice the full version with your mentor, where it's private.

Saying the right words without meaning them. Some men learned the right words inside and say them flat. Employers hear that. If the words are right, ask yourself: do I mean them? If you do, say them that way.

After you leave the house

- **Update your story.** Your evidence grows: a job kept, a raise, a good reference, a year without a missed appointment. Put the newest, strongest evidence in part two.
- **Ask for references while you're doing well.** Your mentor, a supervisor who has seen your work, a teacher from a class. Ask before you need them.
- **Look for the next job while you have this one.** Your work record out here is now part of your evidence.
- **Say it out loud before every interview.** Two minutes, three parts, then stop.
- **Help the next man.** Sit with a newer man and listen to his two minutes. Listen for "just" and "but." That's service, and it keeps your own story sharp.

Remember

- Your record is part of your story. It isn't the whole story.
- Listen for "just" and "but." They erase what you said.
- Full accountability is not full disclosure.
- Two minutes: what happened, owned; what changed, with evidence; what you offer now. Then stop.
- Don't lie about your record. Questions about what you have to say go to legal services.

Try it

1. Hear the spectrum. Here are four answers to "Tell me about your conviction." Write where each one sits on the spectrum, and the words that give it away.

The answer	The level	The giveaway
"I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time."		
"I did it, but the police lied about half of it."		
"The guys I ran with got me into it."		
"I didn't do anything. My lawyer sold me out."		

Answers: minimization ("just"); partial ownership ("but"); blame-shifting ("the guys I ran with"); denial ("I didn't do anything").

2. My evidence. Everything I've done that someone could check.

What I did	Who could confirm it

3. My two minutes. Write a few lines for each part. If you'd rather, write "[my charge]" and practice the full version with your mentor.

What happened, in one or two sentences, owned:

What changed, and my evidence:

What I offer now, and why this job:

4. Say it out loud to three people before your next class. Ask each one: Did you hear "just" or "but"? Was there evidence? Did it end on what I offer?

Who I said it to	How long it took	What they noticed

5. Where I'll look.

Job center _____ **When I'll go** _____

Employers I've heard hire men with records:

My questions for legal services about my record:

6. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

CHAPTER 4

Keeping the Job

The big idea

You're three weeks into a job in a restaurant kitchen. The bus has been late twice this week. One time you called in. The other time you didn't. At the end of your shift, your supervisor pulls you aside: "You've been late twice this week and you're the slowest one on the line. I've got people waiting for this job. One more time and you're done."

Your face gets hot. "Slowest one on the line" hits something old. You can feel the words coming: "Then give it to one of them."

Getting hired is one moment. Keeping the job is every shift after it. A job can be lost over things that have little to do with the work itself: a late bus and no call, a correction that felt like disrespect, a coworker who keeps pushing, a bad day that ends with "I quit."

Each of those is a moment about how you talk and how you take what's said to you. FORGE has a tool for each one:

- For showing up and calling in: the **four communication styles** and the **"I" statement.**
- For a supervisor's correction: **SBI** and the **six steps for receiving feedback.**
- For a problem with a coworker: the **FORGE 5-step conflict resolution model.**
- For the moment you want to walk out: the **escalation curve** and **STOP.**

Not every job is fair, and some are worth leaving. The line this chapter draws is simple: you never decide that in the moment, at the top of the curve.

The tool: how you talk at work

In your first months on a job, the most important thing you do is be there, on time, every shift. When you can't, how you call in tells your supervisor who you are.

FORGE names four communication styles. Here they are in a call-in:

- **Aggressive:** "Bus didn't come. What do you want me to do about it?"
- **Passive:** No call. You just don't show up, and hope it blows over.
- **Passive-aggressive:** You text a coworker to tell the boss, and act surprised when it goes badly.

- **Assertive:** You call your supervisor yourself, before the shift. You say who you are, and that you'll be late or out. You say what happened, in one sentence, and when you'll be there. Then: "Is there anything you need from me?"

Everybody has a style they fall back on when they're stressed. Some men go aggressive. Some go quiet and say "it's fine" about everything, until the day it isn't. FORGE teaches that passive people swallow it until they explode, and then it looks like aggression out of nowhere. Know your style, so you can catch it.

Every job has a call-in rule: who you call, how, and how early. Find out yours this week, and write it down.

The engine of assertive talk is the **"I" statement.**

> **THE "I" STATEMENT**
>
> **"I feel ___ when ___ because ___."** It says what you need without attacking anybody.

At work it might sound like this: "I feel frustrated when the closing work gets left for me, because I end up missing my bus home."

Taking correction

FORGE teaches a way to give feedback called **SBI: Situation, Behavior, Impact.** When and where. What the person actually did. What it caused. "Yesterday at close, the cooler door was left open, and we lost a case of product."

Your supervisor may not give you clean SBI. You may just hear, "You're slow." Translate it in your head. When? What did I actually do? What did it cause? Then you know what to fix.

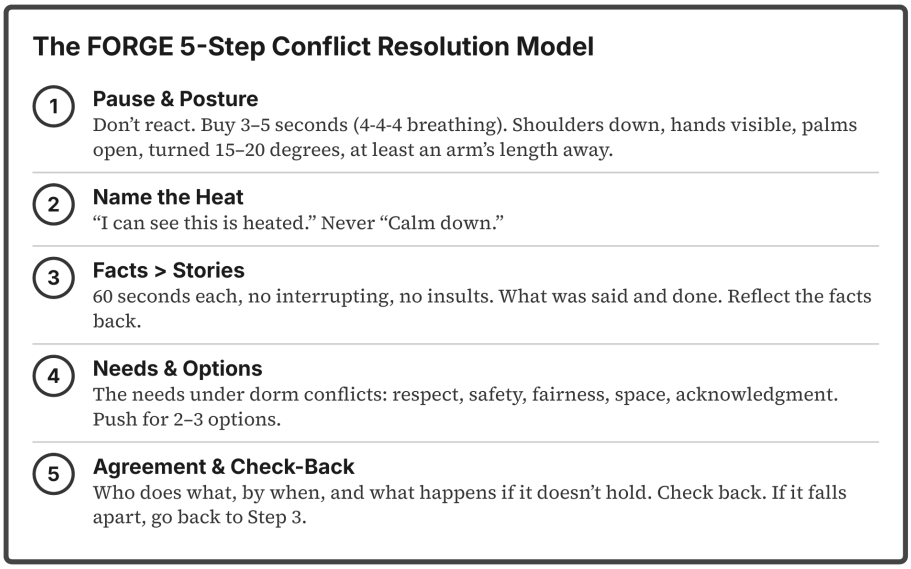
Then receive it. Six steps:

1. **Listen fully.** Don't interrupt.
2. **Breathe.** Buy yourself three seconds.
3. **Reflect it back.** "So what you're saying is..."
4. **Look for the truth, even a grain of it.** You don't have to agree with everything. Find the part you can own.
5. **Say thank you.** Even if it stings.
6. **Don't retaliate later.** At work, getting back at someone looks like slowing down, complaining to coworkers, or the silent treatment. It kills trust.

A correction is not a verdict on you. It's information about one thing you did.

If you've been talked down to for years, a correction can feel like more of the same. Notice that. Then ask the Chapter 1 question: what's the thought? "He thinks I'm nothing" is a thought. "I was late twice" is a fact.

Conflict with a coworker: the five steps



The FORGE 5-step conflict resolution model.

Inside, FORGE mentors use this model to help two other people settle a conflict. Out here, you'll often be one of the two. The steps still work.

1. **Pause & Posture.** Don't react. Buy three to five seconds, and breathe. Shoulders down, hands where they can be seen. Stand a little to the side, at least an arm's length away.
2. **Name the Heat.** "I can tell we're both frustrated." Never "calm down."
3. **Facts > Stories.** "He's trying to get me fired" is a story. "He told the supervisor I left the cooler open" is a fact. Talk about what was said and done. Use SBI when you give your side.
4. **Needs & Options.** What do each of you actually need: respect, fairness, space? Come up with two or three ways to get there. Don't take the first one.
5. **Agreement & Check-Back.** Who does what, by when. Then check back. "We're cool" is not an agreement. If it falls apart, go back to Step 3.

If it's threats or anything physical, you don't run the steps. You step away and go to your supervisor.

Never quit at Stage 3

Here's the line for this whole chapter: **never quit at Stage 3.**

FORGE's escalation curve runs from calm, to agitated, to flooded, to crisis, to recovery. Stage 3 is flooded: tunnel vision, everything feels urgent. "I quit" feels like power there. It's really a decision made with your thinking switched off.

Instead:

1. **STOP.** Stop: one breath. Think: what's the thought, and is it a fact? Options: two or three things I could do. Plan: the one that protects my plan.
2. **Finish the shift,** if you safely can.
3. **Call your mentor** that day.
4. **Sleep on it.**

If you still want to leave after that, leave on purpose. Give notice. Line up the next job first if you can.

Out here

The kitchen, replayed. Go back to the supervisor at the start of this chapter. You catch the heat in your face: that's Stage 2. One breath. You listen to the end without cutting in. Then you look for the grain of truth. Is there one? Yes. You were late twice, and you only called once. So you say: "You're right. I was late twice, and I only called once. I'm taking the earlier bus starting next shift, and if anything goes wrong, I'll call you before my shift starts." Did you have to agree you're a bad worker? No. You found the part you could own, you had a plan, and you kept the job. "Slowest one on the line" might still sting. That's a thought to take home, maybe to your mentor. It's not a fight to have at the end of a shift. In a week or two, you might even ask, "What's one thing I could do to be faster on the line?" That turns the sting into something you can use.

The coworker at the time clock. Your coworker has been leaving his part of the closing work for you most nights. Yesterday he told the supervisor you left the cooler door open. You didn't. Now you're both at the time clock. Here are the five steps:

- **Pause & Posture.** You stop an arm's length away. Shoulders down. One breath.
- **Name the Heat.** "I can tell we're both wound up about yesterday."
- **Facts > Stories.** Not "You're trying to get me fired." Instead: "Yesterday you told the supervisor I left the cooler open. I closed it before I clocked out. And most nights this

week, the floors on your side were left for me." Then let him give his side, without cutting in.

- **Needs & Options.** You need fairness, and you need not to take the blame for something you didn't do. Maybe he needs help on the busy nights. Options: split the closing jobs with a list, both check the cooler before clocking out, or ask the supervisor to assign the closing jobs.
- **Agreement & Check-Back.** "So starting tonight, I do the cooler and the dishes, you do the floors, and we both check the list before we clock out. Let's see how it's going at the end of the week."

The call-in. It's 6:10. Your shift starts at 7, and your ride just texted that his car won't start. The old move: don't call, show up at 8:30, and hope. Or text a coworker to pass it on. The assertive move: call your supervisor yourself, right now. "This is [your name]. My ride fell through. I'm getting the 7:05 bus, so I'll be about an hour late. I'll be there by 8. Is there anything you need from me?" Then be there by 8.

The day you want to walk out. It's a rough lunch rush. The manager yells at you across the kitchen, in front of everybody. You're climbing fast. Thought: "I don't need this." The old move: apron on the counter, out the back door. Walk it forward. Rent is due. The next application asks why you left. Your officer asks too. Instead: STOP. Finish the shift. Call your mentor on the way home. Sleep on it. Maybe in the morning you still want to leave. Then you give notice and start looking while you still have a paycheck. Or maybe in the morning it was one bad day. Either way, you decided it. The lunch rush didn't.

Watch for

"The five steps are too much to remember in the moment." The model lives in your head. You practice the steps so they become instinct. In the moment, you're not thinking "Step 3." You're thinking, "I need to understand what actually happened."

"If I say 'I feel,' they'll think I'm soft." Try it and see. The man who stays calm and says "Here's what I need" while everyone else is losing it, that man has the room.

"My supervisor is just wrong." Maybe. Step 4 of receiving feedback is to look for the truth, even a grain of it. You don't have to agree with everything. Find the part you can own. If it's a pattern and not a moment, write it down and talk to your mentor.

"Calling in feels like begging." It's the opposite. A call before your shift is you running your job like a professional, instead of leaving your supervisor to find out.

"I'd just quit." Walk it forward: the rent, the next application, the check-in where you explain it. Then decide, on purpose.

"It's fine." If that's what you say about everything at work, check yourself. Swallowing it until you explode costs the job just the same. Say the small thing early, with an "I" statement.

When it's more than friction. This chapter is about ordinary problems at work. If something at work is unsafe or seriously wrong, like threats, harassment or not being paid, it's not a five-steps problem. Take it to your mentor and to POD Society legal services. The number is on the contacts page at the back of this book.

After you leave the house

- **Learn the call-in rule at every new job,** on your first day, and write it down.
- **Ask for feedback before you get it.** "What's one thing I could do better?" Then use the six steps.
- **Keep the line.** Never quit at Stage 3. Finish the shift. Call someone. Sleep on it.
- **Leave on purpose.** Give notice. Line up the next job first if you can. Leave in a way that gets you a reference.
- **Keep showing up early.** Every supervisor notices it.
- **Keep someone to call.** You won't have a house mentor forever. Keep the number of someone who will tell you the truth on a bad day: your old mentor, a man from the house, someone in your support network.

Remember

- You keep a job one shift at a time. Be there early. Call before, not after.
- Say what you need: "I feel ___ when ___ because ___."
- A correction is information, not a verdict. Find the grain of truth.
- With a coworker: Pause & Posture, Name the Heat, Facts > Stories, Needs & Options, Agreement & Check-Back.
- Never quit at Stage 3.

Try it

1. My call-in. Find out your job's call-in rule this week. If you're not working yet, write the call-in you'll use at your next job.

Who I call _____ **Their number** _____ **How early** _____

What I'll say (who I am, what happened in one sentence, when I'll be there):

_____

_____

2. My style under stress. Which of the four styles do you fall back on when work gets hard? Write a time it showed up, and how the assertive version would have sounded.

My style	A time it showed up	The assertive version

An "I" statement for something at work (or in the house) that bothers me:

_____

_____

3. A correction I got, or one I expect:

What was said	What it means in SBI	The grain of truth	What I'll do

4. The five steps. Think of a conflict with a coworker, or with anyone you work or live with. Plan what you would say or do at each step.

Step	What I'd say or do
Pause & Posture	
Name the Heat	
Facts > Stories	
Needs & Options	
Agreement & Check-Back	

5. Before I ever quit in the moment, I will:

_____

_____

The person I'll call _____ **Their number** _____

6. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

_____

_____

CHAPTER 5

Money on the Outside

The big idea

It's your first payday out here. You worked 40 hours this week at $15 an hour. You did the math in your head all week: $600. Then you see the check. It says $490.

Before you even get home, your phone buzzes. It's your cousin. "Hey, you got paid, right? I need $200 till next week. Come on. I put money on your books the whole time you were down. You owe me."

Money is where a good plan meets arithmetic. The first check is often smaller than you expect. The bills come due before it. And the people and businesses who want a piece of it show up on payday.

That's the big idea of this chapter. **Decide where every dollar goes before payday, not after.** When you don't plan your money, it still gets spent. It just gets spent by accident, or by whoever asks first.

Inside, FORGE mentors learn the basics of money so they can teach them to other men: budgeting, banking, debt traps and saving. This chapter puts the same basics to work on your own paycheck. Nobody is born knowing this. If nobody ever showed you a pay stub, a bank account or a budget, you are not behind. You are starting now.

The tool: a plan for every dollar

The tool has four steps. Read your paycheck. Plan every dollar, savings first. Put your money somewhere safe, and face what you owe. Stay out of the traps.

Step 1: Read your paycheck

Here is a pay stub. The numbers are made up and round, so they're easy to follow. Yours will be different.

A PAY STUB (MADE-UP, ROUND NUMBERS)

On the stub	Amount
Hours	40 at $15.00 an hour
Gross pay	**$600.00**
Federal income tax	$40.00
State income tax	$24.00
Social Security and Medicare (some stubs say FICA)	$46.00
Total deductions	**$110.00**
Net pay (take-home)	**$490.00**

Gross pay is what you earned before anything comes out. **Deductions** are the money taken out before you ever see it. **Net pay** is what's left. That's your take-home, the money that actually lands in your account. Here, $600 minus $110 is $490.

Some jobs take out more: health insurance, uniforms, union dues. Some men will see money taken out by court order, like child support. If there's a line on your stub you don't understand, or the hours look wrong, ask payroll. Ask calmly, with the stub in your hand. That's a STOP moment, not a fight.

Here's the rule: **budget from your net, never your gross.** The $600 is not yours to spend. The $490 is.

Step 2: Decide where every dollar goes, before payday

A budget is a plan for your money. That's all it is: money in, minus money out. Make the plan before payday, in this order:

1. **Savings first.** Pay yourself first, before you spend anything. Even $10 a week is $520 in a year. That's the start of a deposit on your next place.
2. **What must be paid.** Housing or the program fee. Getting to work. Your phone, because your job and your officer need to reach you. Food. And what you owe on a schedule.
3. **Then everything else.**

Now count your checks. Paid every week? Plan on four checks a month. When a month has a fifth payday, that check goes to savings. Paid every two weeks? Plan on two checks a month. A month with a third check is a savings month.

On the example stub, four checks of $490 is $1,960 a month to plan with. Not $2,400. If you plan on the gross, you're $440 short before you start.

Then add it up. Write down your take-home for the month. Add up everything going out. Subtract. If what's left is below zero, something has to change, and it's better to find out now than when a bill is late. What would you cut?

Start with a small savings goal. **An emergency fund of $500** is a good first one. When it's there, a car repair or a missed shift is a bad week, not a crisis.

Step 3: A safe place for it, and what you owe

Open a bank account. Without one, you pay a fee every time you cash a check. You carry cash, where it can be lost or taken. And you have no safe place to save. Bring your ID, and ask three questions:

- Is there a monthly fee?
- Is there a minimum balance?
- What happens if I spend more than I have?

If a bank turns you down over an old problem with an account, ask about a second-chance account, or try a credit union.

Now the part men avoid. A lot of men come home owing money: supervision fees, court fines and fees, restitution, child support. Don't hide from it. It's part of the plan, like rent.

Find out exactly what you owe and to whom. Get it in writing: how much, who it's paid to, how often, and how to pay. Then put the payment in your budget as a must. If you can't make a payment, ask the office that holds it before you miss it, not after.

This book doesn't give legal advice. Questions about the debt itself go to legal services or to the office that holds the debt. Write their numbers on the contacts page at the back of this book.

Step 4: Know the traps

Some businesses are built for people with no savings and no credit. They're designed to keep you paying. Here's what they cost, in dollars. These are round numbers, as an example. The real terms depend on the lender.

Payday loans. Say you borrow $500, and the fee is $75 every two weeks. Payday comes and you can't pay back $575. So you pay the $75 to roll the loan over. Keep doing that every two weeks for a year. That's 26 payments of $75, or $1,950 in fees, and you still owe the $500. That's $2,450 for a $500 loan.

Rent-to-own. A TV costs $400 in a store. The rent-to-own place offers it for $25 a week. A year of payments is $1,300. And if you miss a payment near the end, the TV can go back to the store, with everything you paid.

Buy-here-pay-here car lots. The lot is also the lender. The price is high and the interest is high. If you miss a payment, the car can be taken back after you've paid into it.

Before you sign anything about money, ask one question: **"What will I pay in total, in dollars, by the time this is done?"** If they can't or won't tell you, walk out. And don't sign anything about money the same day. Take the papers home and show your mentor.

FOUR MONEY RULES

Net, not gross. Budget from your take-home. **Savings first,** then the musts, then the rest. **Find out what you owe,** and to whom, in writing. **Total in dollars before you sign,** and never the same day.

Out here

Here are four money moments from life after release. Read each one and ask yourself what you would do.

The payday call. Back to your cousin. Listen to the last thing he said: "You owe me." That's a thought that feels like a fact. The help he gave you was real. But paying it back out of the rent money isn't the only way to honor it.

Use STOP:

- **Stop.** Don't answer yet. Take one breath.
- **Think.** "He was there for me. That's true. This check is already planned. That's true too."
- **Options.** Give him the $200 and come up short on the program fee. Say no and hang up on him. Or say no to the money, and yes to him.
- **Plan.** Pick the one that protects your plan.

It might sound like this: "You were there for me the whole time. I won't forget it. But this check is already planned, down to the dollar. I can't do $200. I can help you with that job application on Saturday, though."

You can offer something that isn't money: a ride, help with an application, your time. And if you want to give, decide it with your budget, not on the phone. A set amount next month, as a gift, not a loan.

If you're thinking "Family comes first, I'd just give it," walk it forward. What happens when the program fee is due? What happens when your phone gets cut off and work can't reach you?

The shortfall. It's three days before the program fee is due, and you're $100 short. There's a payday loan store between the bus stop and the house. The thought comes: "It's only till payday." Walk that one forward too. The $500 loan above was only till payday, too. Then the next payday, and the next, for a year. Instead, talk to the house staff before the fee is due, not after. Look at your budget for one thing to cut this month. And remember why savings comes first: a small emergency fund is built for weeks like this one.

The question mark. You sit down to fill in your budget. You get to "Fees, fines, restitution," and you don't know the number. Maybe nobody ever told you. Maybe the letter got lost when you moved. Don't guess, and don't skip it. Write a question mark. That question mark is your step for this week. Call the office that holds the debt. Get it in writing: how much, to whom, how often, how to pay. Then put it in the budget. Knowing the number can be hard. Not knowing it doesn't make it go away.

The car lot. Your shift changes, and the bus doesn't run early enough. A car lot down the road has a sign: "No credit? No problem. Drive it home today." The salesman keeps talking about the small weekly payment. Ask your question: "What will I pay in total, in dollars, by the time this is done?" If he goes back to the weekly payment, ask again. If he won't give you a total, walk out. If he does, don't sign today. Take the papers home and show your mentor. Then look at your other options. A ride from a coworker for a few weeks. A talk with your supervisor about the shift. Saving up for a cheaper car you can buy outright.

Watch for

"There's nothing to budget. I don't make enough." Then the budget matters more, not less. On a small check, a budget is how you see a shortfall before the bill is late, instead of after. It's also how you find the few dollars that become savings.

"I'll figure it out when I get paid." A plan made after payday gets made by whoever asks first. Make a rough plan for your next check now, even if it's on the back of an envelope.

"I don't trust banks." Maybe you have a real reason. An account got closed. Money got taken. A bank turned you away. That's fair. Now look at what having no account costs you: a fee every time you cash a check, cash that can be lost or taken, and no safe place to save. Ask the three questions. Try a second-chance account or a credit union.

"What I owe is a legal question." Part of it is. That part goes to legal services or to the office that holds the debt. The rest is yours: find out exactly what you owe and to whom, get it in writing, and put the payment in your budget.

"I don't even want to look at it." A lot of men feel shame about money: what they owe, or never having had a bank account. Your numbers are private. You never have to say them out loud in class. But don't hide them from yourself. You can't plan around a number you won't look at.

After you leave the house

Your money plan goes with you when you move out. Keep doing this:

- **Do your budget every month,** before the first payday. Fill in what you plan. At the end of the month, fill in what really happened. The gap between the two is where you learn.
- **Redo it when your pay changes.** A raise, a new job, more hours or fewer: start again from the new net.
- **Keep paying yourself first.** Savings comes out before anything else, every check.
- **Keep a money folder.** Pay stubs, letters about what you owe, and a receipt for every payment you make.
- **Grow your goal.** First $500. Then a deposit on your next place. Chapter 12 is about planning that move.
- **Before you sign anything about money,** ask for the total in dollars, never sign the same day, and show someone you trust.

Remember

- Budget from your net, never your gross.
- Decide where every dollar goes before payday: savings first, then the musts, then the rest.
- Find out exactly what you owe and to whom. Get it in writing, and put it in the plan.
- Before you sign, ask: "What will I pay in total, in dollars?" Never sign the same day.
- "You owe me" is a thought that feels like a fact. You can be grateful and still say no.

Try it

1. Read your paycheck. Use your last pay stub. If you don't have a job yet, use the example in this chapter.

Gross pay	Total deductions	Net (take-home) pay	How often I'm paid

A line on my stub I don't understand (I'll ask payroll):

---

2. My monthly budget. Fill in the Planned column before your first payday of the month. Fill in the Actual column at the end of the month. Don't know a number yet? Write a question mark.

This month	Planned	Actual
Take-home pay (all the paychecks this month)		
Savings, first		
Housing or program fee		
Phone		
Transportation (bus pass, gas, rides)		
Food		
Fees, fines, restitution		
Child support		
Work clothes, hygiene, other needs		
Everything else		
Total out (add up every line above except take-home)		
Left over (take-home minus total out)		

3. What I owe, and to whom. Every fee, fine, restitution payment, child support order or other debt. A question mark is fine for now. Finding out is the step.

What I owe	To whom	How much	How often, and how I pay	How I'll find out exactly

4. Payday pressure. Who is likely to ask you for money? Plan what you'll say now, while you're calm.

Who might ask	What I'll say	What I can offer that isn't money

5. My first savings goal.

Amount: $ _____ **For** _____ **By when** _____

6. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

_____

_____

CHAPTER 6

Coming Home to Family

The big idea

Inside, you pictured it a hundred times. The door opens. Everybody's there. Hugs, food, your mother crying the good kind of tears. Things back the way they were.

Maybe it even went like that, for a day. Then real life started. Your son was a little boy when you left. Now he's almost as tall as you, and he barely looks up from his phone. Your mother needs help on the stairs. Your son's mother has rules in her house that you don't know. And your sister, the one who took your mother to every appointment while you were gone, is polite to you and nothing more.

That's normal. It doesn't mean your family doesn't love you. It means they lived years without you. Children grew up, some of them without you. Partners moved on, or stayed and carried resentment. Parents got older. Brothers and sisters have their own problems. Somebody else made the rules, paid the bills and answered the hard questions.

That's the big idea of this chapter. **Coming home is not picking up where you left off. It's starting over.** Love doesn't erase hurt. Trust has to be earned again, one honest moment at a time. And when you have hurt someone, the way back starts with owning your part, fully, without demanding to be forgiven.

This chapter gives you three things FORGE teaches. An honest look at what you expected. The idea that trust is earned, not a starting point. And the 4-step accountability conversation.

SAFETY COMES FIRST

If there's a no-contact order, or a supervision condition about who you can contact, it comes before everything in this chapter. If you're not sure, ask your officer before you reach out. A conversation the order doesn't allow isn't accountability. It puts the other person, and your freedom, at risk. If someone in your family is hurting you, or you're afraid you'll hurt someone, talk to your mentor. Questions about custody, visitation or child support go to legal services. Their numbers belong on the contacts page at the back of this book.

The family you came home to

Be honest with yourself: what did you expect? A lot of men carry a picture like one of these home with them:

- "Everything goes back to normal."
- "My family is just waiting for me."
- "I'll pick up right where I left off."

Every one of those comes from love. Don't throw the hope away. Give it something to stand on: a plan built on the family you actually came home to, not the one you pictured.

Your children may be angry, distant or confused. That's normal. The person who kept things going while you were gone may be tired, or proud, or both. Some of them may be glad you're home and still not ready to trust you. All of that can be true at the same time.

If you're coming home to a partner, remember this: you're not the same man you were, and your partner isn't the same person either. The relationship has to be rebuilt, not just picked up again. That takes patience, humility and honest talk, the same skills FORGE teaches.

Trust is earned, and roles come back slowly

If you did FORGE, you heard this in the first week: **trust isn't a starting point. It's earned, one honest moment at a time.** That's true with your family too. You can't demand it. You can only build it.

The family ran without you. So don't walk in and take over. If you're a father, the person who raised your kids while you were gone has been making the calls. Ask before you decide. Learn the rules your kids live by now, before you add your own.

Ask yourself three questions:

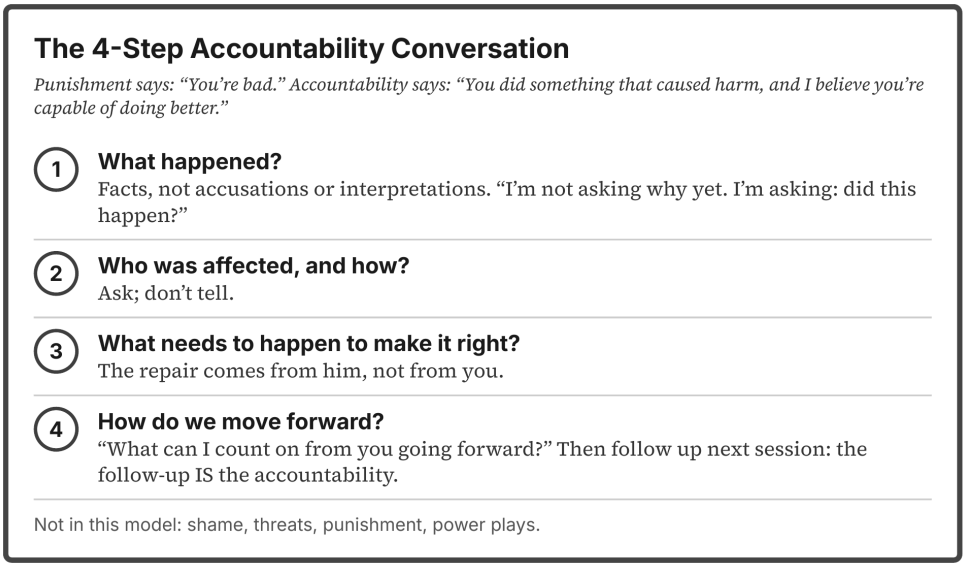
1. **What kind of father, partner, son or brother do I want to be?**
2. **What's standing in the way?**
3. **What can I start doing now?**

Small promises kept beat big promises broken. Call when you said you'd call. Show up when you said you'd show up. Let the other person set some of the pace.

Trust gets built in small, plain ways. You show up on time. You pay what you said you'd pay. You tell the truth when a lie would be easier. Nobody claps for any of it. That's how it works.

And some relationships may not come back. That's painful, and it has to be okay. You can keep the door open on your side without pushing it open on theirs.

The tool: the accountability conversation



The 4-step accountability conversation, from FORGE Week 21.

Inside, FORGE mentors learn four questions for holding another man accountable. The picture is written for that, so "him" is the man who did the harm, and "you" is the mentor. Out here, the first person to use the four questions on is you, when you sit down with someone you hurt. In this conversation, you are the one who did the harm.

1. What happened? Start with the facts and your part. "I missed most of your school years. I missed your graduation." Not "Things happened." Not "I had my reasons." Facts, not excuses.

2. Who was affected, and how? Ask, then listen. "What was that like for you?" Don't tell them how they felt. Let them tell you. And don't jump in with your side. This is the hardest step, because it's where you'll want to explain yourself. That's where STOP lives: one breath, and keep listening. You don't have to agree with every word. You have to hear it.

3. What needs to happen to make it right? In FORGE, the repair comes from the man who did the harm. Nobody forces it on him. So ask what would help, and offer what you can really do. "Sorry" is a start. A change they can see is the repair.

4. How do we move forward? Make one promise small enough to keep, and say when you'll check back. FORGE says the follow-up is the accountability. If you don't follow up, the conversation didn't happen.

Notice what's not in it: excuses, a "but," a deadline for trust, or a demand to be forgiven. **Forgiveness is theirs to give, on their time.** You can own it fully and still hear "not yet." That's not failure. That's the start.

BEFORE YOU HAVE THE CONVERSATION

Plan it on paper first, on the Try it pages at the end of this chapter. Pick only someone you're allowed to contact. Show the plan to your mentor before you have the conversation. You don't have to have it this week. Plan it.

Out here

Here are four family moments from life after release. Read each one and ask yourself what you would do.

Your sister and your mother. You've been home about a month. You ask your older sister to sit down and talk. She took care of your mother through a long illness while you were away. She opens with: "So now you want to talk. I took Mom to every appointment for five years. Where were you? And don't tell me it was complicated."

Here's how it goes wrong: "I know, but you don't understand what it was like in there. I couldn't do anything." There's the "but." Now the conversation is about you.

Here's how the four steps sound:

- **Step 1.** "You're right. I wasn't there. You took Mom to every appointment, and I didn't take her to one."
- **Step 2.** "What was that like for you, doing all of it by yourself?" Then she tells you. It will be hard to hear. She may say things that don't feel fair. Breathe, and keep listening.
- **Step 3.** "I can't give you those five years back. What would help now?" If she doesn't know, offer something real: "I can take Mom to her appointment next Thursday."
- **Step 4.** "I'll take her Thursday, and I'll call you that night to tell you how it went." Then take her, and call.

She might say, "I don't want your sorry." That's okay. You didn't come to get something from her. You came to own your part. Nobody forgave anybody, and the conversation still did something.

Your son's house rules. You visit your son at his mother's house. He's on his phone at the dinner table. You want to tell him to put it away, the way your mother told you. The thought comes fast: "I'm his father. I make the rules." Stop. His mother has been making

the calls for years. You let it go at the table. Later, away from your son, you ask her: "What are the rules here now? How can I back you up?" That's what taking a role back slowly looks like. You're not giving up being his father. You're earning your way back into it.

The small promise. You tell your daughter you'll call her Sunday at six. Sunday comes. You're at a friend's place watching the game, and everybody wants you to stay. At five to six, you step outside and call. You keep it short and kind: How was her week? What's going on at school? You'll call again next Sunday. One call doesn't fix years. But a lot of calls, made on time, start to build something she can count on.

"Not yet." Your oldest son is grown now. You've checked: there's no order, and your conditions allow contact. You write him a short letter. You own your part, and you don't ask for anything. Weeks go by. Then he calls, and he says, "I got your letter. I'm not ready to talk to you." Everything in you wants to explain, or to push, or to say "After all I've been through?" Stop. Take one breath. Then: "I understand. Thank you for calling me. I'm not going anywhere. When you're ready, I'll be here." That's it. You keep the door open on your side. You don't push it open on his. Then you tell your mentor how it went, because that call was heavy, and you shouldn't carry it alone. "Not yet" is not "never." And whatever he decides, you owned your part.

Watch for

"They should be glad I'm home." Maybe they are. They also lived years without you, built routines and carried things you didn't see. Before you decide what your family owes you, answer this: what did they have to handle while you were gone?

"My kids are just waiting for me." Maybe they are. They may also be angry, distant or confused. Don't give up the hope. Build a plan so it has something to stand on.

"I said I was sorry. What more do they want?" That's the line between accountability and asking to be let off the hook. Sorry is a start. The repair is a change they can see, and a follow-up you keep. Forgiveness can't be demanded.

"Why should I own anything? They hurt me too." That may be true. Two things can be true at once: you were hurt, and you hurt people. Neither cancels the other. Your conversation is about your part. Their part is theirs to own, and you can't have their conversation for them.

"I can't talk about my kids." Then don't, not yet. Some of this is too heavy for a class, or for a page. When you're ready, your mentor is a good place to start.

After you leave the house

Rebuilding a family takes longer than a stay in the house. Keep doing this:

- **Keep a promise list.** Write down what you promised, to whom, and when. Look at it every week.
- **Follow up when you said you would.** The follow-up is the accountability.
- **Plan hard conversations on paper first,** with the four steps. Show the plan to someone you trust: your old mentor, a man from the house, a sponsor.
- **Check your conditions** before any new contact, and again whenever a condition changes. Not sure? Ask your officer first.
- **Let them set some of the pace.** Some relationships come back slowly. Some don't come back. Lean on the people you've chosen to lean on: your mentor, a recovery sponsor, the men from this house.

Remember

- Your family changed while you were away. Coming home is not picking up where you left off. It's starting over.
- Trust isn't a starting point. It's earned, one honest moment at a time.
- Own your part with no "but." Forgiveness is theirs to give, on their time.
- No-contact orders and conditions about contact come first.
- Small promises kept beat big promises broken.

Try it

1. The family I came home to. How did your family change while you were away? What expectation are you adjusting because of it?

How my family changed	The expectation I'm adjusting

2. The man I want to be at home. Pick one or two roles: father, partner, son or brother.

My role	The kind I want to be	What's standing in the way	What I can start doing now

3. Small promises. Promises small enough to keep, this week.

The promise	To whom	When	Kept?

4. Plan one conversation. Only with someone you are allowed to contact. Show this plan to your mentor before you have the conversation.

Who I'll talk to _____ **When** _____

I checked that contact is allowed, with _____

The four steps	My plan
1. What happened? The facts, and my part in them	
2. Who was affected, and how? The question I'll ask, and then I listen	
3. What needs to happen to make it right? What I can really offer	
4. How do we move forward? One promise I can keep, and when I'll check back	

Is there a "but" anywhere in my plan? Where?

_____

5. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

_____

_____

CHAPTER 7

Old Friends, Old Places

The big idea

You're walking from the bus stop after a long shift, two blocks from the house. Your feet hurt. A car slows down next to you and the window comes down. It's an old friend from the neighborhood, and he's glad to see you.

"Look at you! Get in, I'll run you home. Matter of fact, I got something going this weekend. Easy money, couple of hours. You need it. I know that job ain't paying you nothing."

Nobody is threatening you. He's smiling. That's what makes it hard.

When you come home, the old neighborhood is still there. So are some of the people. The corner. The house where everybody went. The friend with the car who always had something going. The numbers still saved in your phone.

They pull, and the pull isn't weakness. It's familiar. People there knew you. For a long time, that's where you were somebody. But old places come with old routines, and old routines come with old outcomes. That's the big idea of this chapter. **People, places and things don't have to be bad to put your plan at risk.**

FORGE teaches that the right people hold you up and the wrong people pull you back down. This chapter brings two FORGE tools home. The **relationship map** shows you who is in your life now, and what each person does to you. **Pressure decisions** help you decide before the car pulls up, not while it idles at the curb.

> **CONDITIONS COME FIRST**
>
> If your supervision conditions say who you can be around, or where you can't go, follow them. If you're not sure whether someone or somewhere counts, ask your officer before, not after. You can disagree with a condition and still follow it.

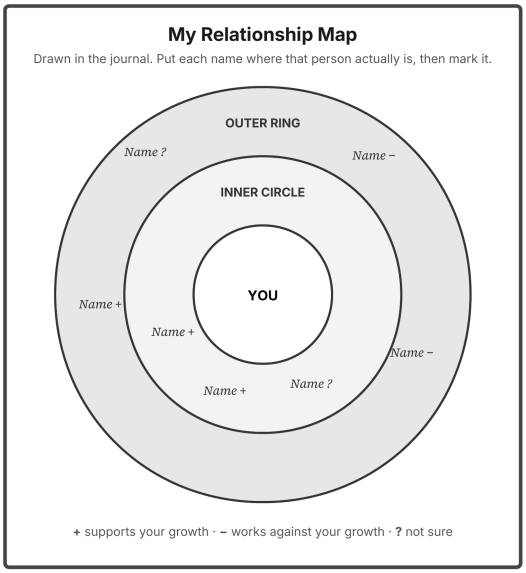
The tool: your relationship map

If you did FORGE, you drew this inside, in your journal. Draw it again now, on the Try it page at the end of this chapter. Your life has changed, so your map has too.

Draw three circles, like a target:

- **You** are in the center.

- The ring around you is your **inner circle**, the people closest to you.
- The **outer ring** is people who are in your life at more distance.



The relationship map, from FORGE Week 8.

Put people where they actually are, not where you wish they were. Then put a mark next to each name:

- **A plus (+)** for people who support your growth. They tell you the truth, they want to see you make it, and they hold you to it.
- **A minus (–)** for people who pull you back. They make it easy to slide, they keep score, and they make fun of the work you're doing: "You think you're better than us now?"
- **A question mark (?)** for people who could go either way.

Be honest. Use initials if you want. Nobody else needs to see it. Then look at the balance. Are there more plus marks or more minus marks? What does that tell you about where you're living and who's around you?

Some men look at their map and see very few plus marks. Some see that the people closest to them are the ones pulling them back. That's hard to look at. FORGE says the map is there to show you what is, not to make you feel bad about it. Now that you see it, you can change it.

Here's what FORGE says about the map: **you have more control over it than you think.** You can't always remove people. But you choose how much access and influence each one gets.

That's a **boundary**: a line you draw about what you will and won't accept. It's not a wall, and it's not a weapon. It might sound like this:

- "I'll get food with you, but I'm not going back to the block."
- "I care about you, but I'm not going to lie for you."

You don't have to cut everyone off. That isn't realistic, and it isn't always right. You decide how close each person gets.

Decide before the pressure hits

Under pressure, your thinking narrows. You stop seeing options. You see one path, and it's usually the old one. So don't make the decision in the moment. Make it now, while you're calm. FORGE calls that **pre-deciding.** A firefighter doesn't decide how to fight a fire while the building is burning. That decision was made in training.

Pre-deciding out here sounds like this: "If someone from the old crowd pulls up and offers me a ride, I'll say I'm good, and I'll keep walking." You make that choice once, sitting at the kitchen table. Then, on the sidewalk, you don't have to decide anything. You just do what you already decided.

Turn your pre-decisions into **personal rules.** A personal rule starts with "I will always" or "I will never." There's no "unless." Out here, personal rules might sound like this:

- "I will never get in a car when I don't know what's in it."
- "I will always leave when drugs or a weapon come out."
- "I will never say yes to easy money on the spot."
- "I will always call my mentor before I go back to the old block."

FORGE puts it this way: a rule that only works when nobody is watching isn't a rule. It's a preference.

And when it's hot, use the **10-10-10 rule.** Ask yourself three questions. How will I feel about this in 10 minutes? In 10 months? In 10 years? Most bad decisions feel good at 10 minutes. The right one is usually the one that still looks good at 10 months and 10 years.

It works the other way too. Walking away can feel bad at 10 minutes. Your pride stings, and somebody saw you do it. At 10 months, nobody remembers. At 10 years, it may be one of the best decisions you ever made.

Saying no without starting a fight

The trap is either/or: "I go with them, or I lose them." FORGE says come up with at least three options before you choose. There's almost always a third one.

- **Keep it short and warm.** "Not this time. I'm good." You don't owe anybody a speech about your program.
- **Say no to the thing, not the person.** "I can't ride with you. Let's get lunch this weekend." With a minus on your map, you may not offer even that.
- **Don't lecture, and don't call names.** Leave him his pride, and keep yours.
- **Leave.** Walking away is a complete answer.

When it's hard, picture the ripples. FORGE calls this the ripple effect. You're in the center. Then the people close to you: your kids, your family, the house, your mentor. Then further out: the employer who took a chance on you, and the next man the house can help. One decision, and look how far it goes.

Out here

Here are four moments from life after release. Read each one and ask yourself what you would really do.

The car at the curb. Back to the friend in the car. Run the tools. Where is he on your map: plus, minus or question mark? Be honest. Which personal rule fits? Maybe "I will never get in a car when I don't know what's in it," or "I will never say yes to easy money on the spot." What does 10-10-10 say? In 10 minutes, the ride feels good and your feet stop hurting. In 10 months, if that car got pulled over, or the weekend thing went bad, you could be explaining it to your officer. Walk it forward. What's in the car? Who else is in it? Who sees you get in?

Now find the third option, between getting in and starting a fight. "Man, it's good to see you. I'm gonna walk, though. I need it after that shift. And I'm good on the weekend thing." Then keep walking.

He pushes: "What, you too good for us now?" Don't take the bait, and don't give a speech. "Nah. I just got a lot riding on this right now. Take care of yourself." Saying no to the car and the money wasn't saying no to the whole person. You decided how much access he gets.

The old number. A text comes in from a number you know: "u out?? pull up tonight, everybody here." Your thumb is already moving. Stop. Your personal rule is "I will always call my mentor before I go back to the old block." So you call him first, or a man from the

house. Maybe then you text back, "Good to hear from you. Can't tonight." Maybe you don't answer at all. If that number is a minus on your map, maybe you delete it. Any of those is a decision you made. The night didn't make it for you.

The block where you'll live. Your mother says you can move back in with her when you leave the house. You love her, and the rent is low. But her house is on the same block as the old crowd. Where you live decides what you walk past every day. That's a housing question, and it belongs in your Reentry Plan. Talk it over with your mentor. If you do move there, plan it ahead of time: the long way home from the bus, your personal rules for the front porch, the people you'll call. Chapter 12 is about planning your next address, with a backup.

The empty map. You've pulled back from the minus marks. Good. Now it's Saturday night, and you have nobody to call. That's real, and loneliness pulls men back too. The work now is new circles, starting small: the men in the house, people at work, a recovery meeting, a faith community, a service project. Ask a man from the house who already goes somewhere, and go with him. One new plus mark this month is a real goal. This is the Service part of your plan, too. New circles get built by showing up for something.

Watch for

"I can be around them. I'm not the same person." Maybe so. Are you willing to bet your plan on it? What's your way out if it turns? Pre-deciding exists because the moment is the worst time to make the decision.

"That's my people. They held me down." Loyalty is a real value. Keep it. But ask yourself: does this relationship support the life I'm building now? FORGE puts it this way: real loyalty supports your growth, not your comfort.

"Those are the only people I know." Then the work is new circles, starting small: the house, work, a meeting, a faith community, a service project. One new plus mark this month is a real goal.

"My officer's rule about who I can be around doesn't make sense." You can disagree with it and still follow it. Ask your officer about anything that's unclear, and take legal questions to legal services. Don't argue the condition with your friend on the sidewalk. It's simply the answer: "I can't. It's a condition."

"I'd just walk away." That's the easy answer on paper. Be honest about the real one. If part of you would get in the car, that's not failure. It's information. Write a personal rule for it, and tell your mentor.

After you leave the house

The map and the rules go with you when you move out. Keep doing this:

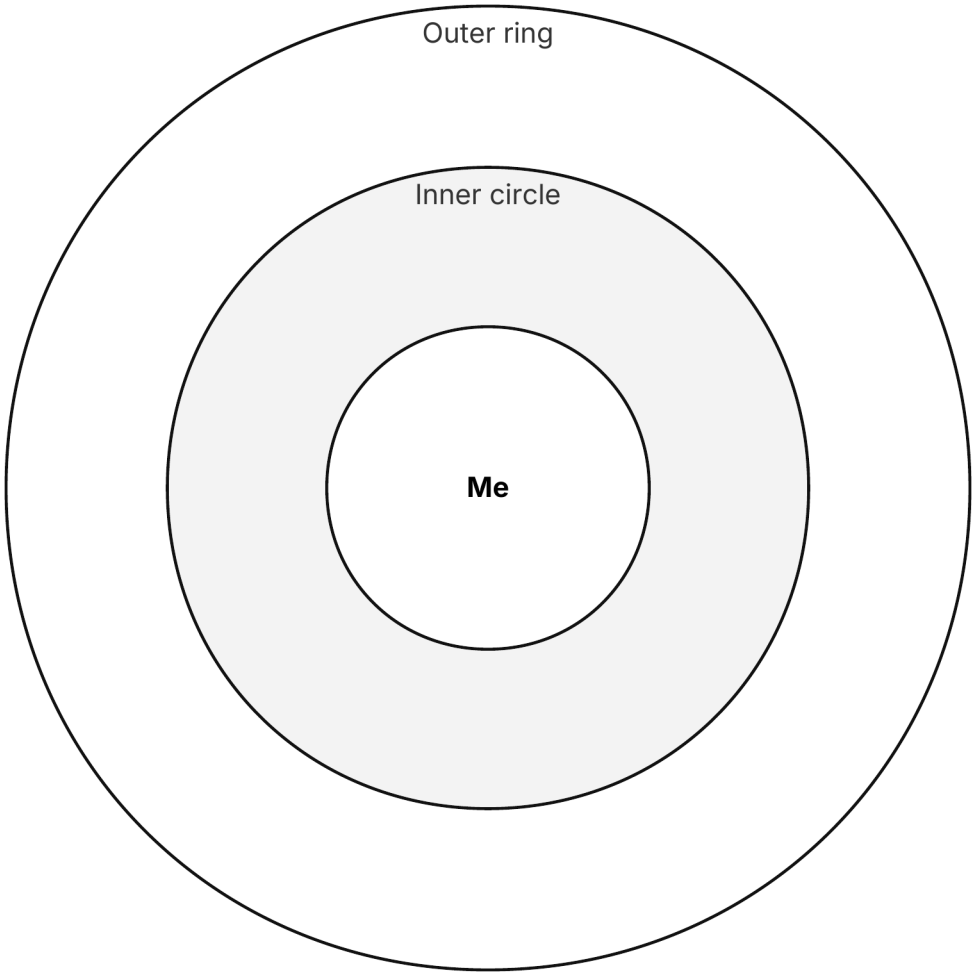
- **Redraw your map** every few months, and any time you move or change jobs. People move in and out of the circles. Notice who.
- **Read your personal rules every morning.** Add a new one when you see a new situation coming.
- **Before you choose your next address,** look at what's on the block and what you'll walk past every day.
- **Keep showing up for your new circles.** The meeting, the volunteer day, the people from work. That's where the plus marks come from.
- **Ask before you assume.** When your conditions change, read them again, and ask your officer about anything that's unclear.

Remember

- Old places come with old routines, and old routines come with old outcomes.
- You can't always remove people. You choose how much access and influence each one gets.
- Decide before the pressure hits. Personal rules start with "I will always" or "I will never," with no "unless."
- Ask: 10 minutes, 10 months, 10 years? Then find the third option.
- Supervision conditions about who you can be around come first.

Try it

1. My relationship map. Put the people in your life since you came home where they really are. Use initials if you want. Mark each one: **+** supports my growth, **–** pulls me back, **?** could go either way.



What I notice about the balance:

---

2. A boundary. Pick one or two people with a – or a ? on your map.

Person (initials)	The boundary I'll hold	What I'll say

3. My personal rules. Write three to five, for situations you know are coming this month. Start each one with "I will always" or "I will never."

4. 10-10-10. A pull you know is coming, and how each choice would look:

The pull	In 10 minutes	In 10 months	In 10 years

5. My new circle.

Where _____ **When** _____ **Who I'll go with** _____

6. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

CHAPTER 8

On Guard

The big idea

You walk into a big store for the first time in years. There's a whole aisle of one thing, more kinds than you can count. You stand there and can't pick. You grab something and get in line. The line is long. Someone stands close behind you, closer than you like. A cart crashes somewhere. A phone rings and rings. The cashier calls out, "Next! I said next!" and the man behind you says, "Come on, move up."

Your heart is pounding. Your hands are tight on the basket. Every part of you is ready for something. You set the basket on the floor and walk out.

If something like that has happened to you, you're not the only one. Maybe you sit with your back to the wall in a restaurant. A door slams and you're on your feet. A loud bus is too much. You sleep with one ear open.

Inside, being on guard kept you safe. Watching the room. Reading every face. Never letting anybody get behind you. Your body learned that, and it learned it well. Here's what FORGE teaches: **your brain doesn't automatically turn that off when the place changes.** You walked out the gate. Your survival system hasn't gotten the message yet.

POD Society has a name for these lasting effects of prison: **Post-Incarceration Syndrome, or PICS.** Some clinicians use the name too. In this book, it's a name, not a diagnosis. Nobody can diagnose you from a book, and you don't need a label to use the tools in this chapter. What the name tells you is this: it has a cause, other men live with it too, and **it is not weakness.**

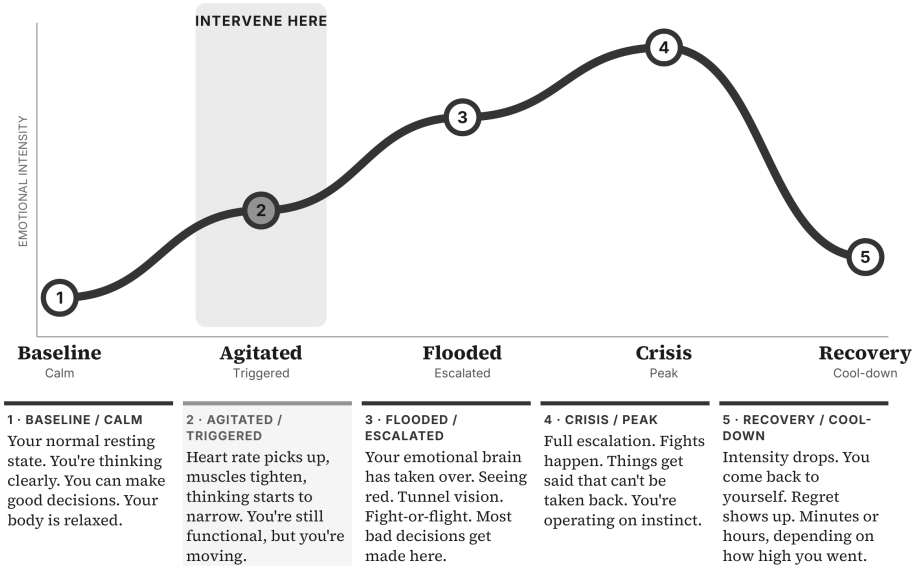
That's the big idea of this chapter. You can learn to notice when your guard goes up, catch it early, and choose what you do next.

The tool: the escalation curve

The escalation curve shows how you go from calm to crisis. If you did FORGE, you learned it in Phase 1. Here are the five stages:

- **Stage 1, Baseline or Calm.** You're thinking clearly. Your body is relaxed.
- **Stage 2, Agitated or Triggered.** Your heart picks up, your muscles tighten, and your thinking starts to narrow. You still have options.

- **Stage 3, Flooded or Escalated.** Your emotional brain has taken over. Tunnel vision. This is where most bad decisions get made.
- **Stage 4, Crisis or Peak.** Things get said and done that can't be taken back.
- **Stage 5, Recovery or Cool-down.** You come back to yourself. That's usually when the regret shows up.



The escalation curve, from FORGE Week 3: the window to act is Stage 2.

The further up you go, the harder it is to come back down. So the goal is simple: **step in at Stage 2.**

To do that, you need to know your **early warning signal**. That's the first thing your body does when you start to climb. Does your jaw tighten? Does your chest get hot? Does your stomach drop? Do your hands make fists? Learn yours. It's the alarm that tells you you're at Stage 2.

The four survival responses

When your system senses danger, it picks one of four survival responses. It picks fast, before you think.

- **Fight.** Someone bumps your cart, and you square up.
- **Flight.** You leave a full cart in the aisle and walk out. Or you stop going anywhere at all.
- **Freeze.** You stand in the aisle and can't choose. Or you go blank when the cashier asks you something.
- **Fawn.** You agree with whatever the person in charge says. You say yes to the extra shift when you mean no.

None of these is weakness. Each one kept somebody safe somewhere. Most men have one they go to most. Some go to one at work and another at home. Which one is yours?

Don't judge your answer. Fight isn't better than freeze. Fawn isn't weaker than flight. Whatever your body learned to do, it learned for a reason. The goal isn't to get rid of it. The goal is to make sure it isn't running the show when you're not really in danger.

Here's the key. **The trigger is in the present. The reaction is from the past. Reacting** is automatic. Your survival system runs the show. **Responding** comes after a pause, when you choose. Every tool in this book is about making that pause.

Here's what that looks like. A door slams. Reacting: you're on your feet with your fists up before you know why. Responding: you're on your feet, you take a breath, you see it was the wind, and you sit back down. The first jump may keep coming for a while. What you do after it is yours.

Three tools for the pause

If you did FORGE, you know these. If you didn't, you can learn them right now.

4-4-4 breathing, for when your body is climbing. Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds. Hold for 4. Breathe out through your mouth for 4. That's one round. Three rounds take about 36 seconds, and nobody has to know you're doing it. Try it now, three rounds. Notice anything? Even a small shift counts.

FORGE explains why it works. When you start to climb, your breathing gets fast and shallow, and that tells your body it's in danger. When you slow your breathing on purpose, you send the opposite message: we're safe. It sounds too simple. Try it before you decide.

5-4-3-2-1 grounding, for when your mind is racing. Name 5 things you can see. Then 4 things you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste. By the time you get to 1, you're back in the room, in the present. That's the only place you can do anything. It works at night too, when you're lying awake and your mind won't stop replaying the day.

STOP, for when you have to decide. Stop, Think, Options, Plan. Chapter 1 walks through it.

> **WHICH TOOL, WHEN**
>
> **Body climbing:** breathe (4-4-4). **Mind racing:** ground (5-4-3-2-1). **Decision to make:** STOP. Sometimes you'll use all three, in that order.

When to get help

These tools help. They don't fix everything, and you don't have to carry this alone. Talk to someone:

- if it isn't easing after a few weeks home,
- if it gets in the way of sleep, work or family,
- if you're having nightmares, flashbacks or panic that won't quit, or
- if you're using alcohol or drugs to get through it.

Who to talk to: your mentor, any time. Mind C.A.R.E. and the mental health and crisis contacts go on the contacts page at the back of this book. Fill them in now, while you're calm.

> **IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT HURTING YOURSELF OR SOMEONE ELSE**
>
> That's not a "wait and see." Tell someone now: your mentor, house staff, someone you trust. Use your crisis contact, or call or text **988**. If anyone is in danger right now, call **911**. Asking for help is using your tools.

Out here

Here are four moments from life after release. Read each one and ask yourself which response you go to.

The checkout line, again. Go back to the store. This time, you notice it at Stage 2: heart picking up, hands tight on the basket. That's your signal. You start 4-4-4, standing in line with your eyes open. Your mind is still racing, so you ground yourself right there in the store: the gum rack, the price sign, the handle of the basket, the music, the smell of the bakery. Then STOP gives you options. Stay in line and keep breathing. Step out of line and come back in a minute. Put the basket down and come back at a quieter time. Or just say "One second" to the cashier.

Maybe you still leave. That's fine. Leaving because your body ran is a reaction. Taking a breath, deciding to come back when it's quieter, and walking out on purpose is a response. Sometimes the response is still to leave. The difference is who decided.

The bus. You're on a crowded bus. It brakes hard. Someone sits down right behind you. Two people start arguing up front. Your body says fight. You're turned half around in your seat, ready. Ask yourself: is there real danger here, or does this just feel like the dayroom?

If there's real danger, do what keeps you safe: move to another seat, or get off at the next stop. If there isn't, ground yourself. Five things you can see out the window. Four things you can touch. Keep going until you're back on the bus, in the present.

The extra shift. At the end of a long day, your supervisor asks you to stay for another shift. You're worn out, and you promised your mother you'd come by tonight. You hear yourself say "Yes, sir, no problem" before you've even thought about it. That's fawn: agree with the person in charge, keep him happy, stay safe. It may have kept you safe inside. Out here, it can cost you your rest, your family time and your plan. Next time, make the pause: "Let me check what I've got going, and I'll tell you in five minutes." Then use STOP and give a real answer. Sometimes yes is the right answer. The point is that you decide.

"I'm fine." You go to work and back to your room, and nowhere else. On your days off, you sleep. If someone asks, you're fine. But freeze can look like calm, and flight can look like being busy or tired. If that's you, it isn't laziness. It may be your guard still doing its old job. Start small. Go to the store at a quiet time, and use 4-4-4 in line. And tell your mentor what's been going on.

Watch for

"Breathing exercises? Really?" Fair question. They're not for when someone is swinging at you. In real danger, do what keeps you safe. They're for all the moments that feel like danger but aren't: the checkout line, the bus, a crowded waiting room. FORGE puts it this way: **regulation isn't weakness. Regulation is strategy.**

"If I let my guard down, I'll get hurt." Your guard kept you safe. The goal isn't to throw it away. It's to choose when it's up. Ask yourself: is there real danger here, or does this just feel like the dayroom?

"I don't need a counselor. I'm not crazy." Nobody is calling you crazy. A broken bone needs a doctor. A mind that won't stop scanning for danger may need a professional too. There's no shame in it, and asking early is easier than asking late.

"A drink takes the edge off." If you're using alcohol or pills to handle a crowd, or to sleep, that's a sign to talk to someone. Talk to your mentor. Chapter 9 is about recovery.

After you leave the house

Your guard may take a long time to settle. Keep doing this:

- **Use one tool three times a week.** Notice where you were on the curve before and after, from 1 to 5.

- **Plan the hard places.** Go to the store or ride the bus at quieter times at first. Pick the place, the time and the tool before you go. Build up a little at a time.
- **Know your early warning signal.** When you feel it, say it to yourself: "Stage 2. Breathe."
- **Keep your person close.** FORGE calls this "my person": one person you can talk to when things get heavy, who will listen without judging. Keep the number in your phone and on the contacts page.
- **Teach it.** When a man from the house is climbing, walk him through 4-4-4 or 5-4-3-2-1, then ask, "Where are you now, 1 to 5?" You're not a therapist. You're just walking him through the steps, and it keeps the tools sharp for you too.
- **Don't wait for it to get bad.** If you see the signs it's time for help, ask for help.

Remember

- Inside, being on guard kept you safe. It doesn't switch off at the gate. It is not weakness.
- Know your early warning signal, and step in at Stage 2.
- Body climbing: breathe. Mind racing: ground. Decision to make: STOP.
- Reacting is automatic. Responding comes after the pause.
- Asking for help is using your tools. Thinking about hurting yourself or someone else: tell someone now, call or text 988, and call 911 if anyone is in danger.

Try it

1. My early warning signal and my response. Where do you feel it first? Which response do you go to most: fight, flight, freeze or fawn?

Where I feel it first	The response I go to most	When it shows up most

2. Hard places out here. Where does your guard go up? Pick a tool for each place.

The place	What my body does	The tool I'll use

3. Practice log. Use one tool three times this week. Rate where you were on the curve, from 1 to 5, before and after.

What was happening	The tool I used	Before (1–5)	After (1–5)

4. My person and my contacts. Fill these in now, while you're calm. Copy them onto the contacts page too.

My person _____ **Phone** _____

Mind C.A.R.E. _____ **Mental health** _____

Crisis contact _____ **My mentor** _____

Thinking about hurting yourself or someone else? Call or text **988**. If anyone is in danger right now, call **911**.

5. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

_____

_____

CHAPTER 9

Recovery and the Stages of Change

The big idea

It's payday. You just cashed your first full check. You walk out of the store with money in your pocket that you earned, and it feels good. Then a car pulls up. It's an old friend, and he's glad to see you.

"Look at you! Working! We have to celebrate. Get in. Just one, I'm buying. You earned it."

He isn't a bad guy. He means it. And part of you wants to get in the car.

Inside, the walls did some of the work for you. Out here, the choice comes every day. It comes on payday and on the old block. It comes after a fight on the phone with family, and on a long night alone with nothing to do. It comes from people who are glad to see you.

This chapter is about recovery. In this book, recovery means **any change you are working to keep.** It might be drinking or using. It might be gambling, a temper, fast money or an old crowd. You don't have to tell anyone what yours is. The tools work the same either way.

You'll get two FORGE tools. The **Stages of Change** show where you are with a change and what kind of help you need right now. The **support network map** shows who is actually around you when the pull comes. And you'll get one honest message: **a slip is information, not the end.** What decides what happens next is whether you hide it or tell someone the same day.

The tool: the Stages of Change

Nobody goes from "I'm fine" to a whole new life in one day. Change happens in stages. FORGE mentors learn the stages so they know what kind of help a man needs. You can use them on yourself.

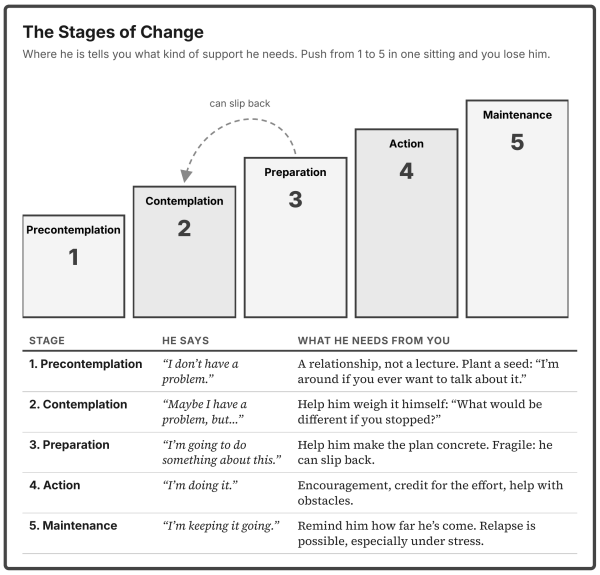
1. Precontemplation: "I don't have a problem." "Everybody drinks on payday." From where you sit, nothing needs to change. What helps here is not a lecture. It's someone who stays around.

2. Contemplation: "Maybe I have a problem, but..." "I know that crowd is bad news, but they're the only ones who picked me up when I got out." You're weighing it. You go back and forth, sometimes in the same hour. What helps is asking yourself honest questions. What would be different if I stopped? What worries me about stopping?

3. Preparation: "I'm going to do something about this." "I'm going to a meeting after my first check." You've decided, and you're making a plan. This stage is fragile. It's easy to slip back to "maybe." What helps is making the plan concrete. What will I do when the invite comes? What will I do instead? Who will back me up?

4. Action: "I'm doing it." Six weeks without using. Going to meetings. Taking a different way home so you don't pass the old spot. You're bored and irritable, and you're doing it anyway. This is where the work is, and where it's hardest. What helps is credit for the effort, and help with whatever is getting in the way.

5. Maintenance: "I'm keeping it going." Months in. New habits. But a relapse is always possible, especially under stress: bad news from home, a lost job, a lonely holiday. What helps is remembering how far you've come, and having a plan for a bad week.



STAGE	HE SAYS	WHAT HE NEEDS FROM YOU
1. Precontemplation	*"I don't have a problem."*	A relationship, not a lecture. Plant a seed: "I'm around if you ever want to talk about it."
2. Contemplation	*"Maybe I have a problem, but..."*	Help him weigh it himself: "What would be different if you stopped?"
3. Preparation	*"I'm going to do something about this."*	Help him make the plan concrete. Fragile: he can slip back.
4. Action	*"I'm doing it."*	Encouragement, credit for the effort, help with obstacles.
5. Maintenance	*"I'm keeping it going."*	Remind him how far he's come. Relapse is possible, especially under stress.

The Stages of Change, from FORGE Week 16.

Two more things about the stages.

You can be in different stages on different things. You might be in Action on drinking and in Contemplation on the old crowd. That's normal. Be honest about each one.

Nobody moves in a straight line. Men go forward and back and forward again. Going back a stage doesn't put you back at the start. It tells you what kind of help you need now.

So here is the first question of this chapter. With the change that matters most to you right now, which stage are you in? You don't have to say it out loud. Just know it.

Triggers: know them before they show up

A **trigger** is anything that pulls you back toward the old way. Out here, triggers come from places you might not expect: payday, a celebration, the old block, a fight at home, a night alone, a "no" on a job, even good news.

Knowing your triggers ahead of time is half the plan. Before a man goes home, a FORGE mentor asks him four questions. Ask them of yourself.

> **FOUR QUESTIONS BEFORE THE PULL COMES**
>
> **1.** What's my plan for staying clean (or keeping my change)? **2.** What are my triggers? **3.** Who's in my support network? **4.** What will I do in the first 48 hours if I feel the pull?

A slip is information, not the end

Now the hard part. If you slip, it is information. It is not the end. One setback does not erase the growth that came before it.

After a slip, the question is not "Am I a failure?" The questions are:

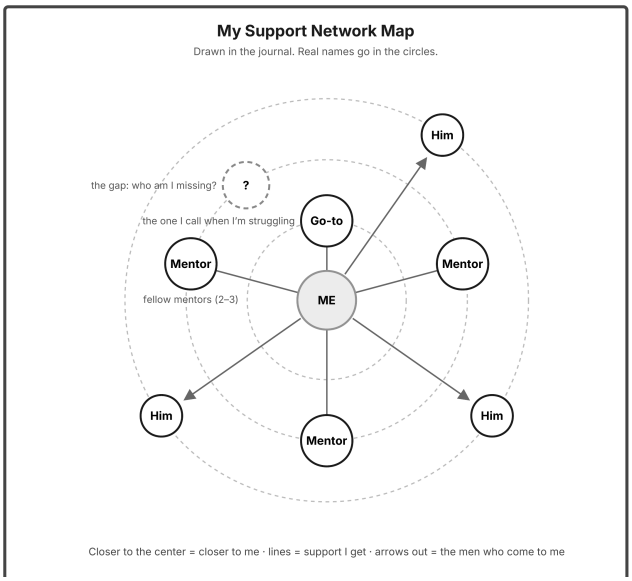
- What triggered it?
- What was I thinking?
- What's my next right step?

The worst thing you can do after a slip is hide it. Hiding it is how one slip turns back into the old life. Tell your mentor or your go-to person **the same day.**

> **SAFETY, SAID PLAINLY**
>
> While you were inside, your tolerance dropped. If you use the amount you used before, it can cause an overdose. **Naloxone, also called Narcan, reverses an opioid overdose.** Know where to get it, and write it on the contacts page at the back of this book. In an emergency, call 911.

The support network map

Nobody carries this alone. In FORGE, mentors draw a map of the people who hold them up. You can draw one too.



A support network map, from FORGE Week 33.

1. **Put yourself in the center.**
2. **Your go-to person goes closest.** This is the one you call when you're struggling. Not the one who's the most fun. The one who will pick up, and tell you the truth.
3. **Around them, two or three people who support you.** People who get it. Maybe from a meeting, maybe from the house, maybe from your family. In the FORGE drawing these are fellow mentors. Out here, they're whoever has your back on this change.
4. **Then the people who come to you.** The men who lean on you count too. Being needed is part of what holds you up.
5. **Then the most important part: the gap.** What kind of support are you missing? A sponsor? Someone sober to spend the weekend with? Someone who'll answer at 2 a.m.?

If your map has you in the middle and nobody around you, that's the most important thing you'll learn from this chapter. Fix it this week. Ask a man from the house. Go to one meeting and get one phone number. Ask your mentor who could fill the gap.

One more test for every name on your map: is this person good for my recovery, or just good company? Both matter. They are not the same thing.

Out here

Here's how the tools work in real moments. Read each one and ask yourself what you would have done.

The invite. Back to payday. Your friend is leaning out the window. "Get in. Just one."

What's the trigger? It isn't only the friend. It's payday, and the feeling of having earned something. That feeling says, "You deserve a reward." That's the moment to know ahead of time.

The thought "I could handle one" might show up. Walk it forward. Then what happens next payday? What happens at your next test or check-in?

Now try it with a plan. You have a line ready: "Man, it's good to see you. I can't today. I've got somewhere to be." You have a way to leave: you keep walking toward the bus stop. And within five minutes you call your go-to person: "That was close. Talk to me for a minute."

Notice what saying no did not mean. It didn't mean cutting your friend off forever. It meant not getting in the car today.

If drinking or using isn't your thing, change the invite. It's the dice game. It's the old block. It's a quick way to make fast money. The plan is the same: a line to say, a way to leave, and a call.

Six good weeks, then a bad night. Say you've been in Action on drinking for two months. Then your job ends on a Friday. That night you drink.

Saturday morning, shame says, "I'm right back where I started. Why bother?" Hiding says, "Nobody needs to know." Both of those lead back to the old life.

Information says something different. What triggered it? Losing the job, and a night alone with no plan. What was I thinking? "I've got nothing to lose now." What's my next right step? Tell my mentor today. Go to a meeting tonight. Put the job search back in my plan.

Two months of work did not disappear in one night. The growth is still there. What you do on Saturday decides whether it stays.

"I've got it handled." Say you're five months in. New routine, new job, a meeting most weeks. You're in Maintenance, and it feels solid. Then a holiday comes. Your family has plans that don't include you. You're alone on a day that used to mean something.

This is where Maintenance gets tested. The man who says "I've got it handled" often has no plan for the bad week. The man who stays steady planned for it. He knew the holiday was coming. He set up somewhere to be. He called his go-to person before the day, not after.

The old crowd. Not every change is about a drink or a drug. Say your change is the old crowd. You know it: "They're bad news, but they're the only ones who picked me up when I got out." That's Contemplation. You're weighing it.

Don't beat yourself up for being there. Use it. Ask the questions that help in that stage. What would be different if I stopped hanging around them? What worries me about it? Who else could I spend Saturday with? When you can answer those, you're moving toward Preparation.

Watch for

"I don't have a drug problem. Why does this chapter apply to me?" Good. Then pick the change you are working on: your temper, your spending, the people you used to run with. The stages are the same. And someone on your map may need you to know this.

"Meetings aren't for me." That's your call. There's more than one kind of meeting and more than one kind of support. Try a couple before you decide. What matters is that you have something, and someone, before the pull comes.

"If I tell anybody I slipped, I'll lose my bed or get violated." That fear is real, and nobody can promise you how it will turn out. Here's what is true. Ask your mentor what the house policy is on a slip, before you ever need to know. The house can't keep a house-agreement violation secret, and your mentor will tell you that straight. Questions about your supervision go to POD Society legal services. Never hide anything from your officer. Lying about a slip usually makes everything that follows worse.

"I could handle one." Maybe. Walk it forward. Then what happens the next payday? What happens at your next test or check-in?

War stories. When men talk about the old days, it's easy to remember only the good parts. Catch yourself. Ask, "That's what it felt like then. What did it cost?"

After you leave the house

The walls are gone, and soon the house will be too. The pull isn't going anywhere. Keep doing this:

- **Keep your map current.** People move, change numbers and drift away. Once a month, look at your map. Is your go-to person still the one you'd call? Where's the gap now?
- **Call someone on a good day.** Make one call a week to someone on your map when nothing is wrong. That way the number works on a bad day.
- **Find support near your new address before you move.** A meeting, a group, a place of worship, a man who gets it. Don't wait until you need it.
- **Name your new triggers.** A new place brings new ones: a payday with no curfew, a holiday with no house circle, a neighbor who drinks on the porch.

- **Ask yourself which stage you're in.** Once a month, for each change you're keeping. If you've gone back a stage, that's information. Get the kind of help that stage needs.
- **If you slip, tell someone the same day.** Your old mentor, your go-to person, a man from the house. Then take the next right step.
- **Know where to get naloxone,** and keep it where you can find it. In an emergency, call 911.

Remember

- Change happens in stages, and nobody moves in a straight line.
- Know your triggers before they show up. Payday counts. Good news counts.
- A slip is information, not the end. Don't hide it. Tell someone the same day.
- Your tolerance is lower than it was. Naloxone (Narcan) reverses an opioid overdose. In an emergency, call 911.
- Nobody carries this alone. Know your go-to person, and fill the gap.

Try it

1. A change I'm working on, and where I am with it. Be honest. Nobody sees this unless you show them.

The change	My stage (1 to 5)	What would help me right now

2. My triggers. Two triggers you expect in the next month, and your plan for each.

Trigger	My plan: a line to say, a way to leave, who I'll call

3. My support network. Closest to you first. Then name the gap.

My support network	Name	Number
My go-to person: the one I call when I'm struggling		
Someone who supports me		
Someone who supports me		
Someone who supports me		
Someone who comes to me		
The gap: who or what I'm missing		

One step that would fill the gap:

4. Where I'll find support. Ask your mentor for these, and copy them onto the contacts page at the back of this book.

What	Name, place or number
A meeting or support I'll try, and when	
Recovery support contact	
Where to get naloxone (Narcan)	
Crisis line	

5. If the pull comes, or if I slip.

In the first 48 hours after I feel the pull, I will:

If I slip, the first person I tell, the same day:

6. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too):

CHAPTER 10

When It Goes Wrong

The big idea

Two days ago you got let go from your job. You were late three times after they warned you, and the third time was the last. You haven't told anyone yet. You keep meaning to.

It's the middle of the day. Your mentor sees you in the hallway. "Hey, I thought you worked the early shift. What are you doing home?"

What you say in the next ten seconds matters more than the job you lost.

Something will go wrong for almost every man coming home. A job ends. A check-in gets missed. A visit home turns into a shouting match. A slip in recovery. A violation. That isn't a prediction about you. It's what life out here is like.

What decides the next six months is usually not the setback. It's what you do in the next few hours. You can hide it, blame someone, or disappear. Or you can own it and tell the people who need to know.

This chapter gives you a way to own a setback fully without deciding you are worthless. That's accountability without shame. It also shows you what to do when the setback is another man's, and he comes to you.

The tool: the accountability spectrum

When something goes wrong, every man lands somewhere on a line. FORGE calls it the **accountability spectrum.** It has five levels. Here's a lost job at each one:

1. **Denial:** "I didn't do anything. They just fired me."
2. **Minimization:** "I was just a little late. It wasn't a big deal." Watch the word "just." It shrinks things.
3. **Blame-shifting:** "The manager had it in for me. If the bus had come on time..."
4. **Partial ownership:** "I messed up, but they never gave me a chance." Everything after the "but" takes back what came before it.
5. **Full accountability:** "I was late three times after they warned me. I lost the job. That's on me. Here's what I'm doing next."

Full accountability does not mean the manager was fair. It doesn't mean the bus was on time. It means you own your part, all of it, with no "but."

Here's why that matters out here. **The only part of a setback you can fix is your part.** If it's all somebody else's fault, there's nothing for you to do but wait for it to happen again.

Listen to yourself the next time something goes wrong. Your first sentence will often come from level 2, 3 or 4. That's normal. What matters is where you end up.

Guilt, not shame

Why do men get stuck at levels 2, 3 and 4? Usually it's shame.

Guilt says, "I did something bad." Shame says, "I am bad."

Guilt is about an action. An action can be owned, repaired and changed. Shame is about who you are. And if you're bad, there's nothing to fix, so why try?

Shame is what makes a man hide a missed check-in. It's what makes him stop answering his phone and stop coming to class. A man drowning in shame doesn't think, "I should do better." He thinks, "What's the point?"

Here's a test you can use. When you think about what went wrong, how do you feel? If you feel determined ("I need to do this differently"), that's guilt doing its job. If you feel worthless ("I'm garbage, so it doesn't matter what I do"), that's shame taking over. When you hit shame, say something to someone. Shame grows when you're alone with it.

Accountability without shame sounds like this: "I did this. It caused this. I'm the kind of man who owns it and fixes it."

And remember: **one setback does not erase growth.** Six good weeks and one bad day is still six good weeks.

After a setback: four steps in the first hours

Not the first weeks. The first hours.

AFTER A SETBACK

1. Own it. 2. Tell it early. 3. Take the next right step. 4. Ask for help.

1. Own it. Say it to yourself the way FORGE writes an accountability statement:

> *"I [what I did]. It caused [what it caused]. I take full responsibility. I'm committed to [what I'll do]."*

For the lost job: “I was late three times after a warning. It cost me my job, and it puts my rent and my plan at risk. I take full responsibility. I’m committed to finding work and being early every day at the next job.”

2. Tell it early. Tell your mentor first, the same day. If it touches your supervision, tell your officer, as your conditions require. That can mean a missed check-in, a change of job or address, contact with police, or anything else your conditions say you must report. If you’re not sure whether something has to be reported, ask the same day: your mentor, and POD Society legal services (the number is on the contacts page at the back of this book). Not knowing is not a reason to stay quiet. And never hide anything from your officer. Being found out is worse than telling.

3. Take the next right step. Not the whole fix. One step. Call the temp agency. Reschedule the appointment. Go to a meeting. Apologize.

4. Ask for help. Your mentor, your go-to person, the men in your class. You don’t have to carry it alone.

When it’s another man’s setback

Sooner or later a man in the house will have a setback, and you’ll be the one he tells. What you do then matters too.

Start with presence, not disappointment: “I heard what happened. I’m here. What’s going on?” Don’t avoid him because it’s awkward. Don’t lecture him. “You should have known better” helps nobody. Help him find the next step, not the whole fix.

When FORGE mentors bring a problem to their group, they use a **case presentation,** so the group gives help, not judgment. You can use the same shape when a man brings you a setback, or when you bring yours to someone:

1. **The situation:** what happened, just the facts.
2. **What I did:** how I responded.
3. **What I’m stuck on:** the question I can’t answer.
4. **The response:** questions first, then suggestions. No judgment. No “I would have done it better.” Just help.
5. **The takeaway:** what I’ll do next, with that help.

Keep two things in mind. **You are responsible for your effort. You are not responsible for his outcome.** And if what he tells you is about someone’s safety, a new crime or the house agreement, it goes to staff. That’s not betrayal. That’s the job.

Out here

Here are four moments. Read each one and ask yourself what you would have done.

The hallway. Back to your mentor: "What are you doing home?"

Here's one way it can go. "I'm off today." That's denial. Or: "They cut my hours, it's no big deal." That's minimization. Or: "That manager had it in for me from day one." That's blame. Each one buys you a few minutes. Then it costs you. Your mentor finds out anyway, and now the question isn't the job. It's whether he can believe you.

Now the other way. "I got let go two days ago. I was late three times after they warned me. That's on me. I should have told you right away. I'm going to the temp agency tomorrow morning, and I need to tell my officer about the job. Can you help me figure out how to say it?"

That may feel worse for ten seconds. Then it feels better. That's the weight coming off. And your mentor didn't have to drag it out of you. That's what telling early buys you: people who still trust you.

The missed check-in. Say you missed a check-in with your officer. You mixed up the time, or the bus never came. Your first thought: "Maybe nobody will notice. I'll just wait and see."

Walk it forward. What happens when your officer does notice? What does your officer think of you then, compared to if you'd called first?

The other way: you call your officer the same day, as soon as you know. "I missed my check-in today. That's on me. What do you need me to do?" Then you tell your mentor. Nobody can promise you how it will go. But you know which version of you you'd rather be.

The cookout. Say you're three months home. You go to a family cookout. A cousin brings up money, and it turns into an argument. You leave angry. You don't come back to the house until after curfew, and you don't answer your phone. The next morning you're embarrassed. Part of you wants to pack up and leave before anyone can say anything.

That's shame talking: "I already blew it. They'll look at me different now. Why stay?"

Guilt says something else: "I broke curfew and didn't answer my phone. People were worried. I own that." Then the four steps. Own it. Tell it early: find your mentor this morning, before anyone has to come find you. Take the next right step: ask what you need to do to make it right with the house. Ask for help. "How do I face the house?" is a good question to bring to your mentor. It's exactly what a case presentation is for.

One bad night doesn't erase three good months. Leaving would.

When he tells you. Now flip it. A man in the house, a few weeks newer than you, tells you he slipped last night and hasn't told anyone. You might feel let down. You might want to tell him what he should have done.

Start with presence: "I'm glad you told me. I'm here. What happened?" Let him tell it. Ask what he's stuck on. Then help him find one step: "Who do you need to tell today? Want me to walk with you to your mentor?" You don't keep his secret, and you don't fix his life. You help him take the next step.

Watch for

"If I tell my officer, I'll get violated." Nobody can tell you what your officer will do, and this book won't guess. Here's what is true: being found out later usually goes worse than telling early, and hiding something from your officer is never the answer. If you need to know what your conditions require, call POD Society legal services today.

"It wasn't my fault." Sometimes part of it wasn't. Maybe the schedule really was unfair. Fine. What was your part? That's the only part you can change.

"I've already been punished enough." Maybe you have. But consequences are what happened to you. Accountability is what you do next. They're different things.

The "but." "I got let go, but the manager had it in for me." Catch the "but" in your own sentences. Then say the sentence again without it.

"I always mess it up." That's shame, not accountability. You did one thing. Stay with that one thing. What's the next step?

After you leave the house

On your own, nobody will stop you in the hallway. You'll have to be the one who tells. Keep doing this:

- **Know your first call now.** Pick the first person you'll tell when something goes wrong. Put the number in your phone and on the contacts page at the back of this book. Decide it on a good day.
- **Keep the same-day rule.** Whatever goes wrong, someone who can help hears about it the same day.
- **Write the accountability statement.** "I [what I did]. It caused [what it caused]. I take full responsibility. I'm committed to [what I'll do]." Write it down before you say it, if that helps.

- **When you're not sure whether to report something, ask.** Your old mentor, or legal services. The same day.
- **Count the good weeks.** When a setback comes, write down what you did right before it. That growth is still there.
- **Be the man others can tell.** When someone brings you his setback, start with presence. Help him find one next step.

Remember

- What decides the next six months is usually not the setback. It's the next few hours.
- Own it with no "but." The only part you can fix is your part.
- Guilt says, "I did something bad." Shame says, "I am bad." Stay with the action.
- Own it, tell it early, take the next right step, ask for help. Never hide anything from your officer.
- One setback does not erase growth.

Try it

1. Where did I land? Think of a time since you came home when something went wrong. What did you say first? Where is that on the spectrum? Now say it with no "but."

What I said at first	Level (1 to 5)	Said with full accountability

2. Guilt, not shame. Write a shame thought you've had about yourself. Then rewrite it as guilt: about the action, not about who you are.

Shame says: "I am…"	Guilt says: "I did…"

3. My early-warning plan. Who you'll tell when something goes wrong, written down before anything does.

Who	Name	Number
The first person I'll tell		
My mentor		
My officer		
POD Society legal services		

4. My accountability statement. Pick a setback you're facing now, or one that could happen. Fill in each part.

I (what I did):

It caused (what it caused):

I take full responsibility. I'm committed to (what I'll do):

---

5. When it's another man's setback. Someone in the house who is having a hard time, and how I'll show up for him:

---

6. My step for this week (write it in your Reentry Plan too). If something is going wrong right now, write the next right step and who you'll tell. If not, write your early-warning plan.

CHAPTER 11

Giving Back

The big idea

A new man moved into the house four days ago. Tonight he's out on the porch with his bag packed.

"This is prison with a nicer door," he says. "Curfew, chores, classes, everybody in my business. My cousin says I can stay with them. I'm out of here this weekend."

You've been in the house a few months. You remember feeling the same way. What do you say?

Your first move will be to tell him what to do. "Don't be stupid. You'll be back inside in a month." It almost never works. When someone pushes, people push back.

This chapter is about giving back, and how to do it so it actually helps. Service can look like something for later, when the bills are paid and life is settled. FORGE says no. **Giving back is part of staying out.** When somebody is counting on you, you have a reason to be the man you said you'd be. And a newer man is watching you to see if it's possible.

The tool: Service Over Self

Men in FORGE learn an elevator speech in their first week inside. It ends with this line:

> *"Our goal is simple: to turn time served into time that serves others."*

That's **Service Over Self.** It's easy to get wrong, so start with what it is not.

- **It is not submission.** It doesn't mean letting people walk over you, or saying yes to everything.
- **It is not performing.** Helping only when someone's watching is image management, not service.
- **It is not control.** "I know what's best for you" isn't service. Neither is telling everybody what to do because you went through a program.

Here's what it is: **a daily decision to make things better for the people around you, even when it costs you something.** It's the man who sits down with the new arrival and says, "Let me show you how things work here."

Think back to your first days home. Did someone help you without being asked? Maybe he showed you the bus, or found you a shirt for an interview, or sat with you when your head was loud. You probably still remember him. That's what service looks like from the other side.

The credible messenger

FORGE has a name for a man who has walked the road and come through it: a **credible messenger.** He can say things nobody else can: "I know what you're going through. I've been there. I found a way through it."

Your past is not a disqualification. If you've done the work, it's a credential. The new man on the porch may not listen to staff. He may listen to you, because not long ago you were him.

And it spreads. You help one man. He handles something better. He helps the next one. FORGE calls this the ripple effect. You'll never see most of it, and you won't get credit for it. It happens anyway.

OARS: helping a man who doesn't want help

When a man is about to make a bad decision, your instinct is to tell him what to do. Telling him usually makes him dig in. FORGE mentors learn four skills that help a man find his own reasons instead. They spell **OARS.** Think of a rowboat: you're rowing alongside him, not dragging him to shore.

O: Open questions. A closed question gets one word. "Are you okay?" "Fine." An open question gets him talking: "What's going on with you today?" "What would it take for this to work for you?" Open doesn't mean vague. "How's life?" is open, but it goes nowhere. Ask about something real.

A: Affirmations. Not flattery. Not "Good job." An affirmation is something true you noticed, said plainly. FORGE has three rules for it. Make it **specific:** name exactly what he did. Make it **genuine:** if you don't mean it, don't say it. Make it about **effort:** the choice and the work, not just how it turned out. "You've made every shift for three weeks, even with the bus. That takes discipline." A lot of men coming home have heard mostly what's wrong with them. An honest affirmation shows a man something real about himself that he couldn't see.

R: Reflections. Say back what you heard, as a statement, not a question. A simple reflection puts his words in your own: "You're tired of people being in your business." A deeper one names what's underneath: "You got out to be free, and this doesn't feel free yet." Watch the question mark. "So you're tired of it?" puts him on the defensive. "You're tired of it." lets him keep talking.

S: Summaries. Pull it all together, then check it: "So you want your own space, you're worn out by the rules, and part of you knows this is the steadiest place you've had. Did I get that right?"

While you listen, listen for one thing: **the part of him that wants to change, or wants to stay.** "I know I need this." "I don't want to go back." When you hear it, reflect it back, and put it in your summary. His reasons will hold longer than yours.

OARS

Open questions: get him talking. **Affirmations:** specific, genuine, about effort. **Reflections:** say back what you heard, as a statement. **Summaries:** pull it together, then ask, "Did I get that right?"

Where you can serve

You have more ways to serve than you think.

- **In the house:** be an anchor for a new man at his first class. Sit with him. Explain how things work. On your second time through the classes, be a peer helper.
- **With POD Society:** ask your mentor what's open right now: _____
- **In your neighborhood, your family, your meeting, your place of worship:** show up for somebody.

One line to keep clear: **peer helpers are not staff.** You don't enforce house rules. You don't report on other men "to help." And you don't keep a man's secrets about safety. If a man is in danger, or says he'll hurt someone, that goes to staff. That's not snitching. That's the job.

Out here

The porch. Back to the new man with the packed bag. This time, use OARS. Don't give advice. Don't try to talk him into staying. Just explore. Here's how it might go.

You sit down next to him. "Four days. What's it been like?" *(Open question.)*

"It's a lot. Everybody's got a rule. I didn't get out to be told when to go to bed."

"You got out to be free, and this doesn't feel free yet." *(Reflection.)*

"Yeah. Exactly. And my cousin's got room."

"What would it look like, staying at your cousin's?" *(Open question.)*

"I mean, it's their place. People come through all night. I don't know. I'm supposed to be working by next month, and I don't even know where the bus goes from there."

"You've been to every class and every appointment this week, even mad about all of it. That takes something." *(Affirmation.)*

"I just don't want to go back."

There it is. That's the part of him that wants to stay. You don't jump on it. You reflect it: "Going back is the last thing you want." Then you sum it up: "So you're tired of the rules, your cousin's place sounds like freedom, and you're not sure it would keep you out. Did I get that right?" *(Summary.)*

A good way to close: "Would you be willing to talk to your mentor before you decide?" That's an offer, not an order.

Notice what you didn't do. You didn't threaten. You didn't lecture. You didn't promise anything. If he asks what happens to his supervision if he leaves, don't guess. That's a question for staff and POD Society legal services, and it's his to ask.

He might leave anyway. You're responsible for your effort, not his outcome. But that night he had what he needed most: a man who listened.

Three acts in one week. Service doesn't have to be big. Say you pick three things to do before your next class:

- Walk the new man to the bus stop and show him the route before his first shift.
- Cook for the house on a night when everybody's tired.
- Sit with a man who's having a bad day, and mostly listen.

FORGE uses three rules for this, inside and out: it's for someone else's benefit, you don't ask for credit, and you write down what you did and how it went. One line is enough: "Showed the new man the bus route. He made his first shift on time." That last part matters. On a bad week, it shows you that you're still a man who gives.

"I've got nothing to give." Say it's your second week. You're behind on everything. You don't have a job yet. Service sounds like something for men who have it together. Then a new man moves in, and at his first class you're the one sitting next to him. You show him where to sign in. You tell him, "It was strange for me too." That's service. The newest man in the room can still hold a door, sit with someone, or show up on time for someone else.

Watch for

"I need to take care of myself first." You do. Service doesn't mean giving away your rent money or your sleep. It means using some of your time for something bigger than your own comfort. And taking care of yourself is what keeps you able to serve.

"This feels fake." The first time you use OARS, it will. Everything feels fake the first time. If you did FORGE inside, STOP probably felt fake at first too. It gets real with practice.

"Why can't I just tell him the truth?" You can, and sometimes you should. But when a man is digging in, telling him what to do usually makes him dig in harder. OARS helps him find his own reasons, and his reasons last longer than yours.

"I just want to fix him." That comes from caring, and your caring is worth a lot. Point it at listening, not at fixing.

"Helping means keeping him in line." Some men try to help by policing: telling other men the rules, or carrying every little thing to staff. That isn't your job. Peer helpers support. Staff handle house rules and safety.

Helping for credit. If you notice you mostly help when staff are watching, or so people will think well of you, be honest with yourself about it. This week, do one thing for someone that nobody will ever know about.

After you leave the house

Service doesn't stay behind when you move out. It's one of the things that keeps you out. Keep doing this:

- **Keep a service step in your Reentry Plan.** One act a week, with a who and a when.
- **Come back.** Men who complete the program are invited back to class as alumni guests. A man who was where the new men are, and made it, is often the voice they hear best.
- **Be a credible messenger where you live.** At work, at your meeting, on your block, in your family. Somebody coming home after you needs to see that it's possible.
- **Use OARS at home.** With your kids, your partner, a coworker who's struggling. Ask one open question. Give one real affirmation. Reflect what you hear before you answer.

- **Keep your own support.** You can't give from an empty tank. Keep your go-to person, your meeting and your routines, so you have something to give. Taking care of yourself is part of serving.
- **Remember the ripple.** You won't see most of what your help does. Do it anyway.

Remember

- Turn time served into time that serves others.
- Service is not submission, not performing, and not control.
- Your past is not a disqualification. If you've done the work, it's a credential.
- OARS: open questions, affirmations, reflections, summaries. Listen for his reasons, not yours.
- Peer helpers are not staff. Safety goes to staff.

Try it

1. Service Over Self, in my own words. What it is, and what it is not:

2. Open questions. Turn each closed question into an open one.

Closed question	Open question
"Are you okay?"	
"Did you go to work today?"	
"Are you going to stay in the house?"	

3. A real affirmation. Pick a real man in the house. Write one affirmation for him: specific, genuine, about effort. Then say it to him this week.

4. Reflections. Write a reflection for each one, as a statement, not a question.

He says	My reflection
"Everybody in this house is in my business."	
"I don't know why I even keep applying."	
"My son won't even pick up the phone."	

5. Three acts of service before next class. For someone else's benefit, no credit asked. Write down how it went.

Act of service	For whom	How it went

6. My step for this week (Service, with a who and a when; write it in your Reentry Plan too):

CHAPTER 12

Your Next Address

The big idea

You've been in the house four months. You're working. You've got a little saved. Then your cousin calls.

"Room's open at my place. Come on over this weekend. Don't worry about rent for now."

A room of your own. No curfew. No chore list on the wall. It sounds like the next step. Maybe it is.

Or maybe it's the porch where the old crew sits every night. Maybe "don't worry about rent" lasts until the first argument. Maybe your cousin changes his mind in a month, and you're out with nowhere to go.

The Reentry Home is a place to land, not a place to stay. Every man moves out. And the move is one of the riskiest points of coming home: new rent, new neighbors, no curfew, no house circle, no staff down the hall. A move you planned months ahead, with savings and a backup, is a step up. A move that happens in a rush can undo what you built in the house.

This chapter is about planning your next address. If you moved in last week, this chapter is for you too. The best time to start this plan is now.

The tool: three questions and a backup

Housing is the foundation. Without a steady place to live, the job, the check-ins and the family all get harder. FORGE mentors learn to start housing plans early, long before the day, and to ask three questions:

> **THE THREE QUESTIONS**
>
> **1.** Where will I sleep the first night after I leave this house? **2.** Where will I be in a month? **3.** If that falls through, what's my backup?

A plan with no backup is a hope. Things fall through. An apartment goes to someone else. A roommate backs out. A family member changes their mind. When that happens to a man with a backup, it's a bad week. When it happens to a man without one, he can end up on the first couch anyone offers, and that couch decides his next month.

Family housing is not always safe or stable

FORGE teaches this plainly. Just because someone offers doesn't mean it's the right choice. A room at your cousin's is not a good plan if the old crew is on that porch every night. Some households aren't safe to go back to, for you or for them.

That doesn't mean family is the wrong answer. It may be the right one. It means you ask the same questions about a family offer that you'd ask about any place:

- Is it safe for me? And am I safe for it?
- Is it stable?
- What happens if it falls through?

Money for the move

Your **savings target** is the money you need in hand on moving day. Write down what it has to cover:

- a deposit
- the first month's rent
- getting the lights and water turned on
- a bed and the basics
- the move itself
- a cushion for the first month, in case something goes wrong

Put real numbers on it with your mentor. Then work backward. How much a week, starting when? If the weekly number is more than you can save, move the month. Don't drop the backup or the cushion.

FORGE teaches **pay yourself first.** Savings come out when the check comes in, before anything else. Not what's left at the end of the week, because there won't be anything left. Small amounts count. At first, the habit matters more than the amount. Chapter 5 has the budget that makes room for it.

What landlords look at

It varies, so ask each one. In general, a landlord wants to know you can pay. Expect to be asked for:

- proof of income, like pay stubs
- an ID

- the deposit

Many landlords ask for references and where you've lived before. Some run a background or credit check. Ask POD Society about a reference from the house.

When your record comes up

If your record comes up, talk about it the way FORGE mentors learn to: **honestly, briefly, and looking forward.** Three parts:

1. **What happened,** in a sentence.
2. **What you've done since.**
3. **What you can show them now.**

Then ask: "What would you need to see to feel comfortable?"

Questions about what a landlord is allowed to ask, or about your rights as a renter, are legal questions. Take them to POD Society legal services. What this chapter can help with is how you answer.

Keep what works

Before FORGE mentors are certified, each one writes a **Personal Sustainability Plan.** It names his warning signs, his daily and weekly practices, his go-to person and a backup person, and what he'll do when he notices a warning sign. The idea is simple: the things that keep you steady don't keep themselves going when the setting changes.

When you leave the house, the structure stays behind: the curfew, the circle, the staff. What goes with you is what you've built. Your routines: the time you get up, the meeting you go to, the check-in you never miss. Your mentor. Your support network. This class, if you come back as an alumni guest.

Moving out is not the end of the relationship. Plan how you'll stay connected before you go.

Out here

The cousin's offer. Back to the phone call. Before you say yes or no, ask the three questions. The first night: your cousin's. In a month: still your cousin's, if it works out. The backup: nothing yet. That's the gap.

Now the other questions. Is it safe for you? Who's on that porch at night? Are you safe for it? Is anything going on in that house that pulls on your old life? Is it stable? What happens if you and your cousin fall out?

Maybe the answers are good. Then the cousin's room is Plan A, and you still line up a Plan B before you go. Maybe the answers aren't good. Then you thank him and say no for now: "I appreciate it, for real. I'm going to stay put until I have my own place lined up." Turning down a free room is hard. Losing what you built in the house is harder.

The landlord. Say you're ready to move. Steady job, savings for the deposit. You go to see an apartment. It's small but clean, on a bus line. The landlord is friendly until the question comes: "So where are you living now?" You say a reentry home.

"Oh. So you've been locked up. I'll be straight with you, I've had problems with people coming out of programs."

Your face gets hot. A thought comes fast: "Here we go. Nobody's ever going to give me a chance." Is that a fact? It's one landlord.

Here's what not to do: argue, walk out, or lie about where you live. Walk the lie forward. What happens when the landlord calls your reference, or finds out later? What does that do to the trust you need for a lease?

Here's honestly, briefly and looking forward: "I understand. I served time for [one sentence]. Since I came home, I've worked at [the job] for five months without missing a day. I've saved the deposit. I brought pay stubs and a reference from the house. What would you need to see to feel comfortable?"

The landlord may still say no. That's why you have a backup. No today isn't no forever, and one landlord isn't every landlord. Notice what helped most: something to show. Pay stubs, savings, a reference. That's what the months in the house are for.

Plan A falls through. Say the apartment you were counting on goes to someone else a week before your move. If Plan A was your only plan, this is a crisis. If you have a Plan B, it's a bad week. You call your mentor. You go back to your list of places to look. You ask what your options are on your move date if you need more time. You keep saving. You keep going.

Scared to go. Some men can't wait to leave. Some are scared to. Both are normal. If the move scares you, look at what goes with you: your routines, your mentor, your support network, your Reentry Plan, this book. You're not starting over. You're taking it with you.

Watch for

"My family said I can come home." That may be the right place. Ask the questions anyway. Is it safe? Is it stable? What happens if it falls through?

"Nobody will rent to me." That's a thought that feels like a fact. Some landlords will say no. Some won't. Plan for several no's, and for the yes.

"I can't save anything. Everything goes to bills." Pay yourself first: save before you spend, not after. Start small. Build the habit first, then the amount. Go back to your budget from Chapter 5.

"I'll figure it out when it's time." When it's time is when you have the fewest choices. What would you need in place to leave with a choice instead of in a rush?

"I just want out." If you're pushing to leave before the savings or the backup are ready, ask yourself what you're running from. Talk to your mentor before you decide.

"What can a landlord legally ask me?" That's a legal question. Ask POD Society legal services. Your part is how you answer: honestly, briefly, and looking forward.

After you leave the house

The first month at a new address is a test. Nobody checks your curfew. Nobody is down the hall. Keep doing this:

- **Keep your routines.** Get up at the same time. Go to the same meeting. Never miss a check-in. Routines kept you steady in the house. They'll keep you steady out here.
- **Write a new Reentry Plan.** New address, new plan. Go through all eight areas again, the way you did at Orientation.
- **Keep paying yourself first.** Rebuild the cushion. Keep a backup, even when you feel settled.
- **Stay connected.** Keep meeting with your mentor. Ask how men stay connected to the house after they leave: _____. Come back as an alumni guest when you're invited.
- **Watch your warning signs.** When you notice one, do what your plan says, and call your go-to person.

What goes with you

This is the last chapter of this book. It is not the end of the work.

You came into the house with a bag and a release date. You leave with a lot more. You have a way to catch a thought before it makes your decisions. A way to stay steady when someone with power over you pushes. A story you can tell an employer in two minutes, and a way to settle a conflict at work without losing the job. A budget. A way to own what you did with the people you hurt. A map of who helps you and who doesn't. A way to see it coming before you boil over. A plan for when the pull comes, and a plan for when it goes wrong anyway. And you have a reason to keep going: the man coming home behind you.

None of it works by knowing it. It works by using it, on a hard day, when nobody is grading you. You'll get some of it wrong. Everybody does. When you do, go back to the chapter. Catch the thought. Own it, with no "but." Take the next right step. One setback does not erase growth.

The tools are at the back of this book, a few pages for a quick look before a hard day. The numbers you need are there too. Keep the book where you can find it.

You don't get handed a good life after prison. You build it, one choice, one week, one kept promise at a time. You've been doing that in the house. Keep doing it at your next address, and the one after that. And when you can, turn around and help the next man home.

Remember

- Start the plan now. The three questions: the first night, a month from now, the backup.
- A plan with no backup is a hope. Ask the same questions about a family offer.
- Pay yourself first. The habit matters more than the amount.
- When your record comes up: honestly, briefly, looking forward. Then show them something.
- The structure stays in the house. What you built goes with you.

Try it

1. My move-out plan. The first three rows are the three questions. Blank spaces are fine. They tell you and your mentor what to work on.

My move-out plan	What I have so far
The first night after I leave this house, I sleep at:	
A month from now, I'll be living at (Plan A):	
If that falls through, my backup (Plan B):	
Places to look	
My savings target, and what I have saved	
What landlords will ask me for (pay stubs, ID, references)	
Who I'll stay connected to (my mentor, my go-to person, the house), and how	

2. My savings target. Fill in the amounts with your mentor.

What it has to cover	Amount
A deposit	
The first month's rent	
Getting the lights and water turned on	
A bed and the basics	
The move itself	
A cushion for the first month	
My savings target (the total)	

Saved now _____ **Each week** _____ **Target month** _____

3. When my record comes up. Honestly, briefly, and looking forward.

What happened (one sentence)	What I've done since	What I can show them

4. What goes with me. A short sustainability plan.

My warning signs	What I'll do when I notice one

Two routines I'll keep	My go-to person	My backup person

5. My step for this week (Housing or Money; write it in your Reentry Plan too):

AT A GLANCE

Your Tools

Every tool in this book, on a few pages. When a hard moment is coming, look here first.

THINK, FEEL, ACT (CHAPTER 1)

SITUATION → THOUGHT → FEELING → ACTION → CONSEQUENCE. The thought, not the situation, drives what you feel and do. Ask: Is this a fact or a thought? What's the evidence for it, and against it?

STOP (CHAPTER 1)

Stop: don't say or do anything yet; take one breath. **Think:** what's the thought in my head, and is it a fact?
Options: what are two or three things I could do? **Plan:** pick the one that protects my plan, and do that.

THE 8 THINKING ERRORS (FORGE WEEK 2)

Closed thinking: "Nobody's going to change my mind." **Victim stance:** "She made me do it." **Lack of empathy:** "That's not my problem." **Minimizing:** "I only pushed him." **Power thrust:** "I need to show these people who's in charge." **Entitlement:** "I've been here longer, so I get first pick." **Cognitive indolence:** "Whatever, I'll figure it out." **Discontinuity:** "I know I said I'd be there, but something came up."

THE ESCALATION CURVE (CHAPTER 8)

1 Baseline: calm, thinking clearly. **2 Agitated:** heart rate up, muscles tight, thinking starts to narrow; this is where you can still act. **3 Flooded:** tunnel vision; most bad decisions get made here. **4 Crisis:** full escalation. **5 Recovery:** intensity drops; regret shows up. The further up the curve you go, the harder it is to come back down. Act at Stage 2.

CALMING TOOLS (CHAPTER 8)

4-4-4 breathing: in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4; three times. For when your body is escalating. **5-4-3-2-1 grounding:** 5 things you see, 4 you touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste. For when your mind is racing.

THE 10-10-10 RULE (CHAPTER 7)

Before a pressure decision, ask: How will I feel about this in **10 minutes**? In **10 months**? In **10 years**? The right choice is usually the one that looks best at 10 months and 10 years, not 10 minutes.

THE FORGE 5-STEP CONFLICT MODEL (CHAPTER 4)

1 Pause and posture: don't react; breathe; calm body, hands visible. **2 Name the heat:** "I can see this is heated." Never "Calm down." **3 Facts over stories:** what was said and done, without insults. **4 Needs and options:** what each person needs; two or three ways forward. **5 Agreement and check-back:** who does what, by when; then check back.

SBI FEEDBACK (CHAPTER 4)

Situation: when and where. **Behavior:** what the person actually did, only what anyone could see. **Impact:** the effect on you or the work. No name-calling, no "you always," no guessing what they meant. When you get feedback: listen, don't defend, ask one question, thank them.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY SPECTRUM (CHAPTER 3)

Denial ("I didn't do it") → **Minimization** ("It wasn't that serious") → **Blame-shifting** ("He started it") → **Partial ownership** ("I messed up, but...") → **Full accountability** ("I did this. It caused harm. I'm committed to being different.")

THE 4-STEP ACCOUNTABILITY CONVERSATION (CHAPTER 6)

1 What happened? Facts, not excuses. **2 Who was affected, and how? 3 What needs to happen to make it right? 4 How do we move forward?** Then follow through. The follow-up is the accountability.

THE RELATIONSHIP MAP (CHAPTER 7)

You in the center; your inner circle next; people at more distance in the outer ring. Mark each name: **+** helps your growth, **–** works against it, **?** not sure.

THE STAGES OF CHANGE (CHAPTER 9)

1 Precontemplation: "I don't have a problem." **2 Contemplation:** "Maybe I have a problem, but..." **3 Preparation:** "I'm going to do something about this." **4 Action:** "I'm doing it." **5 Maintenance:** "I'm keeping it going." A slip is information, not the end.

THE SUPPORT NETWORK MAP (CHAPTER 9)

You in the center. Your go-to person closest to you. The people who understand what you're doing next. The men who come to you. And the gap: the kind of support you're missing.

OARS: HOW TO HELP ANOTHER MAN (CHAPTER 11)

Open questions: "What's going on?" not "Are you okay?" **Affirmations:** name real effort. **Reflections:** "It sounds like..." **Summaries:** "So what I'm hearing is... Did I get that right?"

KEEP READING

Books for the Road

Reading is one of the ways men build a new life: it keeps your mind working, it shows you how other people got through hard things, and it gives you words for what you're going through. These are books that men coming home have found worth their time. Most public libraries have them, and a library card is free. Start with whatever pulls you in. Check them off as you go.

Mindset and character

- ☐ **Man's Search for Meaning**, Viktor E. Frankl. A man who survived Nazi concentration camps on what lets a person endure anything: a reason to live. FORGE uses his ideas in Week 10.
- ☐ **Mindset: The New Psychology of Success**, Carol S. Dweck. Why people who believe they can grow, do. The fixed and growth mindsets from FORGE come from here.
- ☐ **Atomic Habits**, James Clear. How small habits, kept every day, add up to a different life. Practical and easy to start.
- ☐ **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People**, Stephen R. Covey. A classic on responsibility, priorities and working with other people.
- ☐ **The Four Agreements**, Don Miguel Ruiz. A short book on keeping your word and not taking things personally.
- ☐ **Emotional Intelligence**, Daniel Goleman. Why managing your emotions matters as much as being smart.
- ☐ **Can't Hurt Me**, David Goggins. A hard-driving memoir about discipline and getting through pain.

Stories of men who changed

- ☐ **The Autobiography of Malcolm X**, as told to Alex Haley. A man who educated himself in prison and came out to change the world around him.
- ☐ **Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison**, Shaka Senghor. Nineteen years inside, the work he did on himself, and the life he built after.
- ☐ **Long Walk to Freedom**, Nelson Mandela. Twenty-seven years in prison, and how he chose not to come out bitter.

- [ ] **Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion**, Gregory Boyle. Stories from Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, which employs former gang members and people coming home.
- [ ] **Just Mercy**, Bryan Stevenson. A lawyer's story of fighting for people on death row, and what justice should look like.
- [ ] **The Other Wes Moore**, Wes Moore. Two men with the same name from the same city, and the choices that took their lives in different directions.

Work and money

- [ ] **The Ex-Offender's Re-Entry Success Guide: Smart Choices for Making It on the Outside**, Ronald L. Krannich. Written for people leaving prison: attitudes, jobs, honesty about your record, and staying out.
- [ ] **What Color Is Your Parachute?**, Richard N. Bolles. The best-known book on finding work you're suited for. Updated often.
- [ ] **The Total Money Makeover**, Dave Ramsey. A step-by-step plan for budgeting, getting out of debt and saving.
- [ ] **How to Win Friends and Influence People**, Dale Carnegie. How to get along with bosses, coworkers and customers. Old, and still useful.

Family and manhood

- [ ] **Letters to a Young Brother**, Hill Harper. Letters to young men about education, self-respect and what success really means.
- [ ] **Between the World and Me**, Ta-Nehisi Coates. A father's letter to his son about growing up Black in America.

Recovery

- [ ] **Alcoholics Anonymous** ("the Big Book"). The basic text of AA, and the stories of the people who started it.
- [ ] **Narcotics Anonymous** ("the Basic Text"). The same for NA. Free meetings in most cities; ask at the house or see the contacts page.

Books I want to read next, and books someone told me about:

KEEP THIS PAGE

The Numbers You Need

Fill this in at Orientation and keep it current. When you move, take it with you.

Who	Name	Phone	Notes
My mentor			
My anchor / a man from the house			
POD Society	Positive Outreach Development Society	(470) 502-5982	Email below
My officer			Check-in day and time:
Legal services			
Recovery support			
Mental health / Mind C.A.R.E.			
Crisis line	Call or text 988	988	Any hour
Emergency		911	
Where to get naloxone (Narcan)			
My employer			
My doctor or clinic			
Family I can call			
Someone who will tell me the truth			

POD Society email: positiveoutreachdevelopment23@gmail.com

Notes