THE BUSINESS SIDE OF EMPLOYMENT REENTRY

We have defined several different approaches to the challenge of moving returning prisoners into sustaining jobs:

1. Traditional: prisoners receive services while incarcerated and/or upon release, competing in the general labor market after release with or without professional counseling and assistance:
   a. Vocational and skills training
   b. Literacy and educational services to improve ability on a job
   c. Mentoring and sponsored arrangements
   d. Work force/job readiness training and indoctrination to improve chances that the returning prisoner will obtain and succeed in an interview
   e. Collateral support: drug treatment or therapy including AA, NA, church groups.
   f. Business receives tax credits and government incentives including contract bidding preference

2. Transitional Employment – a social services and job readiness model. Entails considerable government support

3. Subsidized and created employment – government money, much of it federal stimulus, to support jobs that are reserved for disadvantaged populations including returning prisoners. Examples: City of Chicago program drawing on Breaking Ground and Safer Foundation ($16 creating 650 green jobs).

4. Businesses created to provide jobs and skills training for returning prisoners. There are many models of these: Delancy Street, Fortune Society, Beeline Industries, Inspiration Corporation Café. Most, not all are nonprofits that require external support.

5. Individual Entrepreneurial Enterprises – low-capital innovative businesses, some in the service industries, founded and operated by former prisoners, sometimes serving impacted communities. Virginia describes these as “Funded Self-Employment Enterprises. Examples include owner-operated businesses such as: carpet cleaning, pet walking, woodworking, computer services, etc.

6. Businesses hire prisoners and returning prisoners because of an identified business advantage. Examples include (again) Sheridan construction industries and the Workman Fund in Kansas.

7. Prison industries – may pay low wages and only recently taking on the goal of “reentry,” this approach strikes many as being at odds with union and labor interests and principles of unfair competition. On the other hand, state PIE programs operate at no cost or at a gain to correction’s budget, provide real world competitive business experience, and include programs that pay close to prevailing wages. They may also be instrumental in helping companies compete against foreign competitors and in encouraging businesses not to go overseas.

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