

BOOK REVIEWS

An Ex-con's Guide to Getting Ahead in Today's Society **by J. Blount**

Irving (TX): SJM Family Foundation, 52 pp.

Reviewed by Jon M. Taylor

The *Ex-con's Guide to Getting Ahead in Today's Society* is an invaluable resource guide that every released prisoner should have in their pocket the day they walk out of the prison into freedom. Published by the SJM Family Foundation, Inc., it is written by J. Blount, a former federal prisoner who has, as the cliché goes, literally been there and done that!

From the opening page entitled "Tips", this text is packed with bits of forthright wisdom for soon to be ex-prisoners from the United States such as "don't believe the hype" of all the horror stories one hears behind bars to "stick with your plan". While real world suggestions and practical references are offered throughout, the primary emphasis of the guide is to assist the reader with obtaining education and job skills.

This references guide directs readers to specific programs and little known options, including 1200 low-cost and high-value community colleges, tuition free schools and programs, along with multiple nationwide and practical training options. It also addresses the all too important, everyday, how-to issues of personal finance practices, job searching services, voting rights, free medical care options, as well as volunteer and internship opportunities.

The author also shares illuminating and inspiring examples from her own life story. Detailing how she completed close to 30 "free" Independent Study Courses from the FEMA's Emergency Management Institute, Blount explains how she transferred the continuing Education Units earned to a Credit Banking Service. For a \$350.00 fee she received 26 college credits from a state university. As the author boldly writes, "[y]ou do the math!" For less than \$13.50 a credit hour she "was able to use all 26 college credits as electives towards [a] Bachelor degree in management".

If I have a quibble with the publication it is that it lacks a Table of Contents or Index for quick topical reference, a quirk that will likely be rectified in future editions. Otherwise, soon to be released prisoners, parolees and their family members, as well as professionals in the justice and social service fields will find this guide to be an invaluable reference for planning and addressing the multiple practical needs that the newly released ex-con will experience when returning to society.

Getting Ahead is a readily useable 5 x 8 inch, well laid out 52-page flip guide that every ex-con should have. Every pre-release program should include this guide as part of its curriculum. It is available from the Information Research Network (P.O. Box 167365 / Irving, TX 75016) for \$10.00 postage paid, with bulk discounts readily available. Get this guide and get a head start.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Jon Marc Taylor, PhD, is co-author of the *Prisoners' Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs in the United States and Canada (third edition)* to be published and distributed by Prison Legal News in 2009. In 1989, Taylor's first piece in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, "The Economics of Educational Rehabilitation", appeared in Volume 2(1).