



## Culture Shock Workshop Guide

The goals and objectives below are meant to serve as a guide for individuals or groups working with the Fair Shake Reentry Packet; please adjust as needed according to your group or individual needs.

### Goals and Objectives:

The goals of this workshop are to describe and discuss reentry culture shock issues from as many perspectives as possible. The people going home have the most pronounced culture shock, of course, but the people they are close to will have huge changes as well, and the waves may ripple even further into employment and beyond. We can all get through it more comfortably with a wider perspective and a more fluid and accepting awareness.

Upon completion of this workshop, participants will be able to describe culture shock issues and how they relate to reentry, identify some of the less-obvious but sometimes more-persistent cultural differences between life in prison and life outside of prison, and consider the perspectives of other reentry stakeholders.

**Discussion:** Use the text below for discussions if you'd like. We also encourage you to develop your own questions, or ask the group to come up with questions, around the many Culture Shock considerations. Real life examples have the greatest impact.

### Quotes:

Quotes are 'fire-starters'. They are thought-provoking and effective for making a point or setting the stage for an open discussion. We suggest asking the group if they can provide a quote concerning culture shock and discussing it. We have provided a sample quote:

"Family and friends are waiting to greet you open arms, but not always with open eyes. Facing the unbelievable "newness" of home and the unwillingness of friends to listen leaves returning participants feeling more like strangers in their own country." – *Re-Entry Shock* by Thea Miller

### Culture Shock study guide:

Several elements characterize all types of reentry...from ex-patriots moving home to people coming out of prison to students who study abroad, many feel these things:

- An idealized view of home life
- The expectation of total familiarity (nothing at home has changed while you've been gone)
- Anxiety to get needs met and create economic stability as quickly as possible.

**People may struggle for various reasons as they reenter society.** Attitudes and behaviors that ensure survival in prison (being intimidating, withdrawn, etc.) are counter-productive when it comes to establishing a stable social and emotional life. One must recognize:

- The culture shock of going from every move being dictated to having the freedom to make decisions - and the importance of making responsible decisions - and moving away from behaviors that lead to crime.
- The wisdom to invoke self-discipline and be pro-active rather than reactive
- That prison life is traumatic and in many ways dehumanizing. Being back in society has its own traumas. Basic human needs – food, shelter and clothing, are no longer provided as they were in prison which creates the challenge of having to provide for one's self; usually with minimal skills
- That facing challenges head on with optimism and strength increases your odds of achieving your goals and staying out of prison.

### Exercises

#### **Perspective:**

**Individual:** Think of the lifestyle differences in prison and outside of prison, and then come up with situations where there may be a difference in how you would respond. One situation in prison and one outside of prison. Play the scenario out in your mind with one ineffective response and one effective response, and then consider why you would respond the way that you chose and the possible consequences.

**Groups:** Groups may create skits using the lifestyle differences and act those skits out.

#### **Example:**

**Out of prison:** You're walking down a crowded side walk and someone bumps into you.

**Effective response:** You say excuse me with a smile and continue walking.

**Consequence:** You continue on with your day without incident

**Ineffective response:** You scowl and ask the person "what's your problem?" and demand an apology.

**Consequence:** The person (who's having a bad day) believes that you bumped into them and he or she demands an apology from you. You stand your ground feeling that you were disrespected and the other person feels the same. Now what?

**In prison:** Someone bumps into you in the mess hall and doesn't say "excuse me". (This is a sure sign that a person lacks respect for you. However, in prison this comes with the added pressure of what those that witness the incident think.)

**Positive response:** You brush it off and continue on with your day understanding that the mess hall is a crowded place and they may not have realized that they bumped into you.



## Culture Shock Workshop Guide

**Consequence:** Walking away could convey to the predators that you are prey. This is one of the many ways that a culture (prison) can dictate your actions.

**Ineffective response:** You use a violent response to prove that you're not soft and that you're worthy of respect.

**Consequence:** You'll end up in the hole and possibly create beef that escalates and lasts a lifetime.

In prison you're in survival mode and your options are limited. Even when you want to do the right thing you have to think about what everyone else thinks, not because you're considerate, but because your survival may depend on it.

On the outside you have options and it is very important to keep this in the forefront of your mind. People are most likely not looking to test your toughness.

If you take the prison mindset out into society with you it will eventually lead you back to where those behaviors can be accepted.

### **Other Culture Shock Considerations**

Contribute to the Culture Shock list: There are important considerations that we are missing. When you think of topics to add, or change the ones we have, we hope you'll share your ideas with us (address on the cover). We'd like to share them if possible ~)



**Worksheet**

**There are no right or wrong answers this worksheet is a tool to help you better understand culture shock and create effective ways to handle it.**

1. Give an example of culture shock. What effects could it have? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What are some ways culture shock affects the reentry process? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Do you believe that culture shock is preventable? Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

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4. In your opinion what is the most effective way to approach culture shock? Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

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