

## **Decarceration Nation Episode 25 Richard Branson**

Hello and welcome to Episode 25 of the Decarceration Nation podcast, a podcast about radically reimagining America's criminal justice system.

Holy cow. We've already done 25 episodes since January. My goodness Okay, I guess we have I'm Josh Hoe, among other things I'm a formerly incarcerated freelance writer, criminal justice reform advocate and the author of the book "Writing Your Own Best Story: Addiction & Living Hope.

First the news Well, actually there really isn't any news I haven't written much this week. And I haven't done much in the way of things to report except a lot of interviews over the last couple days. I went to so many meetings this week.

I was kidding around with someone earlier about how meetings for me are usually about five minutes or 10 minutes, things that are really useful to me and another 45 minutes of stuff that I try very hard to stay tuned into.

I guess there's one other thing I should mention that the return of my long running series of Recaps of the show Orange is the New Black which is called "Orange, Black or Bleak?" which are all written from the perspective of formerly incarcerated person will be coming back right after the season six premiere I have written a recap of all 65 current episodes. So I guess I'll be getting back to writing that pretty soon.

I've been kind of obsessed with the question of re entry over the last month in particular with the subject of employment. Since my discussion with Brandon Chrostowski and Thomas Lennon of the Knife Skills documentary a few weeks ago, I also ran an analysis I read an analysis by Fifth Third Bank suggesting that in our current economy, that the most important business opportunity right now is formally incarcerated people there seems like there's a lot of opportunity, but at the same time prison Policy Institute last week published a paper suggesting that employment discrimination against formerly incarcerated folks has never been higher, in fact that problems with employment for formerly incarcerated people are at the highest level, actually a higher level than they were during the Great Depression. So anyway, with this as a backdrop, my interview this week is with Richard Branson.

Richard Branson is the CEO of 70 million jobs. He started his career on Wall Street, it was riding a wave of success before he became one of the people indicted for security

fraud at the Stratton Oakmont the firm whose story was famously shared in the Martin Scorsese movie, "The Wolf of Wall Street." After serving his time, like many of us, Richard struggled with re entry. Eventually finding himself at the five ventures is reentry experiences and form the eventual creation of 70 million jobs website which is backing from Y Combinator, as also was a South by Southwest West accelerator pitch finalist. Richard, welcome to the incarceration nation podcast.

Thank you so much for having me.

Oh, my pleasure.

You've told this story. I've read it several times. I feel bad asking but would you give us a short version of how you ended up in prison?

Yeah, and I need to correct the record a little bit on what you said okay, I I started I'm from New York and I started working on Wall Street in the 80s working for a number of big investment banking firms. And then in early 1990, I heard about this company that some friends were working at cold Stratton Oakmont where young guys were making a great deal of money on Long Island so while I was skeptical I checked it out and I discovered that in fact they were making a lot of money on Long Island and I decided to join them I soon became a partner at the firm and after about a year there I left to launch my own firm in South Florida called built more securities and it was from that that I got in trouble with the law

okay so you weren't originally in trouble or you didn't get in trouble at Stratton Oakmont you got in trouble with the second firm that you created? Is that correct correct Okay.

Yes,

So, you end up in prison. How would you describe the fall of the move from having a successful corporation to going to prison

It was it was quite a quite a meteoric fall

Indeed.

I was in South Florida you know, and pretty much anyone would describe me as a big shot. I had 500 people working for me and I knew everyone and I was best friends with every celebrity in town and I drove Ferrari's and it was a very glamorous life of drugs

and sex and rock and roll and lots of money in private planes and all that stuff that was depicted in Scorsese's movie however, like most people who do go through the criminal justice system, I came out of it essentially destitute and generally homeless. You see, I paid everybody back prior to my arrest. My partner and I thought it was a both the right thing to do and we thought we knew we were going to get in trouble. So we thought perhaps this could mitigate it somewhat absolutely at whatever money I had leftover, going through lawyers, and fines and all the like, I gave away to charity, because I felt just so awful. I as I was going through the whole experience, and believe me, I don't consider myself a saint. I knew what I was doing was wrong. I have no excuses. I was stupid. And I was greedy. And I was impatient. And like I say, despite paying everybody back, I certainly should have been punished for it. So However, when I came out of prison, I had no idea what to do with my life. And I had no options and no opportunities that I could see. And it took me several years to really kind of get on my feet and begin to put the past behind me. And as you mentioned, that came through my involvement with this nonprofit to five ventures. I served as director in New York there, and it was very, very helpful for me to kind of it was good for my karma, good for my soul. I felt like I was helping people. Eventually, however, I became somewhat frustrated because this nonprofit, along with many, many, many others, that I knew around the country that I worked with, despite their best intentions. And despite all these wonderful people who were giving so generously of themselves, I felt like they ultimately in the aggregate, weren't making that much of a difference. And primarily, the work that they do in general is with folks who have just been released from prison. The question I always had, what about the people were released a few years ago, five years ago, 20 years ago, there's many, many more of them, there's 70 million of them walking around, and who's there to help them? And the answer was pretty much nobody.

Let me take, you know, I think, take one step back. So you come out and you said, you're pretty much destitute or homeless or close to homeless, and how did you get from destitute and homeless to defying ventures, if you don't mind sharing that?

Sure. Well, first of all, thank God, I had a sister with a couch. Um, so that's where that's where I laid my head and I always knew at least at her place to be a meal for me. But that was that was about as much as she could do for me. I you know, I'm frequently asked by people who are coming out of prison for my advice on how to best handle re entry. I made a lot of mistakes in my re entry. So I'm kind of a case study, I thought when I came out that I could hit the ground running and I was a big shot before and everybody knew I was a big shot. So of course, I'm going to be a big shot again, I just got to get my mojo back. I just got to get my swagger back and my confidence, but I discovered that I wasn't a big shot. You know, I should have learned the lesson of

humility in prison. Because if you can't learn about humility, scrubbing the toilets for 100 men, you know when are you going to learn it but when I got out nobody wanted to have anything to do with me. people I knew ran for me they feared I was radioactive people I had lent money to and I had helped disappeared and people who didn't know me, you know, so, uh, you know, there's, this guy's got the stigma of, you know, have a felony record. We don't want to have anything to do with him. And, you know, to a certain extent, that's what everybody faces when they're come out of prison. It is a life sentence, essentially, as long as people can do background checks, or do a Google search on you. So how I, I made a lot of mistakes, trying to find the right thing. And nothing really worked. And I felt like I was banging my head against the wall, one bad situation after another until I kind of hit rock bottom, you know, and I said, you know, something, maybe I'm looking at this the wrong way. I'm not a big shot. You know, suck it up. Be humble. Get involved with a company that you know, or an organization that you're not going to be running the thing and that's how I came to the five ventures. And thank God they would have me.

Yeah, just to show some solidarity. I spent two years cleaning toilets in prison. So I absolutely...

...yeah, I absolutely understand where you're coming from.

So you get to Defy Ventures, you're saying that you got started to get frustrated at Defy Ventures, because they weren't helping as many people as you thought that they probably could. And you've seen this fit your own failures through re entry and bang your head against the wall. I mean, I remember famously, I've told this story a bunch of times that when I got out, even though I had education, I've been working for 20 years, I couldn't get a job bussing tables. So I understand that part too. So where does the idea for 17 million jobs come?

Well, you know, and I certainly don't want to point the finger at the five ventures per se, because I think they do a great job for what they do. Most of these nonprofits take, I've rightfully take a very holistic approach to their clients, you know, folks who have been recently released, they want to help them, you know, with employment and job readiness. But there's also issues sometimes a mental health or substance abuse or housing or family issues, and all of the stuff that they get involved with is very, very high touch time consuming, and it does not scale at all. So as a result, all these you know, to do what they do, all these nonprofits and community organizations have remained hyper local. Additionally, nonprofits typically attract certain types of people, of which I am not one I am, I am a very, very ugly, aggressive guy. And I was kind of like a bull in a china

shop at that place. And as I will be at any nonprofit, I want to see results right away. And nonprofits don't operate that way nonprofits unfortunately, spends 80% of their time maybe in fundraising. Sure. So my feeling was that this is this is a, this is a space and an industry so to speak, and re entry that is crying out for disruption, it is crying out for a different approach. And I thought it was crying out for a for profit approach whereby the profitability of the business could take it and scale it as far as it possibly could go. Also, it needed to employ technology to really truly, you know, achieve its potential. And most nonprofits just don't have the resources, you know, to be in or have the opportunity to attract people, you know, who are involved with technology. So I left my nonprofit gig. I spoke to a bunch of people before I left a bunch of VC firms, I said, Do you think I'm crazy is this investable, you know, and they all urge me Yeah, this sounds like a great idea, do it. So I took a deep breath. And I did it. And almost immediately the city of Los Angeles and I was operating at in New York, the city of Los Angeles contacted me and said, We heard about what you're doing, we'd love to partner with you. Can you come out here and help us because the mayor wants to increase employment opportunities for the city's formerly incarcerated. Gotcha. So I went out to LA for about five months. And I worked closely, you know, within that municipality, you know, was an interesting experience. At times, I felt like I was working at the Department of Motor Vehicles, there were things just don't really get done, people talk about it, but nothing gets done. But, you know, was still instructive. And then I had the opportunity to participate in Y Combinator in Northern California and Silicon Valley. And that was something I was really dying to do. Because I knew that I would have the opportunity to learn a great deal, make connections, avail myself of mentorship and also access, you know, funding from angel investors and venture capital firms, which I need it right. So I think somehow or another, I talked my way into getting in there, I was easily the oldest person there, and the least technical person as well. But somehow or another, you know, they saw fit to include me, for which I am deeply appreciative. And the experience was all that it was cracked up to be, and much, much more. I loved every minute of it. And at the end of it, I had the opportunity to raise enough money to really launch the business properly. And I decided to stay in the San Francisco area where we are currently based.

Gotcha. So recently, in the last week or so we've learned two things, at least according to one bank, formerly incarcerated folks are probably the biggest opportunity for businesses right now. But at the same time, formerly incarcerated folks are having more problems getting hired than at least some people say they even did during the Great Depression.

Yeah, so what do you make of that?

Yeah, and this is central to what we do at 70 million jobs, what you have is we've, you know, we have a marketplace essentially, which, on the one side, you have people with records, who are, you know, very desperate to get jobs, they need them, some of them needs them to eat, and to feed their families. Other need, other of them are free on supervised release, under parole and probation were requirement of their releases that they have a job. So you have people on the one side who desperately need jobs, yet they experience pain every step of the way. One is that they are not familiar generally, with a traditional job search, it's often the first time that they've been doing this. And number two, you know, how do they address their past and what will be the reaction of potential employers, so you have pain on one side. On the other side, however, you have a great economy where we have historically low unemployment and where the government says there are more than 6 million unfilled jobs out there in corporate America. So you have big corporations that are desperate to fill jobs, and, and they're finding it an incredible challenge to attract and retain talent. Well, I figured, well, can't we put them together, you know, we can solve each other's problems. And we'll be the middleman so to speak, and will, you know, have a revenue model that's based upon the the company's paying us to access this vast pool of ignored talent. So we, we put together this huge community, we have over a million active job seekers in our community. And we work with more than 250 nonprofits and community organizations and governmental agencies around the country. So we really have this huge, huge stockpile of assets, so to speak, of supply, then we went to the largest corporations, and because of their desperate need, we have discovered that there is a great deal of interest in what we're doing there. Some companies are just not there yet, not even nearly there yet. And honestly, I'm ashamed to say it's the San Francisco area where we have all these big tech companies that employ hundreds of thousands of people that are run by some of the most progressive liberal management's out there who folks who talk a good game, but when it comes act to, to actually, you know, stand up and say, yeah, we were interested in hiring some of these folks, they are among the worst, if the economy weren't so good, and unemployment so low, my job would be 10 times harder, but because it's good, we have had, you know, forgetting about Silicon Valley, but the rest of the country, a high level of receptiveness. And and one by one, we are signing up some of the largest employers in the country who are accessing our pool of talent.

And that makes me curious, when you talk about the people who are resistant what seems to distinguish the companies that hire formerly incarcerated folks because of the situation economy and those that aren't?

Well, there are certain companies out there that really and truly embrace the mission aspect of what we do and embrace it within their company as well. There are certain

companies that have figured out that hiring folks with records is not only the right thing to do, it's not only the humane thing to do, but it turns out it's very, very good business. And I'll tell you why. Sure, they're a tax credits, substantial tax credits at the federal government provides companies when they hire people with records, sure there's a bonding program, essentially insurance that protects the company, when they hire these folks, in case something bad happens. But what really and surely, companies discover across the board. And it's not just my or my company's experience, but it's the subject of many studies that have come out particularly recently, it turns out that people with records actually emerged frequently as the very best employees that accompany hires. It turns out that because these folks don't have so many choices, because they don't believe that the world owes them a living because they have not had too many breaks in their life, that when a company actually does go out on a limb, and give them a chance, the typical typically what they end up doing is rewarding that company with loyalty and great performance. And, you know, in the HR world, human resources world at companies, there's two issues, attract talent and retain it, companies have a very hard time retaining talent, because people will go jump across the street, if they can make a nickel more an hour, certain industries are, you know, for one job, they've gotta hire five people over the course of a year. It's just so hard to keep people Well, guess what, not only am I guys performing better, but they're sticking around longer, substantially longer. So what ends up happening, that's a bonanza that's a home run in the HR world, companies report that when they hire these folks, their employees, the morale goes up, because employees are proud that they're that their employer has taken a chance on somebody like this. Communities appreciate their leadership as corporate citizens. So many good things come to companies who do this. And it just, it's just education to get one at a time and we're doing on it. And they're discovering that.

So I've noticed two things, though, there's kind of a flip side in a way to the people who jump for five cents is that at least where I'm at one of the things we've seen with, for instance, the Medicaid work requirement bills and whatever is companies and chambers of commerce that seemed to want to fill or to meet that need in the economy by putting formerly incarcerated people into jobs that don't have a chance at a living wage, don't have a chance at benefits and continue to keep that churn going as long as possible to keep corporate profits high and wages low. How do you How are you trying to address that? Or how do you think that is best adressed?

Yeah, that that's a that's a good one. And it comes up all the time. And, you know, me and my company are involved in lots of organizations, you know, advocacy groups, and Blue Ribbon commissions and different municipalities. And there's two schools of thought here, on the one hand, you know, my applicants, you know, folks with records,

they need a full time job, not part time, not flex hours, not gig economy, that's not what that what's best for them, they need to know where they're going in the morning, and what their hours are, and they need reliability, and they need benefits, they need medical care, they need to be able to, you know, their family couldn't go to a doctor, all of that's really important, and a lot of jobs as you point out, you know, or don't provide that because companies have figured out ways to cut costs and do it another way. So, but on the other hand, you know, my guys desperately need a job and they need some income. And so the question is, is a lousy job better than no job at all? You know, and I will tell you, I'm torn and depending on the day I like, you know, I, I have not on as far as I'm concerned, and I can say to the folks I work with, we're not really sure what the answer that is when I see a family where you know, the breadwinner, the you know, the husband or the wife or the mother father starts working, there's something there's a redemptive power of employment when they bring home a paycheck, and, you know, being able to feed your kids, you know, when they have nothing, you know, and and, and if that will prevent someone from going on the streets and getting in trouble again. Well, sure, that sounds like a good thing. And it also sounds like a good thing. Because if you have a job, it's always easier to get another job and work your way up. But then again, like you, like you point out, sometimes it's almost an illusion. And it's doing potentially more harm than good because, hey, we're getting people jobs, but they're such a lousy job, you know, in the state of Florida, in the state of Texas, minimum wage is \$7 and 25 cents, that if you have to live on one's own without, with that income is impossible. If you had a family, you know, there's no way you're leaving poverty from that. So is that better than really facing the fact that we need to have real jobs that provide a pathway and wouldn't the money that we waste on re-incarcerating people because we think that when they get out of prison or jail, even though they have no path to a no trade, they haven't learned anything, and yet, we expect them to stay out of trouble. And inevitably, it, you know, the opposite occurs. So, it's a mess, you know, and and it's a big problem. And I for one don't know the answer to that one.

Well, it's interesting, because it seems like in a sense, you gave one answer before, which is that they're really split. Most companies are struggling, retaining and employers employee, you know, it's like, and so it seems like there's a story there to tell that, you know, I know, for instance, there's two fairly prominent companies in my area that do hire formerly incarcerated people, they've built their business model around sustainable wages and health benefits. And and these are restaurants, not exactly, you know, traditionally the kind of people that do this, so have you been able to have those conversations with some of the people, the businesses that you work with?



Yeah, but we're interested truly, and I know who you're talking about, and I'm involved with them very, very actively on an advocacy level. And I'm frequently at speaking engagements along with those folks. But those are small businesses. Sure, and they are nimble enough, and because the owners of those businesses, you know, our principal bold and immoral and people of faith and just terrific saints, you know, they can get that done. When I set out with 70 million jobs. My goal was not to figure out how we can get a few people hired, my personal goal is to get a million people hired. And to do that I need to engaged the very largest employers in this country, not to get a few people hired. But for them to hire 10,000, 20,000 people. That's what I'm after. And these companies are not changing their their models, you know, overnight, it's just not happening. Little by little, I am seeing progress little by little the Zeitgeist, the attitudes in this country towards criminal justice in general are changing for the better. Certainly, I got out of prison in 2005 and the 13 years I've seen a big difference too positively. But you know, things move slowly, but they are happening the only thing that Democrats and Republicans can agree on in this crazy polarized, you know, country that we've got right now, forget about Trump, forget about Jeff Sessions as attorney general. But the Democrats and Republicans generally agree that the criminal justice system ain't working when you have the Koch brothers who are as arch conservative as you can possibly be, have a keen interest in disrupting the criminal justice system and making changes at the same time a guy like Senator Cory Booker is also you know, in the game and everybody else, you know, you know, it's an interesting time, and it's kind of caught fire. So I really believe that changes afoot organizations and businesses, like the ones that you point out, are providing models of the way it can be, and, and successful models of the way it can be. And we hope that our approach, we seek double bottom line returns at 70 million jobs, we want to build a big successful company and make a lot of money, and at the same time, do massive social good. And I think that's a lot of that's out there right now. And, you know, insofar as one out of three adults have some kind of record, pretty much everybody has been touched by the criminal justice system. So I do believe things are changing, they change slowly, but they are changing.

And since you're, as you said, a disruptive or your attempt is to disrupt the way re entry was done before I have to ask you a future looking question or two. So do you have any thoughts about kind of the challenges of remote work and post work or what, you know, they're talking about, you know, for instance, universal basic income and things like that. Have you thought about those challenges at all?

Well, universal impact, I mean, I think, is an amazing concept. I think, you know, actually the president of Y Combinator, Sam altman is very, very much in the forefront of that. And I think it's fascinating. And I do believe that there are certain basic human

rights in this country. And that's what defines us as a society, you know, the right to medical care, the right to food, the right to a basic existence, you know, because we pay it one way or another, you know, it's not like we're getting around it, we end up paying and why not in enfranchised people and have them be part of the decision making, and give them a chance to do the right thing. You know, I I do believe, you know, you mentioned remote work, I do believe that for a lot of people who are coming out of jail or prison a structured environment is is generally advantageous as opposed to a much looser, you know, kind of thing that that has become popular. And again, I'm in Silicon Valley, you know, so many companies operate remotely. But, you know, I think people who are new to the work force, and who have not had a lot of experience in traditional so called legit jobs, I think they need structure, I think they need the socialization they need to be around people they need to make friends whose lives aren't on the street, you know, who can provide them kind of different examples,

Do you think there's a possibility that one of the challenges is that traditional work will become less available, and remote work will become more what companies are demanding?

Wow, well, you know, something, I I these are all concerns for sure. And, you know, there are a lot of smart people who are working on this stuff, the way we come to work, my team and I is we've got people who contact us, or we've got their family members who contact us and they're saying, you know, sometimes pleading and sobbing for our help to help this person get a job, you know, and, and while there's a place to sit back and speculate about the future, and I don't mean to make the sound overly dramatic, but the stakes are this high, you know, we look at it to that we want to get every person who comes to us for help a job today, tomorrow, and I'm not worried so much about five years from now. And I'm not worried about robotics, and all that other kind of stuff that that's very, very interesting. But the folks that we work with, don't have the luxury you know, of thinking in terms of five years from now. They need food on their table today. Sure. So, so, so that's, you know, that's kind of the role that we see, you know, that that we've undertaken, and, you know, a lot of smart people will think about the other stuff, and I think it's wonderful, but I got my hands filled with millions of people who need to work yesterday.

Sure. So let me ask you one last, kind of more pragmatic question. Okay. formerly incarcerated folks that are coming to your site, what are the most frequent reasons for failures? And how best can applicants take advantage of the site?

It's a great question. You know, people Be quiet, because I'm frequently in the mode of raising funds and talking to venture capital firms, like any tech startup done, one of the questions that I'm always asked is, who's your competition. And truly, we don't see that there's any competition from any other job board, there's really nobody doing exactly what we're doing. So I don't think in terms of competition like that. The competition that I feel and I fear and I see every day is the thoughts that go through my job seekers minds on a daily basis of whether or not it's worth their effort to bang their head against the wall and have door slammed in their face, typically, for low paying jobs, as opposed to going back to the life that they are much more familiar with, where their friends are, are, where they make more money, where they have a lot more fun, where they can get high, and they can hang out on the street, listen to music and whatever else as opposed to waiting in a for an interview with someone who has no intention at all, even considering them. That's where the competition comes from. So So for me, the biggest challenge is the uncertainty is the uncertainty that the applicants have as to does this really even make sense. And certain people of course, you know, they have decided that they're not going back to prison, no matter what. But, you know, for a lot of people, it's a challenge, and I don't blame them, honestly. Because if, if the best that I could do if I was lucky, was to work at McDonald's for minimum wage, and not even a full time job at McDonald's is that was the best opportunity I have. I'm not sure I wouldn't choose other things that might be illegal, but might be a you know, have a little bit more impact in my network.

Absolutely. So is there anything that you'd like to share? Before we we go? Is there anything else you'd like to share about the site or about what you're working on?

Yeah, I would love to thank you. Well, first of all, I'd like to share that people like you are part of all the good stuff that's going on. I've had the great good fortune in the work that I do to meet some truly amazing people with huge hearts who, whose whose intentions are so pure and have no other angle other really than wanting to help their brothers and sisters. And like you, you know, my team, we have a few people, including myself, who've gone through criminal justice and who just really want to, you know, I'm a Buddhist, I believe in karma. And for me, the work I'm doing is my attempt to try to even my karma out so I can go to heaven, you know, and even the score, but I've met a lot of people, and you're one of them. You are there every day constructively positively getting the word.

What I would like to say also is, we're in the middle of a crowd fund on we funder that's we funder dot com, w e funder dot com forward slash 70 million jobs and we're raising money. We have so many people who asked us, how can we help? How can we be

involved? We think it's a great business, can we be investors? Well, if you'd like to, on any level at all, small, medium large, certainly, please visit we funder and if you have any other great ideas, if you have any suggestions, if there's something we're doing wrong, and you know better I want to hear it, please contact me directly at Richard at 70 million jobs. com 70s the number million jobs. com And after that, all I can do is thank you so much for the opportunity to talk to talk with you and to share these ideas. It means a lot to me.

Thanks so much for the kind words and also for sharing your time since I know ou have a million things to do it. Really appreciate it. Thanks so much.

Thank you.

Have a great day.

All right, you too.

Bye.

Bye.

Okay, now, my take. Richard Branson has dedicated himself to providing jobs for formerly incarcerated folks. Yes, his site is a profit site, but companies that pay but it's the companies that pay not the formerly incarcerated people. And if he ends up meeting his goal of getting a million formerly incarcerated people hired, I will be thrilled, and I will thank him profusely for helping so many of my brothers and sisters get good jobs in general. I don't really mind when people get paid if they're doing work to help people this work this recover this re entry and bringing people back from prison work is hard work. There's nothing wrong with making money trying to help people are providing needed services at a fair price. And in this case, he's providing the service at no price to the people who are coming back. In other words, I think Richard Branson is doing great work is helping people get jobs and not charging them for the effort. What I do mind is people who build for profit enterprises that try to hurt excessively charge or take advantage of those people who have little or no money and that includes both incarcerated people and the families of incarcerated people. I do have some concerns with what's going on in the larger economy with how corporations are planning to take advantage while they are hiring formerly incarcerated workers when they do in Michigan. We just went through a bruising battle over inserting work requirements into the Medicaid expansion here. Medicaid expansion was an incredibly successful

program in Michigan. One study concluded that it caused that it created at least a billion dollars in economic benefit to our state. Despite that success and decades of evidence that suggests that work requirements don't work. We lost that battle work requirements are now part of Medicaid. Here. We lost the battle, but why did we lose it became very apparent to me that the reason Michigan's businesses and the GOP majority in our state government were so committed to work requirements was that they wanted formerly incarcerated and poor folks to fill the remaining demand for work. But to fill those jobs in a way that allowed companies to keep wages, low benefits non existent and corporate profits high the jobs Michigan wants we formerly incarcerated folks to take our jobs that won't pay enough so that we can't pay our bills that can't help us put enough we accrue after being released. In fact, in many cases, because these are not the kind of jobs that provide that kind of wager benefits situation, it can leave people in worse situations, then they would have if they'd invested in training or trying to find more education or doing something that would have moved them into jobs that over the long term could give them the potential to have a better life. I have concerns I have concerns about the economy that stops needed, unskilled or lightly skilled workers, and worry about an economy that cuts social services and the safety net exactly at the time, the number of meat of possible meaningful jobs for people getting out of prison gets smaller and smaller, and economy without manufacturing jobs, in essence, a post Amazon and Walmart economy and economy of robots, not people and economy without work. That is why I believe so deeply in the idea of 360 re entry. That includes training for jobs that will be needed in the future economy. That is why I support the idea of teaching inmates to code and support the idea that Department of Corrections should only contract with companies who trained for incarcerated folks and then hire formerly incarcerated folks I don't understand and I will never understand why a prison whose real job is to turn out people who are more safe for society doesn't insist that the companies that they do business with train people in prison and hire people when they leave prison makes no sense to me. We have a real opportunity right now, at the time when corporations need us most and they need loyal and long term employees. They almost need us as much as we need them. We have to use this opportunity to insist on a new model, a model that's based on sustainability, not convenience for the companies. We can only make this happen if we refuse to act out of desperation and use what little leverage we have to build something better for ourselves and for our incarcerated brothers and sisters. Thanks again to Richard Branson for taking the time to discuss these issues with me. Over the next month. I'll be trying to return to the subject of the tension between the demand for hiring and ongoing discrimination in hiring. As always, you can find the show notes or leave us a comment at [D conservation nation. com](http://Dconservationnation.com). If you want to support the podcast directly. You can do so from [Patreon dot com](http://Patreon.com) on [pirate satellite](http://pirate-satellite.com), which is my other blog. You can also support us by leaving a five star review on iTunes

or like us on Stitcher or Spotify. Special thanks to Andrew Stein, who has been doing the editing and post production for me does an excellent job and it's made a huge difference on the podcast. Thanks so much for listening to the D Corporation nation podcast. See you next time.