

Episode 58 Rob Perez

Hello and welcome to Episode 58 of the decarceration nation podcast, a podcast about radically reimagining America's criminal justice system. I'm Josh Hoe, among other things, I'm formerly incarcerated, a freelance writer, a criminal justice reform advocate, and the author of the book "Writing Your Own Best Story: Addiction and Living Hope.

We'll get to my interview with Rob Perez of deviate kitchen in just a second. But first the news.

I want to take a second to say just how thankful I am for all the great things that have happened in my life in the last year. I'm not sure if you told me five years ago that I would have been a consultant for a national organization and become a full time policy analyst working for political and critic criminal justice reform here in Michigan. I'm not sure I would have believed you. This week, I acquired a new car. My poor 2007 Aveo has done its best, but it wasn't going to make the trip back and forth to Lansing every week. It is very humbling to be able to afford a new car again, to some this may seem like a little thing. But over the last five years, there were many times where I wasn't always sure how I was even going to afford food. I'm very thankful for all the good things that have happened that have been happening in my life. And it all kind of in a way started with this podcast. So I'm very thankful for all of you for listening, and for continuing to support the podcast.

Second, I'm also doing my best to keep up with all the little details of the podcast. But now that I have a full time job, it's been a little more challenging. I apologize in advance for the show notes being a little less detailed last week. As of today, I put out 18 episodes already in 2019. So I'm going to take a few weeks off to catch up on my reading and to set up future interviews. Thanks so much for listening. Sorry, I'm taking your break, new episodes will be coming soon. That said I'm very excited about this episode. It really gets to the core of something I deeply believe in, which is the idea that we in the community can really make a difference in how reentry works for people returning from prison. So let's get to my interview with Rob Perez of DVD kitchen, which is located in Lexington, Kentucky.

Rob Perez is restaurant tour and entrepreneur who recently developed an entirely new restaurant concept called deviate kitchen based around recovery. I was lucky enough to first sample of the food from deviate kitchen at the celebration of second chances event in Lexington, Lexington, Kentucky. And then again the next day when I visited his brick and mortar location for brunch before heading home.

Rob, welcome to the decarceration nation podcast.

Oh, thanks so much for having me.

Such a pleasure to talk with you again. For someone who has never lived in Lexington. I've spent an oddly crazy amount of time in your city. Anyway, I always ask the same first question.

What was your life journey that led you to the place where you're ready to found a venture like deviate kitchen?

Well, you know, in a weird way, I think my wife and I have lived lives that kind of pointed us in this direction for the last 50 years. I am in recovery I've 28 years in recovery revelations, I went into the restaurant business, which, interestingly enough, either attracts people with addiction, or it's just, you know, somehow or another magnetically connected. But I think it has to do with some practical things like cash money and all that but but the restaurant industry is industry is interesting, because it does have such a higher rate of addiction, then next, my wife started feeling like it was right for us to figure out how to take what we normally did to make money or restaurants and establish something that was social enterprise to help people that are in early stages of recovery. Well, funny thing happened along the way, I just said no. I mean, I didn't want to do it, because I hadn't had any success with it. And she kept on pushing and so many interesting ways, because she felt like it was the right thing. And she pointed out to me that we had lost at the time 12 people in our three restaurants here in Lexington, and they're gone. And that's a huge amount of people in a short period of time, and a very small pond 100 and, you know, 40 people we have on staff. And so while that was really impactful, I just felt like a social enterprise wasn't necessarily the best, you know, vehicle to try to support people because I couldn't figure out how to make money with folks that were in addiction before this. And I felt like it was a Doomed, Doomed venture. Then I said, No, but she was pretty persistent. And she woke me up one morning and said, Hey, I want that woman's address. And I'm like, what, what woman, I didn't even know what she's talking about. She says, the woman that you let go for doing heroin in our bathroom last week. And I'm like, Well, I'm not gonna let you go and talk to the woman. I mean, you know, we don't know what's going on. And clearly she has a problem. I mean, you have responsibilities to this family and our children, I don't feel safe. It led to a fairly long conversation. And she ended up leaving against my wishes, and went and met with this woman. What happened was, is that she struck up a relationship with her, and she convinced me to have an kind of accountability relationship and hire her back, which was difficult to do, given that all of our staff knew that she had been fired for doing heroin in our bathroom. Well, for seven months, we had kind of a dual relationship, not only a relationship that we were friends, I mean, she was spectacular. She mean, it was magic. I tell people, she have great service, she great. It was just fun. She was energetic, and she was great at her job. But we also took money at the end of the shifts and knew her bills my wife met with and landlord met her family. And we tried to hold her accountable to her program to being clean. And that went along for seven months. And it was awesome. But she unfortunately didn't pay her rent a couple months in a row. And in an intervention, we found out that not only was she using shit us the whole time, while she went to recovery. And we watched her do well in recovery, and then try to hit the job market and got zero responses from jobs. And she she couldn't be hired. I watched how systematically and automatically the business community prevents people from having an opportunity after recovery. And coincidentally, along this way, I realized how many folks in recovery also had a past of incarceration. And, and I realized that you couldn't really separate the two. And I just watched how we, as humans, and Americans scratch your head and are really confused about why the recidivism rates, the recidivism, recidivism rates are so high, and

we don't understand it. But it's pretty easy to understand. If you get out of recovery or get out of addiction and into recovery or, you know, get out of prison or jail. And you don't have opportunities for a job, certainly not one that is well paid. And you don't have the ability because you have a felony to get an apartment. And in our state, you don't even have representation. How can you pull yourself up by your own bootstraps? How can you be a productive member of society, where's the hope. And I tell people that one of the biggest starkest things that I realized before we decided to commit to this restaurant was that folks that are in recovery, or just getting out of incarceration, you know, feel less likely that they're going to die, but they don't have much hope for living. And through my wife pushing me, I came to that realization, and we decided to go ahead and open up this restaurant. And it's been almost two years, we have 23 people out of one for an active recovery, and our measurements of success, as it relates to general Human Resources standards, our turnover rate is 70%, which is 20 basis points that are better, you know, better than national average, our average tenure is seven months. And our folks are performing one of our main premises is that we have to be 20% better than our competition. And so we break bake bread, and we try to give great service and fun atmosphere, a little bit different attitude than most social enterprises. And three months ago, we got a notice from Yelp and said, Hey, the restaurant, your staff members have earned the rating of the 40 40th Best Restaurant, and all of America based on their, their data. And, and I guess I'm I'm so proud of them for that, because it just proves that people that need a second chance if they're given it. And if they, if they do work a program, and then they do have purpose, they have unlimited capacity for excellence. And I feel like deviates, turned into a, you know, something that can be a model and used for other people. And we can decentralize this idea. And it is a model where it's similar to what my wife set up with the young lady that we found doing heroin, it's kind of a dual role. It's, you know, we love on them, we pay a better than average for the job they do. And we press into them. And we have meetings, and we connect them with people that might help them personally or professionally. But we also hold them really accountable. They all sign documents that say they're going to stay in recovery, they're going to stay working in a 12 step program and all sit also they're going to stay in a residential living. And we have the right after they sign this document to choose to let them go, they sacrificing one of those three standards. So it's both loving, but it's also very accountable. And we think we've found something that has it, you know, at least initially, some really good results.

So just to back up a little bit, though, you mentioned that you have a history of addiction. But you also didn't talk much about your history as restaurant or how you know, to start this business, you had a lot of experience in in this area, correct?

Yes. When I got into the business when I was 19, and I kind of made my way up through a California state at wine restaurant. After working there and kind of learning the business. I got asked to join the Hard Rock Cafe. And I worked my way up through operations. And then after five years, I was asked to go into development. And I took over the process of finding, developing and opening up hard rock cafes, and did that for five years. And then I was asked to go to the Walt Disney Company. And I was part of a group of folks that that developed and operated restaurants entertainment complex is outside of the Burma, the theme parks. And I

was most intimately involved with a concept called ESPN zone that was kind of one of the things that I loved it was a blast, then did that for eight years, and then started my journey of trying to figure out how to become an entrepreneur moved to Lexington, Kentucky. And we opened up three restaurants here, starting 11 years ago, and deviate came along as the social enterprise. helping folks that are in recovery and past incarceration. Two years ago,

it's interesting that you mentioned because I remember when we met at the second chance event, I hearing your business model, I said, Wow. that reminds me a lot of something I read that Walt Disney said about delivering excellent customer experience. So can you talk a little bit more about kind of that end of your business model? what you're hoping what you're trying to communicate to customers?

Yeah. So we did, I did a bunch of research, to be honest, it didn't work. And I mentioned something about that earlier. But my wife because of her faith said, I don't care if we lose everything. And because sometimes my lack of faith, I wanted to figure out how to not losing everything. I tried to apply all of the business aspect government and strategy that I possibly could to this business. The first step for me was to learn what other people had done. And I studied, I'd say 20 different businesses that offered second chance. And it was very stark. And it was very glum for me, I realized that of the 20 that I sampled only for provided great food and great service and great atmosphere. And I, I really needed to understand why I was super confused by the whole thing, because if you're going to give someone a second chance, it seems Oh, just giving them a job isn't a total mission. The total mission in my mind was to show this workforce, the connection between great performance and getting raised and getting a promotion, and how sustainable employment and understanding why why what do you do to get a promotion? What do you do to be always employed. And when you are performing at a level of excellence, I just don't know how you learn. And, and so one of the premises we came up with at we have three major tenants is that we have to be 20% better than our competition. And we have to be deliberate about it. We don't serve bread, we bake bread and then serve it. We you know, make everything from scratch. We're about 95% scratch kitchen, and we give service similar, it's a fast casual concept, but we give service that is much more akin to probably table service than anything. So we can prove that we're better than our competition because that service, but the component of being 20% better, I think is integral to assisting people that currently might not know the connection between getting a raise or promotion or how sustainable employment and their performance. But we're hoping to teach them by doing it.

So it's one thing to come up with a brand and a business model and quite another to funded and make it sustainable. How did you actually build the restaurant? And how was the community in Lexington a part of that?

Yeah, I don't know if there's any other place in America would have been this generous. So we decided that what we were going to do, we were to go to private investors and ask them for social investment. And we needed \$250,000 to get this business off the ground. And we went to basically 25 families, and said, Hey, we want to open up this restaurant that employs people in a

second chance, and their history hasn't been good. And we're looking for a \$10,000 investment. And we would like to pay you back in five years with no interest. But you do need to know a couple things. Number one, we don't know specifically how to employ people in second chances and make money. And second, even without this extra social impact that we're adding seven out of 10 restaurants in America fell before their third year. So what about that? \$10,000?

That's a heck of a sales pitch you got?

Isn't that embarrassing?

Or an anti elevator pitch?

Exactly.

So if anybody didn't run away, I had an opportunity to just explain what what I covered a lot because of my wife's prompting about second chances and how we systematically and automatically eliminate opportunities from people. And, you know, just when I did a deep dive and trying to figure out, you know why recidivism rates are high? Why do people go back to addiction, I realized that were part of the problem. And once I explain that to the investors, here's crazy fact, it took us seven and a half weeks to reach and exceed our goal. And we had had seven and a half weeks, we had 300 \$300,000 of social investment. And isn't it I mean, I really am blown away it. It's just makes my heart completely warm that people wanted to help so much.

And the name itself, it seems to me you're kind of turning what could be seen as a weakness into a strength. You know, I think you mentioned that one of the original fears was that people might be turned off by the idea of walking into a restaurant, that's, you know, mostly staffed by people who are impacted by the justice system or by addiction. So what made you decide to use the word the name DV8?

Well, whenever we wanted to be honest with what we work, and frankly, I didn't realize that the stigma would really attached to the business as much as it really did. When we first opened the restaurant, we knew that we needed to probably get out the word through the main vehicle, and it's still the newspaper here, whether it's online or not. But that's the main vehicle that people need to hear that a restaurant is open. We agreed to do one, you know, one interview with that, that paper, but we just assumed just like every restaurant, we'd open up there in this market. And every restaurant we've seen open up in the last, you know, 15 years here in Lexington that, that we were really super busy for the first year or 18 months no matter what. Well, we opened up and I tease and say we had tumbleweeds and crickets. Because we didn't have any customers. And after we were slow for about two months, I started going to the regular customers that we had it are the three restaurants and people I trusted and asked directly. Why are you not coming in when you came and drove and a half an hour out of the way to follow our second and third song good restaurants that we had that are just regular businesses without a

social impact? Why did you come there, but you're not coming here. And it was always some specific excuse. And I would always have to get a little bit more probing and say look, visit because you're insecure about being around people that have a past of incarceration or coming out of drug or alcohol addiction, and they immediately would all spit up? No, absolutely not. I would never do that I want to support this mission. But I gotta tell you, I, I could see there are eyes dark, I could see them feeling uncomfortable, especially when I went to the next question was, do you automatically think that because we're a second chance restaurant, that you're going to get second rate food. And those two either some insecurity about their pocketbook or their personal safety. And the idea that second chances meant that it was going to be not very good food, and they didn't want to waste their money on a \$6 salvage. And then when you compare the the previous question, seven and a half weeks for \$300,000, for something that looked like just a terrible investment, then they wouldn't come in for a \$6 challenge.

That is a little strange, although I mean, not entirely unpredictable, in a sense. So how did you bridge the gap?

Well, we were \$10,000 away from closing up. And I mean, literally having to close down the whole business. And, you know, there's lots of soul searching, discussing discussion, wife and I. And she says, Well, I think you need to go out there and do PR, and I didn't want to do PR at all, I even looked for surrogates to do any PR, I interviewed two different people to do it. because of two reasons. Number one, I didn't want to look like we were profiting off of the backs of someone else's misfortune. And secondly, you know, we're trying to do this as as a a business based on Christian values. And I'm a sinner, I screw up all the time at work, I, I demand a lot. And sometimes I go over the edge and it doesn't seem kind or Christian. And I and I didn't want to feel that pressure. And my wife said, yeah, that's all good. And well, but you're going to have 25 people not have a job if you don't get over yourself and go out there and, and shake some bushes and, and get the word out. So the message that she convinced me to go out and sell was that our foods good. And so try not to talk too much about the mission, always they they first US and then just tell people, we had good food. So it got a little new traffic. And nothing really changed until we got to five solid five rating and became the number one breakfast place and Lexington. And then that was the endorsement meant that people needed to come and it changed everything.

So quality actually ended up being pretty important to the to the success.

Yeah, it was paramount.

Speaking which this was kind of touching my brain a couple of times, how did you arrive at 20% better?

Well, I just started looking at what our numbers were going to have to be if we wanted to pay people 20% better than our competition to get a higher rate to advance their the hourly rate to higher than a living wage here in Lexington. That means that if if a successful restaurant is 10%,

that you make 10%. Bottom line, that's a successful that's doing great. If we're going to pay 24 to pay 10% or 20%. More, that means that we're in the whole 10%. And in order to get back to New Normal profitability, we were a half to be 20% better. And it was figured out that way. And I know that sounds really simplistic, but if you want 20% more profit, you're going to have to probably be 20% better. And I know that that's not like a really scientific way to think about it. But that's what I did. So it's one thing to say we're going to develop a great experience, we're going to have great food, we've got good recipes, we know what we're doing. We've You know, I've worked in retail,

You've worked in restaurants your whole life. But how did you get the people working for you to buy into, you know, that concept?

Well, I think it's two ways, and is that we, before we hire them, we talked to them about where they've been what they've been doing. We only hire from residential living facilities. So we may have five different partnerships with folks that house people that are trying to recover, and it's impatient, it's, you know, it's intense. And, and so we source our people from those houses, when they come in interview, their social worker, or their executive director has already said, hey, look, this is a place that everybody's in recovery, and they work towards your recovery, they pay well. But you're going to have to agree to allow them to have access to your personal information, specifically, if you're a solid citizen and resident of the house, if you are testing appropriately. And if you were working a program in earnest, and it's an it's the houses obligation, if they sign that document to call us within 24 hours, changes. And so that accountability, I think is really critical. Secondly, you know, we closed down by three o'clock every day. So the folks that are in residential living facilities typically have programmed work to do in the evenings. So we try to make it completely easy without fail for them to be able to work their programs at night, we do not sell alcohol, we do pay 20% better than our competition, we have a weekly meeting on Tuesdays from three to four, we're a community member comes in and shares their personal or professional experiences, try to motivate them in a most the most positive way we can or try to scare them not to go back out there. And then lastly, in these in these workshops, we try to expose them to a craft and experience or hobby, that's just fun and make it you know, interactive. We've had cake makers come in, and we've decorated cakes, we've done origami, we've had 20 yoga mats on the floor and done yoga. And so this experiences akin to basically a group therapy session where we all find out about who's good at a certain thing, or who's really gifted at painting or whatever. And it and it becomes an incredibly great bonding moment. And I think that that's critical to then lastly, we encourage everybody to, to work together as good, good employees helping each other but also good employees thinking about your program. If someone's in a bad mood, they either try to encourage them or cheer, cheer them up, someone is being lazy, we try to coach them in a way that they can talk to the to their co workers to say, look, you just got to get over it, and press through. Everybody has bad days, but the guests can't have a bad experience. So get over yourself. And we try to get them to just have so much trust in between them, that they can voice both their pleasure working with their co workers or their displeasure in a way that doesn't make it confronting hostile,

inappropriate, but accountable and relational. And I think that that's what's really been a bought them into.

And do you kind of build with an eye when you're hiring people and they're working for you towards kind of building either life skills that are transferable or a path to a different to a to employment down the road or to other business opportunities? Is there kind of a vision for what's going to happened to someone as they go through your program, or your restaurant, calling it?

it's, it's completely, what we try to do is say, hey, look, if this is not your end, stop, and about 30 people 30% of the people really want to stay. And because of that we've even created bakery, the bakery. And so there's a way to learn a trade and advance kind of not only what you make, but advanced your skills and in baking, so you have three different stations within the restaurant to learn it. But if you're not one of those 30%, and you want to move on, it really is a conversation we have with all of our people, if you want something, let's figure out how to get you. And that's part of the relationship that I think that they appreciate as well. You know, I've worked with people in terms of getting back into nursing into the T professional, and to, you know, into factory jobs. And we feel like that's part of the relationship we are, we are trying to keep them there, we're trying to get them to the spot, they feel most comfortable. And if they're comfortable within the restaurant will try to provide them, you know, employment, advanced employment with us. But if they're not, they're not going to be comfortable with us, it's going to be like, you know, living in the neighborhood that that you don't belong for some reason. And you're not going to feel comfortable or be successful if you're that way. So we do want to help them. And that's part of our relationship with our staff members.

This is, you know, kind of a tricky question. As someone who is, you know, eight, I guess I'm eight years 11 months and some number of days sober myself, how do you deal I know in recovery recovery, in my experience, and with the experiences of people I've seen is rarely linear. How do you deal with people's bumps in the roads?

Josh, that's a great question. It's all individual. Let's say that someone relapsed. We've had people that we found out from their caseworker that they had a bad drop. And we've also had people come to us and say, hey, look, last night, I smoked dope. And I know I screwed up. My first job was to tell you guys asked you to at least, consider giving me a chance, let you know that this is the everybody I'm going to tell this is who I'm going to speak to whether it's court ordered, whatever. But I am going to show you that I'm going to redouble my efforts hurts to stay in recovery. This is the reason why I think I did it. This is how I'm going to work on it. And the two different cases where someone messes up, and we have to find out about it from the work they come to us. We treat those two different ways. And we don't automatically let someone go. If they're, if they're upfront and honest, and taking their program to the next level through their own actions. And they apologize without excuse, that things that you look for and good recovery. If they can manage it that way. We still want to help.

That makes a lot of sense.

So in case anyone will be well, let's first talk about you mentioned the bakery part. Can you talk a little bit more about that, too? Yeah, so, um, we have seven different people that are in second chances that are that are working in our bakery. And in order to try to put people to work that are in second chances and expand the opportunity for people that didn't want to stay in the restaurant industry. My wife and I decided we were going to open up a small batch bakery that would support selling our baked goods to other restaurants, wholesale baking products, as well as supplying or three restaurants as well as deviate. And so this bakery is really pretty amazing for a couple reasons. Number one, it does give people a little bit more predictable, more professional environment, to be able to learn a trade. And it takes approximately a year for someone to be a solid Baker where they can be left alone, and they can do all the right things. But the interesting thing about the baking processes, that's you know, it's a lot with your hands, and you're looking down and you're rolling dough or shaping loaves, or, or whatever. And there's usually a team member next to you because it's easier to do in large batches with someone else. But there's something kind of magical about it. Because when you're sitting there and you're rolling the dough when you're talking to someone and not looking them in the eyes, you start to speak really your truths. And I think that there's a lot of good interaction between the folks that are in the bakery for their program, as well as their pocket book. And as well as having something that they can take with them. Even if they're not with the VA, they're going to have that trade in their back pocket. And they can show that they've done it for a year or two or whatever. And the bakery's have been pretty successful, we now have about \$230,000 worth of annual business is we've turned that into a 501 c three, so the bakery sells the product they receive the money they have, it's a completely separate entity. And, you know, we're not quite profitable there yet. Because, you know, we have seven people that are still in our apprentice position, basically. And but we're figuring it out. And we're trying to apply just regular business acumen to trying to get better product, using less labor less product, trying to understand how we can grow it. But we want to hope this is going to be a sustainable business without the help of donations. But for the first two years, pretty solid.

Yeah, sounds like you're doing a lot of really great stuff. And I feel like, although she's been mentioned so much in this, that your wife is such a big part of this, do you want to say anything about else about her?

Yeah, Diane has a heart, the size of a small state. She is not only the, you know, the heart behind it, but she had the vision to do it. And what what I guess I'm so blown away by is that she used her faith to really push her to contemplate what could be done. And she had the vision to understand that, that that really, this is all about surrounding folks that have a past of incarceration and past addiction, surrounding them with really a relationship that is both loving, but accountable. And she knew inherently without even articulating it, that that was going to be the difference in most people's lives. And it's not, it's not a for sure thing. It's not like we've had 100% success. But it is noticeably different. If the folks can stay with us and work a solid six months and have that relationship where they're not only nurtured but held accountable. And it

blows me away that Diane has the heart, the head and the stamina to really make this happen. Because I was an easy guy to convince that we I mean, she. It's fun, because she's super soft, spoken and sweet. And she's the most beautiful woman inside and out. I know. And they don't know how intense she can be. They don't know how pervasive she can be. They don't know. You know, really how tough she can be. I do.

Yeah, I know. I loved everything I tried both at your booth and at the restaurant in case anyone might be visiting Lexington and soon, what do they have look to look forward to if they visit DV8?

Well, you know, we offer breakfast, brunch and lunch seven days a week. And the center of our menu is really our baked products. And we take extra steps to try to make it 20% better as well. For example, we're kind of known for our cinnamon rolls. And our cinnamon rolls are actually made from laminated dough, which is croissant dough. And so that extra step not many people do because it is so labor intensive. It's such a hard process to do. But that cinnamon roll and I love them with the Carmel homemade Carmel pecan. And we also do specially cinnamon rolls based on whatever topping matches the holiday or the season that we're in. We do croissants, we do Southern biscuits, we do 12 grain, bread and sourdough loaves. And then we take that fresh product, fresh bread bake product, we turned it into awesome sandwiches. Things like ham, an apple butter on a southern biscuit sandwich, and do all the jams and jellies, we do apple butter, strawberry jam and orange. Normally, we do an orange marmalade chicken sandwich that's delicious. We do a great burger, we have tacos, salads, and it, it's it's a fun menu. And the staff is super excited to serve it because it really is excellent. And I'm super proud of all of them. And a big giant shout out to Wong and Jill who manage it every single day and establish a standard for quality and really are the backbone to our business.

So you said that your hope was that this model is transferable. So what can folks who are considering starting a business around hiring recovering and formerly incarcerated people are impacted people in another part of the country learn from this experience?

I think that what we've done is we've tried to build a model where we make those relationships. So the residential living facilities, we have a written document that holds people accountable, and then systems within the business to try to make sure that we understand who they are as people where they stand in their program. And we try to craft our relationship around what best suits them. And, and, you know, it's kind of like a river bed. On one side, there's a bank, that is encouragement and love and nurturing. But for the water to go through that river, there has to be a second bank that's accountable. And, and, and standard bearing. And if you could build both sides of the river up, they naturally flow where through. And it's not like you're beating them over the head constantly. If they just know that they're going to be appreciated for a good job, or they're going to be told that they're not doing a good job consistently, it starts to self perpetuate. And, and I think that that's really the trick of this whole thing. It can be hard, it does mess up our schedule, it is messy, we're going to a funeral. Unfortunately, tomorrow, it's hard earlier that it doesn't have a huge amount of time off, its 24 seven, but it's literally the best location that both

Diane and I have ever had. Because we feel like we're working with other people that truly need it, are truly working towards their own best life. And we're really proud of that, do it, we're, we're so fired up. And we want other people to know that they can apply this model. And if they want to call or contact us, we have mechanisms that help other businesses with and honestly Josh the reality of this is that I first thought that we wanted to try to convince other businesses to hire their workforce and second chances, but I feel like what our, our real goal should be, is to try to encourage every single business in America to hire one person out of incarceration or, or, or addiction and recovery, and figure out how to understand how to best be accountable and being nurturing as a as a boss. And if we do that, maybe we could start developing a nomenclature that we all understand, we can all understand stand, how to be accountable, and how to be, you know, nurturing in a relationship that may be some of the folks are coming out of prison or addiction might not have had. And our current system isn't working by giving to do lists, and, and directives, when they're coming out of prison or coming out of out of addiction. I think what it's going to take is a longer term, personal relationship that encourages people when they're down, but kicks their butt when they're, they're not thinking right, and they're fine. And knowing the difference. And it's going to be relationships that really get us through that. And I'm hoping that, you know, any business would consider doing this with just one person.

Well, and I think that's an interesting point to highlight a little bit more, you know, I we've spent a lot of time talking about how the business helps people get second chances. But one thing we haven't talked too much about until just now is how your perceptions have changed. Because at the beginning, you talked about your reluctance. And even though you had some of this in your background, yourself and some of your, your fears for safety, etc. How has working with folks who are addicted and have come back from incarceration kind of changed you and how do you hope it would change? Like, for instance, the other business owners that you're talking to right now?

Yeah, I went, I went from a guy that didn't want to listen to his wife for fairly extended period of time after she was just hammering me about, you know, not only the things that I mentioned, my own addiction, the people we lost to, you know, to drugs and alcohol. But the woman we found that was magic, as a server, and she started calling me out as a community member, and even my Christian values, she question and it took, you know, experiences that she set up for me, like going into an unmarked car to go see what really happens in downtown Lexington. And I watched a woman take \$5, you know, to, to feed a habit from from prostituting yourself. And, and so it took a lot for me to convert to wanting to help. But once I got into it, and realize that these are people that don't have a huge amount of chance, and that when I did help them by giving them a job and tried to be a boss that was nurturing and accountable, that I got something completely out of it. I mean, I absolutely adore the people I work with, I want to spend time with their smart, funny, encouraging, they encouraged me, it has helped my program the most significant way, it's helped my soul in the most efficient way. And I will tell you that what it's going to take for us to change this is all of us to have a common language, to understand how to talk and maybe open up about addiction, about incarceration, instead of sweeping it under the rug, I hope that as a society, we can start being really honest about it.

And finding out specifically how to have a relationship with someone that's in that position, and realizing this recidivism rates are absolutely so high. Because what we do, and the perishing thing about it for me is that I didn't even realize that we were doing the way they were doing didn't even take time to contemplate that we systematically eliminate opportunities, people by the systems that we build in business and in housing, and through legislation. The walls of you know, a jail do not disappear after someone serves their time. They're visible. And they go in front of everybody looking for a job. after they leave prison. They go in front and are visible to the person that's going to offer them a job or not. They go in for that wall goes in front of the people that are not offering them housing. And frequently, it keeps them from a job and from housing. And it's automatic. It's for 10 1215 their lifetime. It doesn't go away. There's not much hope. So why wouldn't you go back? And you me, us collectively as a marriage Americans are producing the reason recidivism rates are so high, it's because of us. I didn't realize that.

I think that's a really powerful place to kind of start winding this down. So how can people find deviate? Where can they look to visit you if they come to Lexington?

Yeah, so they can go to DV8kitchen.com and they also we offer a two day seminar for businesses once a quarter. And we offer today's seminar for us to take our social enterprise and our foundation, and we break it open, we explain our stories and how we kind of came to being a second chance employer, how we've applied strategy and tactics to making a sustainable business. We talk about how to help people in a second chance, like really to get a real good understanding of it, we tell them everything we've screwed up, we tell them everything that we have had some success in, we take our p&l, we take our operating systems, our strategies, everything. And in two days, we work with these businesses to try to give them kind of the skeleton to a business plan to either build a business that that that would be second chance or to insert a check Second Chance business into their existing business. And we're going to have the second one coming up in June, on June 11, eight, I'm sorry, ninth and 10th. And it's on our website if anybody wants to come to it. Or they can just contact you know me, Robert, DV8Kitchen.com, and we could talk to see if we can assist, we feel like part of our mission now is to spread the word that folks that are in Second Chance have unlimited capacity for excellence, if you just give them a chance, and you build a relationship around them. And we can show people that you know the the tactics and the strategies to do it.

I always ask the same last question. Where did I mess up? What questions should I have asked but did not?

Oh, gosh. You know Josh, you were amazing when I first met you and you were amazing in in this podcast, because, you know, either it's through your, you know, your own recovery or through your experience. You are so intuitive about this whole thing that you knew the perfect question to ask next. So, you know, hey, kudos to you. I don't have anything that I missed. But when I hear that it makes it, it was impressive.

I always try to put humble question at the end, but I don't mind getting a little bit of brag.

Yeah, you deserve it. Because I can't think of anything else.

Well, I really appreciate you doing this. And thanks for the kind words and I really just want to say how much it matters to me to see that you're doing the work that you're doing. And I think to a lot of people hear this, it'll it'll, it'll be a pretty strong message, I hope. I hope so. Alright, man, thanks so much for for talking to me.

My pleasure. All right.

Talk to you later.

And now my take. We have a hard time coming to grips with the simple truth that Rob explained. The current approach that we take to reentry from incarceration and recovery from addiction is actively counterproductive. It doesn't help us stay safe. It doesn't make our communities better and often results in catastrophes for public safety. As I've said many times, we know the three best ways to fight recidivism are safe housing, solid employment and community connections. Most crime and addiction is born in isolation and in trauma. I love to highlight businesses like Rob and Diane's the society where hiring people with the record could destroy their business. Mainly built on faith, they made what many would have considered a weakness into a strength and I can't tell you how spectacular The results have been. I stood in that amazing restaurant waiting in a long line, all to have an incredible sandwich and delicious croissant cinnamon roll afterwards, I saw smiling and hustling employees all over the place and happy customers everywhere. But the important message is that every one of us in this country can be active in changing the narrative just like Rob and Diane have been. Rob and Diane built the business around trusting and valuing people that to a great extent the later sis of the largest city in discarded or disowned. And the result has been a thriving, helpful and hopeful business that has been written about in the New York Times. So it's celebrated by the US just so that justice Action Network and by many others, and brown most important, knowing those people and working with those people change Robin Diane's lives for the better to it is amazing when we realized that people returning from prison and people returning from addiction are still people. And then in many in not most cases, the harm that set them on the wrong path start with trauma, neglect and isolation. As Johan Harry says the opposite of addiction is not sobriety. It is connection. And I think the same of reentry. what might happen if we started working to heal instead of the harm from the very beginning? What if we started bringing people back into the circle healing the harm done by them, to them and to their victim and communities, training them for a new life with real skills and real opportunities so they have somewhere else to go with with their lives. They say when you try the same thing over and over and over again, expecting different results that you are by definition insane. Right now we keep insisting on using the same old failed solutions and expecting different results. One of the things I most appreciate about what Van Jones is doing with the redemption project, as it is showing the nation that real alternatives exist. Let's start being open to trying something new. Let's stop

trying to harm and start trying to heal. It's been an amazing few weeks for me, but that doesn't change a darn thing about the work. There are still incredible numbers of people in cages and far too little healing that is taking place. We can do better. I really want to thank Rob and Diane for the work they're doing and for Diane for faith and for encouraging Rob to do the work that he's doing what an amazing if you're ever in Lexington make sure you go to deviate kitchen. It's amazing place.

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