

Prison Break: Can Entrepreneurship Solve the Recidivism Problem?

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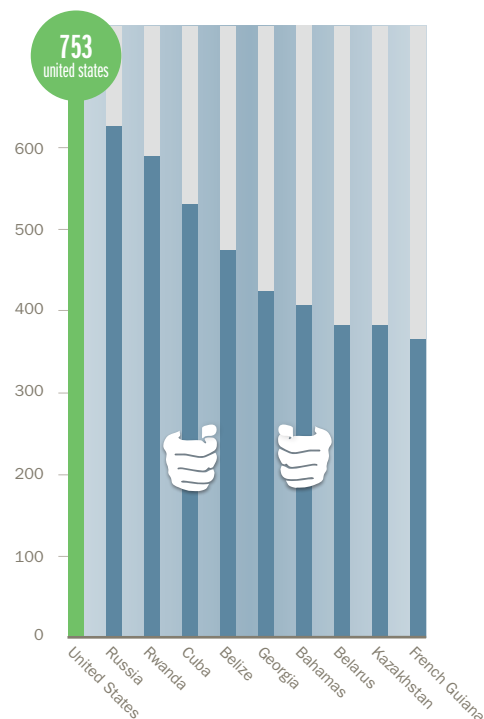
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COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST INCARCERATION RATES (2006-2008)

Rates per 100,000 people

Source: International Centre for Prison Studies



Over the past three decades, the United States has experienced an explosive increase in its prison population. The number of incarcerated Americans climbed from 220 for every 100,000 adults and children in 1980 to 753 in 2008.¹ This upward trend culminated in a sobering statistic: By 2008, more than one in every 100 adults was behind bars.² Today, nearly 2.3 million Americans are locked up, many serving time for drug-related, nonviolent offenses.³

This staggering rate of incarceration—the highest in the world—translates into high costs for all of us. It has a negative impact on the offenders, their families and their communities due to lost jobs, broken relationships and neglected children.

And, of course, there is the more easily quantifiable cost to taxpayers. In 2008, federal, state and local governments shoveled about 75 billion taxpayer dollars into corrections, the majority of which covered the cost of incarceration.⁴

95% of inmates eventually return to the free world. In 2009 alone, nearly 730,000 of them were released from state and federal prisons. Unfortunately, half end up back behind bars within three years.⁵ Unprepared to face the challenges of life on the outside—including stigmatization—and unable to find legitimate employment, many return to a life of crime.

But what if there was a way to significantly reduce recidivism? This *Batten Briefing* focuses on three programs that teach inmates to take an entrepreneurial approach to their unique challenges. In giving offenders tools and a positive framework, these programs help them to create employment opportunities for themselves and others.