

## Turning Belief into Action: A Template for *Getting Out and Staying Out*

*“The reward I get every time one of our young men earns a diploma or a job far surpasses anything I ever got in the corporate world.”*

- Mark Goldsmith, Founder and President, GOSO

Following recent media coverage of **Getting Out and Staying Out (GOSO)**, many people from around the country have contacted us, asking how they can start a program like **GOSO** in their own communities. In response to these questions, we’ve put together the following summary of how we have gotten to where we are.

One caveat: This work will require everything from you; so if you aren’t willing to give yourself completely to it, don’t even consider doing it. The reality is that prison systems are not currently set up to support the work. In New York, we got lucky. High-ranking leaders of city and state government – from the Mayor’s office to the corrections agencies – are committed to countering the recidivism rate with effective discharge planning.

If you find that your community is ready – and you’re ready to go at it 24/7 – then the rewards can be truly spectacular.

### HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

In 2003, retired businessman Mark Goldsmith founded **Getting Out and Staying Out** to lower the recidivism rate of incarcerated young men on Rikers Island, New York City’s largest jail. The idea was simple: Bring successful people to Rikers Island to coach young men, giving them practical direction and tools to build productive lives in mainstream society. And continue to coach them when they return to their communities. In short, give them the tools to *get out* and then to *stay out*.

Now in its fifth year, **GOSO** has established itself as a key player for young men ages 18-24 at Rikers, with only 10% of **GOSO’s** clients returning to jail, compared with an overall Rikers recidivism rate of roughly 66%. New York City has selected **GOSO** as a major provider for its newest initiative to combat recidivism. And **GOSO** has received funding from some of the nation’s leading foundations.

### PROCESS & TIMING: KEY STEPS IN GETTING OFF THE GROUND

Breaking through the system and getting off the ground is the toughest part. Here are some key steps in our journey so far:

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Commit & Connect	Launch & Organize	Build the Service	Stay the Course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the DOC* and Mayor’s Office focused on discharge planning?</li> <li>If possible, forge a connection with an educator/school at a local jail; this relationship is your lifeline</li> <li>Make top-to-top connections at the DOC, DOE*, Mayor’s Office, Governor’s Office, and state prison superintendent’s office</li> <li>Start showing up. You must walk the walk to earn credibility, by making regularly scheduled visits, bringing successful coaches (not speakers) to work with guys, and keeping commitments</li> </ul> <p>*DOC: Dept. of Corrections *DOE: Dept. of Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brand yourself: pick a name and trademark it</li> <li>Incorporate as a 501(C)3</li> <li>Establish a board of directors and put them to work</li> <li>Begin recruiting coaches</li> <li>Secure office space, or a place to conduct business (GOSO operated out of a coffee shop for the first 6 months)</li> <li>Raise seed money to cover initial expenses; or reach into your own pocket</li> <li>Research additional funding sources interested in reentry</li> <li>Keep showing up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise funds (foundations and private donors)</li> <li>Add additional muscle to your board, if needed</li> <li>Hire staff to handle specialized services (counseling, job development and social services, etc.)</li> <li>Continue building relationships with key DOE and DOC stakeholders</li> <li>Track and publicize successes</li> <li>Keep showing up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remain focused on the guys and their achievements; keep in mind, it’s all about them</li> <li>Concentrate on those things that got you to where you are</li> <li>Continue building one small step at a time</li> <li>Don’t chase funding just because it’s there</li> <li>Protect your reputation</li> <li>Measure your outcomes and stay relentlessly focused on improving them</li> <li>Keep showing up</li> </ul>
<b>Timing:</b> 12 months	12 months	12 months +	Ongoing

“Two out of three guys that come to Rikers Island, come back to Rikers Island. This must stop.”

- Mark Goldsmith, Founder and President, GOSO

## GOSO PILLARS

We’ve built **GOSO** on a particular set of conditions, beliefs and practices. Without any of these, we would have been stalled at the starting gate.

1. **True belief.** If you don’t truly believe that incarcerated young men can build productive lives in mainstream society, they won’t follow you anywhere.
2. **Passionate addiction.** Being there for the guys is truly a 24/7 proposition. You have to lead by example and let the work reprioritize your life. This is your second family: kids who need successful adults to be there when *they need*, to solve life-jeopardizing problems in the moment. Are you willing to work weekends to help a guy out of a jam?
3. **Top-to-top access.** We had to impress, cultivate, and cement access to the top people at all four critical points: the DOC, the Mayor’s office, the Governor’s office, and the prison superintendent’s office (guards ultimately determine frequency and quality of access to prisoners).
4. **Inside connection.** Our strong relationship with Horizon Academy and Island Academy, schools located on Rikers, and their principals, allows us to start working with young men early on and to support them in making educational progress (GED or diploma) *before* they leave Rikers. Forging strong bonds with the rank-and-file corrections staff is also critical to your ability to get things done at any detention facility.
5. **Team work.** Rather than act in isolation, we collaborate with other agencies, educational facilities, potential employers, and local and state governments to ensure that clients succeed.
6. **Successful coaches.** We bring in successful people who map out what it takes to succeed in the mainstream. They show up at Rikers every week and work with our guys, both in groups and individually. A lot of our guys don’t have a single, positive role model in their lives, so these coaches make an extraordinary impact.
7. **Practical action.** We focus on actions, one small step at a time. We set realistic goals with each of our young men and then help them execute a practical, day-by-day plan to get there.
8. **Earn everything.** We make our guys perform at every step, from writing an application essay to get into the program to keeping commitments on the outside—to earn subway passes, clothing allowances and short-term stipends.
9. **Family involvement.** We get the family involved. Nothing happens if families don’t support the new plan.
10. **Measurement.** Success breeds success, and we stay focused on outcomes – things we can measure: how many of our young men have returned to Rikers? Earned a GED or diploma? Gotten jobs? We live by this. And funders demand it.

## NOT BOARD AS USUAL: STRATEGICALLY BUILDING A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Starting **GOSO** was like launching any start-up on a shoe-string budget. It required enormous levels of resourcefulness and creativity. And it required getting the ball rolling – without an elaborate infrastructure, staff or outside funding – until we had a track record we could sell to funders. Thus, we lived the principle we preach to our guys about their own paths to productive lives: “*yard by yard it’s hard...inch by inch it’s a cinch.*” One of our critical early building blocks was a board of directors.

**GOSO’s** early months relied extensively on cultivating a small, *working* board of directors, meaning that each board member rolled up his sleeves, came to Rikers, and served as a coach for our guys. This was less about board members with deep pockets and more about successful men and women who were willing to get their hands dirty and help build the organization when we had few resources to hire staff. It wasn’t until later in our development that we focused on finding members who could lead fundraising.

Ultimately, you have to be able to bring together a team and bring them to the game.

*“These young men have little vision beyond their present circumstances and most do not know a single person who could help them change their life. We let our guys know they have self-worth and legitimate hope; they are entitled to a second chance, and there are things they can do immediately to start achieving results. Then we show them how to do it.”*

- Mark Goldsmith, Founder and President, GOSO

**GOSO STAGES**

GOSO works in **three stages**:

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Stage</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Stage</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Stage</b>
<b>Support While in Jail (Rikers Island)</b>	<b>Support If Incarcerated (Convicted and sent to Up-State NY)</b>	<b>Support When Released (Back to their communities)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Express interest in furthering education through GED, high school diploma or college</li> <li>Apply to <b>GOSO</b> by submitting an essay, a resume and signing a contract</li> <li>Once enrolled, immediately begin planning for release</li> <li>Assess legal status and provide legal assistance, as needed</li> <li><b>GOSO</b> coaches meet weekly with participants, providing training on getting an education and career upon release</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young men sent up-state participate in our <b>Correspondence Program</b></li> <li>Keep them focused on the future, setting goals and plans for continued education and career training</li> <li>Those who excel academically can be considered for full scholarships to Ohio University’s College Program for the Incarcerated</li> <li>Stay in contact through mail and face-to-face visits to keep them on-track and focused</li> <li>Consider a pilot program in one prison facility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As the release date approaches, we put a transition plan in place</li> <li>The first stop upon release is our office, where we assess immediate needs (housing, counseling, treatment, etc.)</li> <li>At the end of the first day, clients leave our offices with an alarm clock, note pad, pens, a weekly planner, condoms, a subway card and a professional resume</li> <li>Most importantly, clients leave with a concrete plan, and a place they come to weekly for coaching, job assistance and a variety of other services</li> </ul>

**Features that Extend Across all 3 Stages**

- Education.** We support educational goals in a number of ways. Our services include support of their success at Rikers’ Horizon Academy; assistance with correspondence courses while incarcerated for vocational skills and college credit; and advocacy for continued education after release in trade schools, GED programs and college.
- Coaching.** Our coaching starts at Rikers and continues upon release. Services include group and individual coaching on life skills, interpersonal relationship skills, job skills and attitude improvement. Coaches are successful businesspeople who have success stories they can share and that can be translated into something relevant for our guys.
- Job Counseling.** Job counseling includes everything from setting a vision for the future to the nuts-and-bolts of the job search. Services include an examination of participants’ interests and talents combined with exploration of careers and vacations that leads to a realistic plan for the future; resume writing and job interviewing skill-building.
- Job Development and Placement.** Assisting our guys achieve their career goals means that we establish relationships with local employers to secure a pipeline of jobs for our guys. We then connect them to employers with job openings, set up interviews, videotape practice interviews, and coach them on presentation, attitude and answers. .
- Social Supports.** We are not a classic social service agency, though we know well that our guys come to us with many pressing needs. So we have an experienced MSW to help connect our clients to the services they may require, such as mental health, drug treatment, and anger management.
- Legal Guidance.** We provide a legal resource to young men that often have none. Services include providing an important link with counsel, judges and the District Attorney’s offices; contributing meaningful information and documentation as well as advocacy and court appearances to help with sentencing.
- Public Policy Advocacy.** We support policy and legislative initiatives that are compatible with rehabilitation and discharge planning.