

How this ex-con started from nothing to build a 7-figure business

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Your sentence doesn't end when you leave prison. No doubt you spent years reflecting on your bad decisions while in penitentiary, but the consequences of your actions stay with you forever.

That's what 18-year-old Mike Pisciotta found out the hard way. After taking near-fatal amounts of Xanax, when doctors said it was a miracle he was still alive, Pisciotta awoke two days later in a prison cell. He'd robbed two stores and would spend the next 10 years in the Florida Correctional System.

To most it would seem life was over. Your hopes and ambition would pass you by, and you'd never be able to escape the stigma of your criminal record. A decade of confinement would be followed by a lifetime of discrimination, making it almost impossible to find a job.

But Pisciotta didn't allow himself to fall victim to circumstance. Prison would take 10 years of his freedom, but he didn't let it take 10 years of his life. Here's how he used prison to kick-start his entrepreneurial journey and lay the foundation for a seven-figure consulting business.

Ambition without skill is useless.

As someone with a natural aversion to authority, Pisciotta realized his only chance of success lay in self-employment. Instead of spending his prison years in silent apprehension, he applied himself in the library, learning everything there was to know about management, marketing and entrepreneurship.

He immersed himself in works like *E-Myth Revisited* by Michael Gerber. He studied the Bible avidly, and he dedicated time to learning new languages.

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However, his attempts at self-improvement were constantly undermined and ridiculed.

“ I felt like a crab desperately fighting to get out of a bucket. And all of the other crabs... the inmates and the officers were desperately fighting to pull me back in. Officers would shake down my cell and confiscate any books that I didn't have a receipt for. And they'd do this purely out of spite,” says Pisciotta.

It was a negative environment that he had to fight against everyday. Each time he tried to raise himself up, the people around him were waiting to pull him back down again. Constant hostility and discrimination made attempts at self-improvement virtually impossible.

Learning is easier with a study partner.

Things began to change a few years into his sentence when Pisciotta met a man named Tyrone, a fellow inmate. Both were on a mission to turn their lives around and he was intrigued by Tyrone's commitment to studying, and even more so by his affinity for languages. The two stuck together and after several months of practicing routinely, Pisciotta became fluent in Spanish.

“ I eventually developed my own system for teaching Spanish and I actually began charging guys for lessons. I was paid with Ramen noodle soups and tuna packets because we weren't allowed money in prison. About 50 percent of those guys left learning a new language. I was totally blown away by it,” Pisciotta says.

He describes these Spanish lessons as his first entrepreneurial experience. Not only was he able to master a new skill quickly, but he was able to teach and profit from it in an environment where inmates didn't respect or value other people's time.

"Teaching inmates had its challenges," says Pisciotta, "Yes I was making money, but I also attracted a lot of negative attention from people who frowned on attempts at self-improvement. My constant learning was often interpreted as a statement that I thought I was better than everybody else. For the most part I brushed it off. I'd always been confident in my abilities, borderline arrogant. But I didn't learn new skills to show off, I learned them to stand a better chance of surviving life outside of prison after my release."

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Despite the criticism, Pisciotta explains that he is proud of the impact his Spanish lessons have had on some of his close friends and fellow inmates. "Very few guys applied themselves the way they needed to in order to fully grasp a new language. There were also people who just couldn't learn no matter how hard they tried. But the ones who did apply themselves made it all worth it for me. It was awesome to see the sense of pride they had in their accomplishment. They achieved something that they never thought they could before, and I was glad to be a part of that."

Pisciotta has stayed in touch with many of his prison mates since his release, including Jason Nelson, a friend and past student who spoke at his wedding.

However despite multiple attempts to reconnect, he has been unable to contact or track down his former mentor and teacher Tyrone.

Overcoming adversity alone is nearly impossible.

It's difficult to overcome adversity. But it's even harder when you try to do it alone. Fortunately for Pisciotta, he had a helping hand.

Robin was a local church youth leader with a popular radio show called "Soul Jams." As a fervent Christian himself, Pisciotta would tune into her station on a Friday night, and before long her words were a regular fixture behind the Brevard County prison walls.

Despite their different backgrounds Pisciotta felt drawn to Robin. He was her biggest fan, and one day he asked his mother to call in the station on behalf of the Brevard County inmates. Robin was stunned. She didn't even know that inmates were allowed a radio in prison, let alone that they'd be interested in what she had to say.

Regular radio shout-outs led to casual letters from many of the inmates, but Pisciotta's letters always stood out. Robin says, "Here I thought I was ministering to these inmates, but this one inmate was actually ministering to me! He would write stories and share scripture that literally made me want to be a better person. In fact the first time we met in person I wore a red T-shirt that said, 'I Wanna Be Like Mike.'"

A civilian goes to church on the inside.

Their shared commitment to the Bible drew them closer. After months of writing back and forth, Pisciotta asked Robin to join him for a Sunday

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morning church service. “ I was stunned,” Robin says. “ People can go to church with you in prison? I had no idea, but I was scared to go to prison -- a young girl, all by myself. So I took my friend Marcel along, and we filled out the visitation forms together.”

Sunday visitations became a frequent occurrence over the months to come. Robin continued writing and encouraged Pisciotta’s passion for learning. “ Whenever Mike started learning a new language I would send him a translated version of the Bible in that language. It was a book he knew so well that it really allowed him to immerse himself in the learning process. I also sent him business books in Spanish and Italian. Not only did this help him develop proficiency in multiple languages (Pisciotta speaks Spanish and Italian fluently, and is competent in both French and Greek), it forced him to learn about new types of businesses at the same time!”

On the 11th of October 2009, seven years after their first church visit and six weeks after his release from prison, Pisciotta and Robin got married. Having supported one another tirelessly for almost a decade, it was finally time for the couple to put in motion all the crazy ideas they had been talking about for years.

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You don’t always have time to make mistakes.

Pisciotta left jail with the expectation that the world wasn’t going to accept him. He tried everything and anything to make some extra money. Working in restaurants, retail, telemarketing, tutoring and even carpet cleaning. But

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every job interview was the same. People were initially impressed by his qualifications and multiple languages, but their attitudes changed as soon as they learned about his criminal past. That wasn't surprising.

What Pisciotta didn't expect was that his prison record would affect his wife as well. Robin had her own small business, A1 Administrative Support, that outsourced admin work from other local businesses. Unfortunately she was forced to close her company when the local economy collapsed in 2009.

NASA scrapped the space shuttle program in Brevard County, and the knock on effect caused small entrepreneurs like her suffer. She eventually found another job but her employment was short-lived. Robin was fired as soon as management found out about her ex-con husband.

Amidst this turmoil Robin became pregnant. The Pisciottas were broke and jobless with a child on the way. " We just cried," he says. " We cried and we knew we didn't have time to make mistakes."

Pisciotta had lived his entrepreneurial fantasies vicariously through Robin while he was in prison. Now that entrepreneurship was their only option, they decided to apply everything they had learned together and start a business of their own.

Teaching others your business is a business.

" I saw how much technology had changed since I was incarcerated," he says. " We knew we had to go online, so we did what any entrepreneur would do. We built a website, went out on trash night with socks on our hands and found old printers, televisions and appliances and sold them on

Craigslist.” They made enough money to get by but soon realized they could replicate the success of their own online business for other people.

Pisciotta recalls this early venture fondly. “ We landed our first client in Australia of all places, for \$13 an hour! We were really excited because it proved to us that the basic concept of online business could be replicated over and over again. We just needed to find a way to scale up and get better at it,” he says.

And that’s exactly what the Pisciottas did. Using the skills they learned from making their own website, the couple created done-for-you websites, online sales funnels and other online marketing platforms for new clients.

The more freedom they had to experiment, the better they got at what they did. “ We started turning our clients into millionaires.” Robin says. “

Eventually we had a waiting list of people who wanted to work with us and we could choose who we did business with.”

Success makes its own demands.

But the Pisciotta’s success came at a cost. “ We were working 12 hour days every day,” he says. “ We couldn’t even visit Robin’s parents in Michigan without constantly worrying about our clients. Robin’s father ran a small ministry out there, and we had to drive down to use the church internet every day. It was the only place we could do client work. We’d have to load our truck with sandbags to stop it drifting on the snow, and we’d always get stuck on the way back home.”

The Pisciotas were slaves to their business, and it was taking a toll on family life. Money wasn't an issue, but the only way the company could grow was if they each sacrificed time to work longer hours. That left little time to spend with their son, John.

"I didn't spend 10 years in prison to walk right into another one," he says, referring to their business. "So we made a drastic decision. We fired all our clients and completely transitioned to a coaching and consulting business model. We also started a few ecommerce stores and automated most of the admin and sales processes. It was a huge time saver and basically let us sell stuff while we were sleeping."

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By patiently growing their new client list and expanding their online stores, the Pisciotas were able to reach their seven-figure target in just over 18 months. Today, with the money taken care of, a life of freedom and balance has become a priority.

The couple now has the flexibility to mold their work schedule to fit their family-oriented lifestyle. They enjoy spending time with their two children, John and Sophia, and they're still very active in their local church. Pisciotta has even found time to write a book, , about his experiences in prison, and how they shaped him into the successful entrepreneur he is today.

Theirs might be a dramatic example of hopelessness to success, but the Pisciotas' dedication to learning new skills, their devotion to their business

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and to one another, and their willingness to make tough decisions has allowed them to thrive where many others would have given up.