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**PENDLETON**  
**From dungeon to ivory tower**  
*Former inmates find success after prison*

By **KATHY ANEY**  
 The East Oregonian

Finding a job after being in prison isn't something for the faint of heart.

Job applications ask whether the applicant has ever been convicted of a felony. Resumes telegraph big gaps in experience. Egos, already hammered by prison life, often sink into an abyss.

David Koch and Michael Lucia know a little something about rising from the ashes. Both are ex-cons who found success on the outside.

Koch went from menial cleaning jobs to flying planes and starting a successful green energy company. Koch travels around the country to give prison seminars on finding success on the outside.

Lucia got out a year ago. A graduate of Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution's clock-making program, he started a clock business that is ticking along.

Koch left prison in 1980 after serving time for theft and spent a month in a fruitless job search. One sultry day, feeling beat-up and bereft, the 24-year-old stopped at a small airport to admire the planes. An old-timer mowing the lawn spotted him and cut the lawnmower's engine.

"Uh-oh," Koch thought.

But the man just wanted to chat. He asked Koch if he'd thought about learning to fly.

Two problems, Koch told him, spilling his guts - no money and a prison record.

The man, who turned out to be the CEO of an airline company, offered him a job cleaning planes, scrubbing floors and mowing lawns.

"I took a job nobody else wanted," Koch said, "and I went to school and took flying lessons."

In 18 months, he'd earned his license and moved up to flight instructor. He later started a successful green energy company. He now gives seminars inside prisons and leads an organization that helps inmates start incubator businesses. He wrote about his experience in "Slaying the Dragon - The Journey from the Dungeon to the Ivory Tower."

Mike Lucia spent eight years in the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution for a Measure 11 crime. As an inmate, Lucia earned his GED. He also learned how to make and repair clocks from master clockmaker Gary Kopperud of Pendleton. Kopperud found Lucia in the prison's woodshop making a cabinet for a grandfather clock commissioned by Pendleton's Altrusa group.

"He asked us if we wanted to learn to put the mechanism in," Lucia said. "Twenty-eight of us said yes."

Later, Kopperud asked the group if they'd be interested in repairing old clocks. Lucia spent the next two-and-a-half years learning the trade. He holds a certificate of mastery - the 86th issued by the state of Oregon. Kopperud holds certificate number 57.

Now that Lucia is out, he has a little corner of his best friend Andy's auto shop for his clock repair business. He takes in work and often finds old clocks on eBay to fix and sell at a Sherwood antique store. Lucia also fixes cars at the garage.

His income is still lower than he made driving dump trucks before going into prison, but he is happy and moving forward.

Of prison, Lucia said, "I know in my heart, I'm not going back."

Koch, now 53, advises inmates to do as Lucia did - make a plan and take advantage of education and vocational programs while inside prison walls.

"I think education is directly related to crime and recidivism," he said. "The core underlying problem is illiteracy."

Plenty of people end up in prison because they lack education and instead rely on their "reptilian-level instincts," he said. "Just like lions and tigers and bears, people will use their teeth and claws to find clothing and shelter and protect their territory."

But finding success is more than just education, he said. Like Lucia, inmates need to find a dream and the confidence to carry it out. People, he said, need to become their own solution.

"In prison, you hear that now that you're a felon, you don't have a life," Koch said. "You hear that from people who come back."

Don't listen to the people who fail, he advises inmates - listen to those who succeed.

Koch spends many weeks a year delivering that message, traveling the country in his Hummer with his yellow Labrador retriever Buddy. Because of a serious diabetic condition, he pulls a trailer that houses a kitchen. Cooking his own food allows him to avoid restaurants and diabetes drugs.

"Buddy also visits most correctional facilities with David, if he's given clearance and a biscuit," said Koch's publicist, Kate Knapp. "David says Buddy actually helps put the inmates at ease and they more readily open up to him."

Koch pushes his message hard.

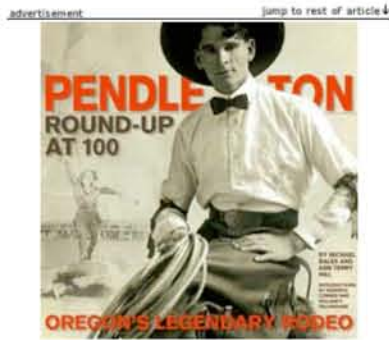
Someone who is down, Koch says, needs to dig deep for courage to reinvent himself. Never quit.



David Koch rose from an ex-con cleaning airplanes to the CEO of a green energy company.  
*Contributed photo*



Michael Lucia started a clock repair business after studying clock-making inside the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.  
*Staff photo by Kathy Aney*



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