

CASE STUDY

# 2

## **Transformation** The Other Side Academy Salt Lake City, Utah

*The content of your character is your choice. Day by day, what you choose, what you think and what you do is who you become.*

~ **Heraclitus**

*Souls are like athletes that need opponents worthy of them, if they are to be tried and extended and pushed to the full use of their powers.*

~ **Thomas Merton**

*Freedom never is obtained by mere release from old limitations; freedom is the positive substitution of inward self-control for external restraints.*

~ **Harry Emerson Fosdick**

Sometimes you find the most dazzling moral superstars in the unlikeliest of places.

My humbling moment came in walking through the back door of The Other Side Academy in Salt Lake City. I'd heard about it through an acquaintance who had discovered TOSA when his wife was surfing Yelp reviews, looking for a better moving company than the last disaster.

"Look, honey, these guys get five stars." She beckoned him over. "Would you believe this praise?"

Sure enough, every review for "The Other Side Movers" commended exceptional integrity, swiftness, punctuality, and care. Shortly after establishment, it shot to being the number-one rated moving company in Salt Lake City, and has remained there since. But reading a little closer, a curious tagline deepened the intrigue: "We rebuild lives by moving yours."

The Other Side Movers hail from The Other Side Academy, a life-training school for people with long criminal or addiction histories. Students commit to a minimum of a two-year residence—many as an alternative to incarceration—after prison sentences of five or more years (some have been in and out of jail for 20). Anyone who appears to be sincerely committed to changing his or her life is admitted free of cost, and the whole program is self-supporting.

"Our students might have some wild tattoos," reads a marketing brochure for The Other Side Movers, "but they are the hardest working, friendliest, most polite, and the most careful movers you can find. We take care of you as though our lives depended on it—because they do."

It begins with truth and love, every minute learned by doing. Entering this peer-to-peer residential community as "moral pea-brains," as founder Joseph Grenny puts it, within two or more years these former criminals catapult to "calculus-level" moral reasoning and relational maturity. It's not therapy, and it's not about relapse prevention. The Other Side Academy is about behaviors, and re-calibrating one's moral compass through practice and revelation.

"You'll solve your drug problem [here] and never even talk about it," says director Dave Durocher, who himself spent 25 years floating in and out of jails before landing at Delancey Street in California, one of the most effective rehab organizations in the country and the model inspiring The Other Side. "Once we have a value-centered life, we are not going to float away again."

TOSA only deals in real change. "This isn't a place where everybody gets what they deserve," says Grenny. "If you and I lived in a place where

we all got what we deserved, nobody would ever get better. So the real question here is: What are we willing to *do*? What is the expression of who we are that we're willing to offer?"

What is it worth to save a life?

### **The Bench**

It all starts with the Bench, an ordinary piece of furniture turned sacrosanct. Sitting in a crowded foyer in the back of the house, the Bench is like a portal from the old life to the new one—if you'll accept the truth and love it takes to change.

There are two ways to enroll at The Other Side Academy. You can either walk in off the street, or write a letter from jail. Most letters are desperate: "I'm at rock bottom." "I've realized I need change but I can't do it on my own." "Please help me. I promise I'm worth a shot."



Brutal honesty is TOSA's hallmark. The purpose of the initial interview is to see if the applicant is willing to hear hard truth.

No one is ever turned down for an interview, but the admission process is rigorous. Only 10 percent of those who apply get in. Aside from non-negotiables like no arson, no sex offenders, and no psychiatric medication, the brutal honesty that is TOSA's hallmark turns many applicants away in the first encounter.

"Do you love your family?" a student I'll call Susan was asked during her first interview. She's now been at TOSA for a little over a year. "Of course I do," she remembers responding.

"No, you don't," came the reply, hard and swift. "You left them. You wouldn't be doing this crap to them if you loved them. I sure hate to see what you would do if you hated them."

Susan still sucks in her breath remembering the wake-up call. "That line right there was just..." she dwindles off. "I knew."

The purpose of that initial interview is to see if the person is willing to hear hard truth. There's a social contract established right from that first discussion. It says: "This is what your days are going to sound like for the next two years. Is this what you want to be hearing?"

“We really look for a fire in you,” says a student I’ll call Larry, who’s been at TOSA for two years after serving multiple jail sentences. “There has to be something in there that we can mold and shape.” Dave Durocher puts it simply: “What I’m looking for is a soul.”

The Bench is at once a birthplace and a grave. “The idea is that [life] before the Bench doesn’t exist anymore once you arrive,” says Larry. “You have to put that behind you.” At TOSA, past is prologue to the real living. Upon arrival, you get sent to the Bench for six hours, alone with your conscience, close to the door that could be your exit back to prison. A plaque on the wall for you to ponder outlines TOSA’s 12 principles, your best hope for an alternate future (bold text as stated on the plaque; explanations adapted from the program literature):

- ***You alone can do it, but you can’t do it alone***

The bad choices we’ve made have disconnected us from our own best interests, and from other people. The way out is to let others in. We get to the Other Side by connecting to other imperfect people, because they are worth it. As they connect with us, we discover that we are worthy too.

- ***Make and keep promises***

The only requirement for entry to The Other Side Academy is a sincere desire to change. We must learn a completely new set of habits and skills. Growth comes from making increasingly rigorous commitments to live by good principles.

- ***Self-reliance, there is no free lunch***

We support ourselves by running businesses. If we don’t work, we don’t eat. The Other Side Academy is about us doing for ourselves what no one else can do for us.

- ***Impeccable honesty***

In jails and rehab programs, we have perfected skills of lying, manipulating, and using those around us. Dishonesty has become such a habit that we are even disconnected from our own feelings and truths. These habits have kept us in a revolving door. To get to the *Other Side* you will be expected to practice impeccable honesty. You will be surrounded by others who hold you to account. This is the only path to having real relationships with others.

- ***Act as if***

New habits of self-discipline, hard work, and rigorous honesty will feel deeply uncomfortable—even painful—in the early stages. But as these new principles become new habits, they begin to create feelings of self-worth, peace, and happiness. Until then, we “act as if” we are honest, caring, curious, and humble. Over time we become that which we habitually do.

- ***Embrace humility***

Humility accelerates self-awareness. The speed with which we change is determined by the degree of our humility in listening to how others see us.

- ***Each one teach one***

Our past was about escaping discomfort and reacting to impulses. It was all about me. Stop thinking about yourself. As we lift and serve others we earn deep satisfaction. The Other Side Academy is a peer teaching system. Each time we learn a new skill, we are responsible for teaching it to others.

- ***200% accountability***

Everyone at The Other Side Academy is accountable not only for our own actions, but for watching over those around us. We need each other. Anyone who sees a problem is required to confront it and report it. The strength of our family is in everyone’s commitment to keeping each other safe.

- ***Forgiveness***

Be patient with each other. We won’t back down from letting you know when you fall short, but we won’t give up on you. Grudges weaken our family and weigh down the one who carries them.

- ***Boundaries***

Maintaining boundaries is the process through which we create our character. The Other Side Academy has firm boundaries. The first ones are to avoid violence and avoid substance abuse. Set strong boundaries and be an example to others.

- ***Faith-friendly***

There is no requirement at The Other Side Academy to believe in God or practice any particular religious beliefs. We are, however, supportive of beliefs that help you lead a healthier and more connected life. We worship and allow others to do the same.

- ***Pride in work***

The best way to create a feeling of well-being is to do any job—no matter how minor—with joy and love. You get back what you put in. Measure the progress you are making by looking at the quality of your work. Shoddy work is an invitation to self-examination.

“We believe that changing from the outside in is a good place to start,” says Durocher. The thesis is that when you practice living in the right way, for a long time, regardless of whether you feel like it or not, you begin to change. Add to that habitual right-choosing a supportive peer community who will hold you accountable, and a graduated tier of responsibility and autonomy, and little by little, crusty, angry, disillusioned skin starts to peel.

“People started to trust me,” remembers Durocher of his own transformation. “That made me feel good. I started realizing, ‘I can do this.’ Then when some of those bigger responsibilities were given to me, and I was doing them well, I started to believe in myself.”

With the inner change comes outer results. “I’m a hardworking, loyal person,” he says. “Now I am honest,” echoes Lola Zagey, a former heroin addict who helps run TOSA. Alan Fahringer, a third Delancey grad and current TOSA director, whose demon was methamphetamine, now calls himself “a person that has integrity. I take my word seriously. I’m a person that’s *about* something.”

What TOSA does, board chairman Grenny suggests, is help individuals rebalance their moral scales. “You can’t undo the stuff that you did,” he says. “You can’t erase it. You’ve done so much damage, hurt so many people that your moral scales are never going to get fixed. All you can do is do more and more good and help and serve others until eventually you can feel inside yourself that shocking thought: ‘Okay, maybe at this point I can be an okay person.’”

TOSA’s entire model is peer-based: Everyone has either spent time in jail or struggled with drug addiction. This lends a foundational credibility—and, crucially, moral authority—because everyone has been

through the same thing. There is no expert who swoops in, saying, “I’m going to fix you.” Rather, it’s “We’re going to fix each other, and it doesn’t matter how long it takes.”

### Games

“This is what we came for,” Susan tells me, pointing to a drawer full of paper slips carrying raw scrawls in one of the busy passageways. “This is Games, how we change our behaviors.”

It’s a strange name for one of the most gut-punching rituals of TOSA life. But every student who blossoms into someone he or she can be proud of credits Games as the key. It’s a twice-weekly circle where the wrongs of the week get broken down and addressed, to the offender’s face. One student “pulls up” another by calling attention to some offense of house rules, then fills out a slip and puts it in the Games drawer. Come Tuesday or Friday, all the residents surround the offender with a tidal wave of feedback and exhortation. It gets colorful quickly.

“Oftentimes you’re not even aware that you’re doing something wrong. But we are telling you,” says Susan. “We’ll say, ‘Hey Suzi, that’s not appropriate.’ And then other people will start jumping on that indictment, saying, ‘Hey, come on, you’re a leader. In this house, you know better. Come on, get it together.’ It’s a culture shock for every newcomer, especially those coming out of the prison ethos of ‘no snitching.’”

“The last thing you ever do in jail is give feedback,” says Susan. “But here, if I care about you, I will give you feedback.” After many years, if not decades, of having families and the rest of society give up on you, the contrast of getting so much attention aimed at pulling you up to a higher moral standard—a standard that the community depends upon for its own functioning—is a radical change.

“We get visitors,” says Grenny, and when the Games process is described to them, “they’ll say, ‘oh man, we’ve got to do something like that in my family.’ And then you see a second thought come over their face, and they say, ‘man, that would be terrifying. I would hate something like that.’”

He pauses here. “I think most of us in the normal world have this secret shame that causes us to cower from moral life. What TOSA does is force you” into moral judgments. “This moral life is available to the rest of us, but we don’t choose to enter it. The question is, what are you aspiring towards? Do you want to enter a place of perfect truth? What if our students are teaching the rest of us that not only could we survive such a place, but it would actually elevate us as human beings. That a real,

vulnerable accountability would make us all happier, more joyous and connected as people.”

### **Goodbye to the past, goodbye to victimization**

Contrary to conventional therapy practices, TOSA pushes students to avoid looking back. Whether the student’s prior conception of self involves braggadocio or shame (it’s typically a toxic mix of the two), TOSA believes it all needs to go. With the exception of some guided storytelling in the sophomore term, the past is off-limits.

“That image that you have of yourself...we’re going to take that away from you,” says Durocher. “We’re not going to let you grow the mohawk, we’re not going to let you grow the Fu Manchu mustache, we’re not going to let you do all those things that you associated with prior. Instead, we’re going to let you build a new image. But your new image is going to be built from you going forward, not who you thought you were when you got here.”



I used to believe that what happened to me in my childhood made me a victim. But I can make conscious choices and choose to do good instead of bad. It’s up to me.

A student I’ll call Joe served over 20 years in prisons from Nevada to Rhode Island, and is currently in his fifth month at TOSA. “Not talking about my past has been one of my biggest battles since I’ve been here,” he admits. “I used to work all that past stuff with prison therapists. I’d just get in there and pull on their heartstrings, and force them in whatever direction I wanted. Here, that doesn’t happen. We all drive each other in a positive direction.”

He continues: “I used to believe that what happened to me in my childhood made me a victim. Which was why I acted in the ways I did. But all of us here, we’re adults, and we can make conscious choices and choose to do good instead of bad. It’s up to me. I have the choice to get up every morning and be happy and healthy, or I have a choice to get up and be depressed and angry.”

Durocher chimes in: “A lot of people have horrific stories without making the bad decisions that we did. Going through life, you are going



to get disappointed and people are going to hurt you. Get used to it. Learn to deal with bad circumstances and powerful emotions.”

In the beginning, says Grenny, you have to “disconnect how you’re feeling from how you’re acting.... Numb yourself a little, so you don’t act on impulse. Then figure out why you have these negative emotions. By the time you’re a sophomore, you have a chance to sit with a group and start telling your story. But you need to learn to tell it in a new way, not in a glorifying, war story way, nor in a ‘this is my identity’ way, but in a way that takes some responsibility where you need to. And also absolves your responsibility for the things that weren’t your choices. So often people feel either too much guilt or too little guilt.”

At TOSA, all students both receive and give discipline and exhortation. Grenny and Durocher have discovered that accountability really only works when three or more are gathered. The freshman dorm has ten to a room. Later grades are four to eight per room. More broadly, informal critiquing and bolstering takes place all day long, as students work together, cook together, and clean together, scrutinizing and correcting each other as they go.

“I started set in my ways,” says Joe. “I had this convict mentality, where I’d lived a certain way for so long that I thought my way was correct. So I was pretty thick-headed and stubborn when I got here. I didn’t want to listen.... Somebody would try to correct me and I would immediately get angry. I’d curse them out: Who did they think they were?” Over time, Joe learned to trust the feedback, as he saw it came from people just like him, who had paid the price that allowed them to see things to which he was still blind.

“We’re exactly the same,” says Durocher about Joe. “The only difference is that I am farther removed. Everything that he’s going through, I’ve been through for years and years and years. All we have to do is get him on that road and shepherd him down that whole process. Soon he’ll be sitting in this chair when there’s another new student sitting there, and he’ll be one-upping him.”

The example of relatable yet transformed peers has given TOSA a high success rate. TOSA hasn’t seen one dirty drug test in its three years of operation. And the overall level of moral circumspection is astounding: scores of former criminals and hardcore meth and heroin addicts—men and women—living and working together, and no one is trying to game the system.

“Thirteen years my roommate’s been out of prison and he’s been nothing but a positive role model for me,” Joe says. “Every night I come

into that room he asks me how my day was, what's going on, and has nothing but positive things to tell me. If he can change his life, I believe I can change mine."

### **Time for transformation**

"The short answer to why this works," Grenny says, "is because it's long and it's real. It allows you to stay in a mode of practicing new behaviors until they go to the marrow of your bone. Some people will stay at The Other Side Academy for four or five years, sometimes longer. But they stay as long as it takes until they get it, rather than until the funding runs out."

Grenny views most rehab as operating like a business transaction. "People will ask, 'How long is it going to take?' The answer comes back, 'Well, how much money do you have?' So they'll do a 30-day program because that's what the government will reimburse. Or 60 days, or 90 days. Let me tell you, if you've been in and out of jail your whole life, living on the street, 60 days is an insult."

Among other realities, TOSA students often struggle to accept the love that comes with the accountability. Running the streets for as long as many of them have, they don't know what it's like to truly be cared for. TOSA is their introduction to intimate connection.

Larry, who had decided to stay a third year in the program, says, "We have a guy who's on contract now" (that's when you break a rule and have to wear a yellow t-shirt which sets you apart for several days and prohibits you from speaking as you work alongside your peers), and "he said he preferred it. For him, contract helped him isolate himself"—which was familiar. "The hard part was people coming to him and saying, 'How are you doing?' and, 'You're gonna be all right,' and 'We got your back.' He said, 'Their care made me so uncomfortable. I'd rather they leave me alone.'" He wasn't ready for relationship and accountability.

Larry says that TOSA's patience relieves pressure for you to put on a false face of changed behavior. "They don't say, 'Time's up.' Or, 'we want to make room for other people.' They know what it takes to change someone like me."

Extended time not only allows moral transformation to occur, it also lets the habits of a productive life form. A crucial part of the TOSA formula is the businesses operated by students. They provide daily discipline, purpose, satisfaction, and lessons in self-reliance. And the funds they throw off pay for 80 percent of the organization's work. The other 20 percent comes from donations.

The first company started was The Other Side Movers. “Loading moving trucks allows people with very little skill to work hard and attend to detail,” says Grenny. “It’s an arduous job that leaves little time for people to ruminate and live in their heads—which is a dangerous place to be for the first few months after a person enters the TOSA regime. We teach everything from showing up on time, to packing cleanly, to sweeping the floor, and eventually to running the office side of the company.”

In 2017, TOSA started a thrift store. When they move, many of the affluent households served by The Other Side Movers end up with clothing, furniture, dishes, and other items they would like to donate. The thrift operation makes that a seamless process. The store is clean, orderly, carries good products, and has attentive customer service. “It’s more of an experience than a store,” says a proud Susan.



Business activity teaches students how to get up every day, go to work, have a good attitude, do as you’re asked, learn how to learn, go to bed, and do it again the next day.

Students have also started a construction company and a landscaping firm, culinary services, and an autobody shop. Other students sit in the basement of the Academy’s home for eight-hour shifts making calls and explaining the organization’s mission to potential donors. It’s not one particular set of skills that TOSA wants to develop. It’s more concerned that you learn how to get up every day, go to work, have a good attitude, do as you’re asked, learn how to learn, go to bed, and do it again the next day.

“You may not graduate from The Other Side Academy and go get a job at a moving company or restaurant. You may get a job at a place that you’ve always wanted to work prior to you destroying your life,” says Durocher. “The idea is you can leave and be a success anywhere...that you gain some portable social capital.”

So far, TOSA has produced 39 graduates, only one of whom has relapsed. About 25 percent of entrants to the program opt out during the 30-day orientation phase; beyond that point, they go the distance. Many

graduates of the two-year program choose to stay on for a third (they're called master students). Those who graduate and leave are employed, drug-free, crime-free, and living productive, positive lives.

### **Bridge to the other side**

After two or more years of hard work, brutal honesty, communal living, and gradual transformation, TOSA students get to a much vaunted day: Graduation. Like everything else at The Other Side, there's a physical monument marking the transition, in this case, a bridge that extends from the front door to the rest of their lives. When students are first admitted into the program, they are brought to this same east side of campus, where at the foot of the bridge they make solemn promises to join the community and accept help for a new life. Graduation marks a return to the bridge, this time facing a watching world.

As families look on, the ceremony includes letters to each graduate read aloud by other TOSA participants, a message from Grenny, and then a recitation of vows before crossing over the bridge into handshakes. "Scotty O., you have been a rock for me over the last 18 months," says one burly student in his public message to the graduate. "There have been times here where I felt unimportant, lost, anxious and misunderstood, times when I needed clarity about certain crucial topics like family, love, connection, disordered thoughts.... Never once have you been at a loss for just the right words. You are authentic, talented, and beautiful. I love you, and I know that you love me. Your actions have shown it. Now, true to what we do here, I will pass on this gift of love and understanding to others."

It's a strange thing to watch men with shaved heads and pockmarked faces speak with such open emotion. Some of the watching students are contorting their facial muscles, either too moved to show it publicly, or daunted by their own personal journeys ahead.

Then today's graduate, Scotty, speaks.

Right before I came here, I found myself yet again in that situation where everything in my life was crumbling, and I was ruining lives and hurting people and doing a lot of horrible things. I really was tired of doing all that, but I didn't know what else to do. I didn't feel like I deserved to see the world. I wanted to die. I had already done 14 years of my life incarcerated, and I didn't want to keep doing it. So I wrote a letter after someone told me about this place. I didn't know what to expect, but I figured it was better than going to prison, and better than dying.

So I got here and I thought, this is the weirdest place ever. These people are nuts. All the staff members were nice and friendly, and then every once in a while they were really mean. It drove me nuts when I first got here. And then I realized that it was really *my* thoughts that were crazy. *My* view on things was so upside-down.

After being here for two years, I think the biggest thing that I have learned is that it is not about me. It's about the next guy and the newest guy. It's about finding somebody who needs help and helping them. And that's the only way that I get better. I learned that from Lola, and Dave, and all the staff here. It seems like they are always trying to help the next person. You know, from the small things, like seeing somebody stuck in the snow on the side of the road and just stopping whatever we are doing as a house and jumping up and helping them. Like I did when I was a little kid.

Scotty chokes up and pauses. "It's really nice now to be able to see myself as the kind of person who wants to give to the next guy, who wants to be there for people and be a good person."

Then Grenny speaks.

This here is what grace looks like. When you go to Florence and visit the famous David sculpture by Michelangelo, you're struck by how something so glistening and beautiful could be made from stone. You look at David's hand and you see veins on it. It literally looks like skin. That's what happens here. We take stones that are completely unshapen—often *misshapen*—and...chisel each other.... It's a violent process. It involves really long, patient, aggressive activity. Scotty had to choose to stay here for two years, through 208 Games. That's a lot of chiseling, a lot of hammering.... Brothers and sisters here today, if you're feeling that violence and you don't like the feel of the chisel against you, just remember what you're on the way to becoming. Just remember what's at the end of that journey if you just choose to sit still. Because the way grace looks is that the chisel and hammer arrive, and the block of marble has to choose to accept the grace, to be willing to sit there and accept it.

Here Grenny tears up.

I watch that happening in this house every single day. Those of you that are deciding what to do in your third year, decide whether or

not the chiseling is done, because there might be a little bit more work to do. For some, like Scotty, you'll make the decision for the chiseling to continue to happen out there, but with a tie to stay connected to the hammer's home base—us. So my question for the rest of you is: If you want to take control of your behavior, what do you have to do?

It's a question of context and moral norms.

All you've learned in the last two years is how to be people of character *here*. You haven't learned how to be this kind of person as a master's student or as a graduate student—you haven't learned that yet. So expect as soon as you cross that bridge, a whole new set of feelings and temptations and thoughts to start coming on. You have to stay connected to the exact same kind of influence structure that you've had here, to continue to become who you want to become. Stay still and let the chisel and the hammer continue to do its work. The worst thing you can do is start to feel entitled and say, "All right, I've done that. Now I get to enjoy life." No, you get to continue to be decent men and women, and that creates enjoyment.

Before he walks across the bridge to shake the hand of a previous graduate, now living as a free man, Scotty repeats a final vow: "I promise to show the world what TOSA is by having integrity and by being accountable. I promise to respond to any of my TOSA brothers or sisters in need. I promise to spend the rest of my life saving and serving others, just as you have saved and served me. Will you help me now as I do my best to live our beliefs on The Other Side?"

TOSA's staff, watching families, and the previous graduates respond, "Yes. You may now cross over."

### **Expanding ambitions**

"I don't believe there's anything more important than the work we're doing," says Durocher. "Taking people and changing their lives, lives that they'd be utterly incapable of changing on their own. Providing a place that's safe to go, so they can get the help they need."

On more than one level, Durocher's conviction mirrors the crisis of the hour. Every year now, more than 70,000 of our citizens die of drug overdose—far more than the number of Americans who died during the

Vietnam War. Millions more suffer neglect or family breakdown because of substance abuse. As the *New York Times* reported in the investigative series “Addiction, Inc.,” drug treatment has become one of the most lucrative health-care industries to emerge in a generation. There’s an untapped market, and, because of that, an urgent need for institutions of integrity that put people before profit.

“The basic problem is not addiction,” says Grenny. “The real problem is disconnection. People don’t know how to live in an ordered, high-integrity, honest life with other people.” TOSA’s trying to change that, by helping residents practice decision-making until their intuitions are honed and shaped in healthy directions.

The gold standard that TOSA is setting really has two applications. The first involves franchising its model for addicts and criminals everywhere, and the second invites other professional sectors to apply the principles that undergird TOSA’s success.

The Other Side Academy is currently raising funds to purchase 20 acres of land in Salt Lake City for the building of a model campus that could house 400-500 students. Leaders hope that 30 percent of the total funds necessary for this expansion will be granted by private donors. The remaining 70 percent they will seek as loans, to be paid off by revenues from the businesses run by TOSA students. “It’s a wonderful symbol that the students get to say, ‘We did twice as much as the community did,’” says Grenny. “And the community in turns says, ‘We believed in you, and this is our way of saying that we’re part of this, too.’”

The organization is also documenting all of its steps and processes so that its operations can be franchised in other cities. There are already donor commitments to bring the model to Denver (with Daniels Fund money), San Diego, and Chicago. A key issue both on the bigger Salt Lake City campus and in other cities will be maintaining the sense of community ownership that allows the program to work. Both Grenny and Durocher believe that to maintain intimacy and accountability, operating units need to be kept in the range of 100 students. Multiple units will operate in parallel to serve larger total numbers.

TOSA is also starting an entity to incubate companies owned and run by graduates, called UpSide Enterprises. The first business to be spun off by successful completers of the program will be a temp staffing and employment agency that works exclusively with people coming off the

street or out of jail. “We figure our folks know how to mentor them better than anybody else,” says Grenny. “And we believe it will be a profitable model”—because many cities face serious shortages today in manual-labor industries like construction and landscaping. “Plus we’ll be offering a distinct quality of service experience.”

Grenny’s own business background will be a vital boost to these expansions. He was president of a successful IT company, then founded one of the most respected corporate training companies in the U.S. He has co-authored seven books on managing change, and products growing out of his research have been used to instruct more than 2 million workers.



TOSA isn’t a traditional therapy or rehab operation. Officials don’t know how to pigeonhole the nonprofit.

According to Grenny, the biggest challenge in expanding TOSA is, “Can we develop leaders fast enough? The critical component of our model is our leadership.” The three people who run TOSA day in and day out—Dave Durocher, Lola Zagey, and Alan Fahringer—have a combined 45 years of experience with the Delancey Street model. TOSA is now developing a training regimen to turn some of its graduates into future Daves and Lolas. Candidates will begin as apprentices, then serve as junior staff, and eventually become full staff members. The program also wants to learn from other programs doing similar work, like Father Greg Boyle’s Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, and San Patrignano in Italy.

Grenny realizes that to attract donors, TOSA needs to be able to provide concrete measures of success. Compliance metrics like re-arrest numbers are easiest. Harder, yet more important in his view, are what he calls aspirational metrics. “Are graduates happy and connected and productive? Are they employed? Are they satisfied with their lives?”

TOSA aims to maintain contact with each graduate and track life satisfaction, financial health, relationship satisfaction, and other metrics as more graduates are produced, but it’s tricky. “If somebody’s messing up, they’re not easy to get a hold of. So you have to be suspicious of data sets



that say, 'Well we sent out a thousand surveys, we got 400 back, and here's the data from those 400.' We're trying to figure out how to solve that."

There are also regulatory minefields to navigate. TOSA isn't a traditional therapy or addiction-rehab operation. Officials don't know how to pigeonhole the nonprofit. Should the city zone them as a school? Monitor them as a drug program? Regulate them as a business? Treat them as a prisoner-reentry pathway? To keep itself free to make decisions as it deems best, TOSA so far hasn't taken a cent of government money.

And the group is zealously protecting the practices it considers crucial. "We will refuse ideas for expansion that expose us to infidelity to our model," says Grenny. "We've already run across some states that have laws that would be damaging to our operating procedures. We won't be going to those places."

Durocher and Grenny believe the model of accountability created by The Other Side Academy, and the nitty-gritty of its 12 operating beliefs, may also have wider value. "We recognize that we have this unique live-in community, but we think we can translate the principles that make it work beyond the criminal and addict profile. Corporate leaders seem increasingly to be clamoring for a new kind of culture, one defined by transparency and accountability. Maybe we can help."

Might TOSA's insights on moral accountability, peer-to-peer policing, learning by doing, and the value of rituals and physical monuments have value to companies, colleges, and other organizations? Spend a day at The Other Side Academy, and it hits you that the real world is so much softer, so mired in a spirit of victimization and individual rights to the exclusion of all else. TOSA is a beacon of counterculture, both in its communal nature and what it requires of each person to maintain it.

"I've learned more in the last two years about how to create a healthy, real community than I think I learned in the previous 28," says Grenny. His sentiments are reflected in the face of every other thriving student. "Look at how inappropriate all the boundaries are in every part of society today that we've seen with the whole #MeToo movement," says Tim Stay, one of TOSA's co-founders. "Both the participants and the surrounding environment were aware of what was going on, and yet no one was standing up and saying, 'Hey, this is inappropriate.'... Here there would be 50 people who would say, 'Whoa, you're not going into that room alone with that person. We know what kind of person he is.'"

Rare in this day and age, and even rarer given their histories, these students have come to *trust* this place. To trust its moral authority, its transformative alchemy, and even the pain such transformation requires. Critically, the trust is not just for the years they live and work as TOSA students, but for a way of being that is sufficient to direct the whole of one's life, and radiate outwards.

“What if our students—once felons and convicts—could show today's schools, corporations, and even religious institutions how to run an honest, trustworthy organization?” asks Grenny. “I think the reason our population is blessed is because they're so relatively broken. The problem with the rest of us is that we all are the same level of brokenness. And so we all think that, ‘I guess it must be okay, because I am probably about as happy as he is and she is.’ So rather than asking the most important question in life, ‘How good can I stand it?’, we settle for, ‘Eh, this is probably about how it is.’”

You don't need to be a thief or an addict to be persuaded by the beauty of a solid moral compass. There's an opportunity for philanthropists to catch TOSA's vision and evangelize its approach: Physical monuments, rituals, peer-to-peer accountability, learning by doing, patience.

“I think all of us want this kind of intimacy,” says Grenny. “It is what we are...we crave it. We just don't know how to do it.”

Maybe this community of reformed rascals can lead the way.