

**A FORMER INSIDERS'S GUIDE TO PAROLE:  
A Manual for Anyone Trying to Get Out of Prison  
By Gerald T Balone  
GTB Speaks, LLC**

Reviewed by Denis J. Uminski, JD

If I could take only one person to a desert island with me, it wouldn't be an attorney. But, if I could only take one book to prison with me, this would be this one-- and I am an attorney.

Gerry Balone has written and published his first book. This is a difficult financial venture and I wish him luck. His style reminds me of the style of, ironically, a retired police sergeant whose book I recently reviewed. Balone's strength lies in his personal experiences and his plain speaking, conversational style, making the reader feel that Balone is speaking directly to him.

Balone uses his prison experiences to illustrate the points that he is making. He committed a horrible crime as a teen-ager and was sentenced to 25 years to life. He served 37 years before release. After 18 years inside, he underwent a transformation and used his time wisely to get an education and sharpen his skills. As a former parole officer who supervised released offenders for 27 years, and who currently defends parole violators, I find his assertions refreshing. .

Chapters are short and cover the topic in bite-size pieces, making it easy to set the book down and pick it up again later.

He explains, chapter by chapter, how to prepare for parole board hearings. He covers RAP sheets, pre-sentence reports, disciplinary records, and letters of recommendation, to illustrate a few. He uses no legalese and dispenses no legal advice. He speaks about the need for proper attitude and demeanor in prison. He speaks about taking responsibility for the offense and expressing remorse for the offense. In my own conversations with hundreds of offenders, I have heard very little remorse. While reading this book, there were times when I wanted to shout "YES! YES!"

He covers appearance and demeanor during parole board hearings. When crime victims receive notice that their tormentors are making an appearance, they imagine that the offender will try to "sweet talk" the parole board into releasing him. Facility parole staff and board members will tell you that most applicants make poor appearances. Most exceptions are found among inmates at Shock facilities, who are continuously pumped up by the corrections staff, and exceptional men like Balone.

The book frequently refers to "rehabilitation" of the offender. Personally, I have never been comfortable in applying this term to offenders, and I sense that my former colleagues feel the same way. The word "Rehabilitation" promises a lot, which may, or may not, be delivered. I can view before and after photos of a building, and assure myself that it has been rehabilitated, but I can't peer into someone's mind. I prefer to say that someone has made "positive changes."

As attorneys Alan Rosenthal and Patricia Warth said, in a recent review in the Public Defense Backup Center Report: "It is much more than a book about how to make parole; it is a book about change and self-improvement."

The writer makes some assertions about police investigative conduct and the management of halfway facilities which could have used some justification. However, the book is effective, and I hope that Mr. Balone is some day able to write a sequel called "How to Do a Good Parole". I'll be first in line to get a copy.

This book should be in the hands of any inmate awaiting a board appearance and any attorney or criminal justice professional that needs to know how the game is played. It has earned a place in prison libraries and on the reading lists of criminal justice education programs.

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