



PROJECT 2: SOCIAL INNOVATION
HAYLEY SCIALDONE

CREATIVE RATIONALE

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Clemency Coffee is an idea for social innovation that focuses on the human need for inclusion and equal opportunity. The idea is to start a coffee shop that hires the formerly incarcerated. This group historically has had a hard time finding jobs after reentering society. This is mainly due to the automatic disqualification for a job if the applicant checks yes for a criminal record. The company would focus on building the life skills of its employees by using a majority of the profits to fund life skills development programs for the staff. When given a second chance through employment, the employees of the shop will gain economic security and reduce the likelihood of returning to prison.

After conducting further research, I found that one-third of U.S. adults have an arrest record (Goode 2011). Once released, over half cannot find jobs and are left outside of the labor force (Mullaney 2018). We are all likely linked to someone who has struggled finding work due to criminal records. Additionally, over 60 percent of Americans drink a cup of coffee every day (Sherman 2019). If we can merge the need for jobs amongst the formally incarcerated with the American addiction for coffee, we can position the company in a market that is reliable and that our communities are constantly in demand of.

A big obstacle in this specific business model is a lack of understanding or fear of the formally incarcerated. There is a bias that workers with criminal records will not be successful, but executive who hire ex-offenders say they have been at least as successful as their average hire 82 percent of the time, according to a report by the Society of Human Resources Management (Mullaney 2018). Research suggests that employers discriminate against workers with criminal records, even if they claim not to. While employers express willingness to hire people with criminal records, indication shows that having a record reduces one's hiring rates by 50%. What employers say versus what they do appears to be contradictory when it comes to hiring decisions (Couloute and Kopf 2018).

The fastest, most accessible way is to open the business in a college town, with an open-minded and progressive consumer base. Coffee shops are always in high demand for students, so the market on campus is strong. The triangle community does not have a business like this one in place so Chapel Hill is a great place to start modeling this system. As the company grows, the brand will most profitable in more progressive towns like college towns or cities with a large group of young professionals. Once the brand proves effective, the goal is to have employers of other businesses in the community adopt a hiring method that will not discriminate against applicants with criminal records.

The hiring process would be based on an open hiring model. This means that jobs will be given on a first-come-first-serve basis, no questions asked. There will be a screening to make sure their record does not include violent crimes. As jobs at the shop become available, the next person on the list will get the job. The employees have a chance to prove themselves. If current employees are not meeting expectations, the next on the list will receive the job.

A strong training process must be set in place that is upheld by the company. It will provide life skills development programs for employees. These programs and program leaders will be crowd sourced from volunteers in the community. Program funding will come from a majority of the profits made from the store. Funding will go to scholarships, alcohol and drug counseling, and beneficial life-skills education. The goal is to offer a sense of neighborly support for the formally incarcerated, and offer them an option outside of the reentry programs the government provides.

We will need initial investors, chefs, baristas and a branding specialist to pull off a successful brand. Even though we are introducing a purpose-driven brand, the coffee has got to be good. A physical establishment and menu must be created. A strong brand is crucial to paint a clear identity of this business. A strong social media presence will aim at helping to erase negative perceptions of hiring workers with criminal records by doing personal statements and biopics of each employee, as well from customers of the shop.

According to the 2018 Cone/Porter Novelli Purpose Study, Americans are more loyal and willing to stick with purpose-driven brands. In this day and age, there is some sort of expectancy from the consumer that your brand has some sort of social component. When a brand can build a stronger emotional connection with consumers, they develop a sense of pride to be associated with the product. Not only is it good for a business to introduce social good, but there is also a huge positive impact it can leave on society as a whole. The study found that 86% of Americans think companies should address domestic job growth in their business models (Cone Communications, Inc 2018).

The labor market tightens in our expanding economy and as the economy grows, businesses will need workers. The shop will aim to change the negative connotations associated with the formally incarcerated. It will show the potential in workers with criminal records when you value second chances and forgiveness. The end goal is to be a model for other businesses to hire the unemployed with criminal records and close this disparity in the labor force.

THE GOAL

The goal of this specific idea for social innovation is to remove the stigmatism towards hiring workers with criminal records in society at large. The goal of this specific coffee shop is to equip ex-cons with the skills that will prepare them for life outside of jail by giving them reintegration solutions within the community. If successful, this business can stand as an example that having an open hiring model is worth implementing as it will not affect sales negatively. Instead, Clemency Coffee will show that you can capitalize on investing less in screening out workers and more in supporting and training employees because it creates a good perception from their community/customers.

METRICS

- 1 How successful are profits? Are people coming to the shop?
- 2 Does the shop offer a community for workers with criminal records in a more natural, 'neighborly' way than with government intervention?
- 3 Does it evaluate the most essential information an ex-felon should have? Do the programs identify information that is critical for the formally incarcerated?
- 4 Is the community adopting the model for hiring formally incarcerated employees?
- 5 Do employees have a smooth transition into society with this job opportunity and the reentry programs offered in the program?

VALUE PROPOSITION

Clemency Coffee is a company that is all about serving the community... and coffee. Clemency Coffee will be successful because it serves exceptionally tasting coffee, and with each purchase you are creating opportunity for those in your community that need support the most. This concept provides customers the opportunity to make a personal contribution while receiving something in return for their community. We all make mistakes, and this company helps society learn the value in forgiveness. The company's goal is about making a better tomorrow through compassion and coffee.

USER TESTING AND RESEARCH FINDING VALIDATION

For all people interviewed, no one responded with reservations about going to the coffee shop. There was one business owner that said she does not hire people with criminal records, but that she could be swayed if it was proven to be a good business decision. All liked the idea of giving back to their communities. They liked that the proceeds went to life-skills development programs for the staff. They said that this aspect would be even more enticing as a customer to spend their money on over competitors like Starbucks.

Interviewee's Demographic

- College Student, Female, 21 "I think it is important to help them get on their feet again, to establish a routine and keep them on the straight and narrow. There is a thrift shop where I am from that gives clothes to the formally incarcerated for job interviews. It is a popular place in my community to give back to."
- Business Owner, Male, 56 "I personally have never hired anyone with a criminal record. That is a bias I could break if I am given proof that ex-offenders would work hard. As a customer, I would get coffee at this shop. If it benefits the community, why not?"
- Business Owner, Female, 57 "I have hired ex-offenders. They have great work ethics because they usually over compensate because they have to."
- College Student, Male, 19 "A lot has to do with the convenience of the store and if the product is good. I do not have any reservations towards the employees having a criminal record, as long as they did not commit violent crimes."

REFERENCES FOR RESEARCH

- Cone Communications, Inc. "Americans More Loyal And Willing To Defend Purpose-Driven Brands, According To New Research By Cone." PR Newswire: News Distribution, Targeting and Monitoring, 30 May 2018, www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/americans-more-loyal-and-willing-to-defend-purpose-driven-brands-according-to-new-research-by-cone-300656014.html.
- Couloute, Lucius, and Dan Kopf. "Out of Prison & Out of Work." States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2016 | Prison Policy Initiative, July 2018, www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html.
- Goode, Erica. "Nearly a Third of Americans Are Arrested by 23, Study Says." The New York Times, The New York Times, 19 Dec. 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/us/nearly-a-third-of-americans-are-arrested-by-23-study-says.html.
- Mullaney, Tim. "Why Companies Are Turning to Ex-Cons to Fill Slots for Workers." CNBC, CNBC, 18 Sept. 2018, www.cnbc.com/2018/09/18/why-companies-are-turning-to-ex-cons-to-fill-slots-for-workers.html.
- Sherman, Elisa. "Americans Are Drinking More Coffee Than Ever." Food & Wine, 19 Mar. 2019, www.foodandwine.com/news/americans-drinking-more-coffee-ever.

THE VISUAL SYSTEM: HOW DOES THIS BRAND TELL ITS STORY?

Clemency is an act of mercy and leniency. In the context of the law, clemency is a grant by the president or by the governor of a state of an amnesty, pardon, or reprieve or of a commutation of a criminal sentence. Clemency Coffee is fitting for the business because clemency stands for compassion and forgiveness. The alliteration is also catchy and easy to remember, which is beneficial for a new business trying to gain a customer base. The chain that represents the “C” is a symbol for breaking free. Clemency Coffee is a company that strives to help its employees ‘break free from the chains’ of prior mistakes that are holding them back from transitioning into society. The bottom of each coffee cup will have unique quotes about compassion and forgiveness. The goal is that when a customer takes a sip from the cup, those around the cup will see words of love. These words will hopefully spark a sense of compassion to the customer and their neighbors in the community.

