

Journey from Prison to Success

– Kendrick Youngblood

By: **Tujauna White**, MSI Website Admin, Communication, Sales, Michigan State Industries

Life after Prison for many formerly incarcerated individuals is anything but a cake walk. Sure, they have gained their freedom, but they also face a host of challenges as they assimilate back into society. The most widely known obstacles to reentry are employment and housing discrimination ... but many formerly incarcerated individuals can also face roadblocks in the areas of public assistance and food stamps, voting, adoptive and foster parenting, and sometime the simple act of obtaining a drivers' license becomes a major task to try to accomplish. There are many formerly incarcerated individuals whose only wish is to be given another chance. A chance to get a good education, a chance to work, a chance to have their voting rights restored, and a chance to learn a skill that would provide the needed resources for a better life.

Kendrick Youngblood, a former worker at the **Michigan State Industries' (MSI) Janitorial Factory Operation** is a reentry success story that will inspire others to "never give up!" His inspirational story of hard work and persistence will pave the way for others who are on the same road to redemption. In society today, formerly incarcerated prisoners can face the stigma of being convicted for life. A conviction is like the metaphorical scarlet let-



Kendrick Youngblood

ter. When people see you, they see your conviction because many will never let you forget that you committed a crime.

Fortunately, some attitudes and perceptions have shifted and we are beginning to witness a paradigm shift in how formerly incarcerated individuals are treated. In the **City of Detroit** for example, **Mayor Mike Duggan** introduced and implemented the **Returning Citizens Program**. This is a nationally recognized program

that partners with local companies who make it a practice to hire formerly incarcerated individuals. One of those companies, **Arrow Chemical Supply, Inc.** strongly believed in second chances and hired Youngblood after release. This experience and opportunity catapulted him into the successful man he is today.

Kendrick Youngblood's story begins with his training at the **MSI Janitorial Factory Operation** located at the **Ryan Correctional Facility** through a classification work detail assignment. **Curtis White**, MSI Janitorial Factory Operations Manager hired Youngblood who was employed at the operation for over seven years prior to being paroled. Mr. Youngblood had been incarcerated with the **Michigan Department of Corrections** since he was a young teen and served well over ten plus

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Curtis White, MSI Janitorial Factory Operation Manager

years. He immediately showed a desire to excel and his motivation and determination to improve himself became his focus. He learned valuable skills in chemical batch processing, mixing, packaging, shipping and receiving ... almost every aspect of the janitorial chemical operation.

Due to his positive attitude and leadership skills, he promoted to the **Main 5 Rate** (floor leader) for the operation. He had a “get it done” attitude which motivated other incarcerated workers on the team. Youngblood played a very integral part in developing, managing, and supervising the **Ryan Correctional Facility Hi-lo certification program** which certified an average of 20 incarcerated individuals per cycle. His personality and work ethic were impeccable and always noticed by all that surrounded him from the facility staff to vendors who visited the operation. Youngblood’s persistence in staying focused on acquiring various certifications and work skills training along with his willingness to improve himself at all costs led to an early release and parole from prison.

Upon release, Youngblood was offered a position with Arrow Chemical Supply Company, a vendor of the MSI Janitorial Operations program. He was hired due to the knowledge, skills, training, and experience gained from his employment with MSI, and eventually became a supervisor within the Arrow Chemical Supply Company. He also held other positions with the organization,

and his immediate supervisor **Cindy Schroeder**, former President, shared a letter (see page 24) with MSI regarding his employment at Arrow. Youngblood is currently employed by the **Chrysler Manufacturing Operations Plant** in Detroit, MI.

Curtis White, MSI Janitorial Factory Operation Manager states “Mr. Youngblood has shown that it doesn’t matter what you have been through in your past, you can always make a future for yourself and build a bridge to success.”

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Texas Department of Criminal Justice
TEXAS Correctional Industries

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TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Mr. Youngblood's immediate supervisor **Cindy Schroeder**, former President, Arrow Chemical Supply Company shared this letter with MSI regarding his employment at Arrow.



February 15, 2022

Arrow Chemical Products, Inc. is a believer in the judicial system that inmates can be reformed. On Oct 1, 2018 we hired a gentleman, Kenneth Youngblood. We were very aware that he spent most of his life adult life in the state penitentiary. We were also aware of his background.

Ken came to the interview and was properly prepared and knew a great deal about blending chemicals, safety issues, haz-mat requirements, record keeping, and most impressive, he was adamant about his impeccable work ethic. Ken is very well spoken, eager, appreciative and quite obviously sincere.

Ken started working at our family business as a mixer. A key position at Arrow Chemical. We cross-train at our company to keep employees well-rounded and able to transition to another role with ease. Ken is a quick study and adapted well in every situation. He quickly rose through the ranks and was promoted to shift manager. Approximately 20 men and women reported to Ken. He consistently led by example, an outstanding team player, and treated co-workers with dignity and respect. Ken and his team were always tops in production.

Ken was an excellent manager. In turn, he demanded excellence from his team. He kept them enthusiastic and motivated. We could count on orders that were done correctly, quality checked and thorough. As part of our management team, he came to weekly meetings prepared, he contributed in countless ways and implemented processes that are still used today.

Lastly, I'd like to share with anybody considering hiring an employing trained by Mr. Curtis White to expect a winner. Curtis laid the ground work for men like Ken Youngblood to thrive in any organization. Ken had keys to our building including the office and safe. He proved over and over that he is not only trustworthy but, a true asset to our company.

We sold the business in 2021. The new company moved all of the manufacturing to Kalamazoo so, to no fault of Ken's, his position was eliminated. He did stay on with the new company until our very last day of production. He was offered a job but unfortunately it would have required him to re-locate his family. Ken was very grateful for the Arrow Chemical opportunity and said so on many occasions. Arrow Chemical was the real winner in this situation, as he accepted a position with us. Speaking from myself and the Arrow team, we all miss him as a fellow co-worker and a friend. He is a kind, soft spoken, dependable, helpful, and all-around great guy.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Schroeder, (former President)
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