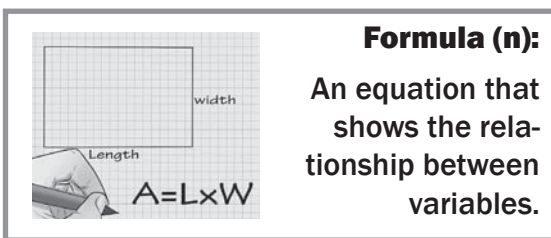


A Formula to Live By

(Determination x Dedication) + Discipline = Success

Curtis Braxton



BEFORE YOU READ: In the above formula, the letters stand for area, length, and width. The letters are variables. That means their value can vary. But the formula is fixed. No matter what the values of A, L, and W, the relationship between them is always the same. What is helpful about formulas?

Confronting Geometry

A few years ago, I signed up to learn AutoCAD, a vocational course offered at my prison. At the time, I hadn't done math since I passed the GED 12 years ago. When I sat down to the task of learning this new skill, I was confronted with geometry, a branch of mathematics that deals with the relationships between points, lines, angles, and surfaces.

Dumb as a Door Knob?

I was perplexed. The points weren't on point. The lines wouldn't line up, and I didn't know what angle to approach it all from. I couldn't understand anything. Every ten minutes, I called the tutor for help. He was another prisoner. He became irritated, but he tried not to show it. Some guys on my block told me he said I was as dumb as a door knob. I felt bad, but it didn't deter me. It became my impetus to keep fighting to understand.

Geometry was a discouraging struggle! It was like going to school every day to face a bully that won't leave you alone until you defeat him. This particular course was the hardest that the prison had to offer. It had a reputation for having a high

drop-out rate.

I was determined to learn. For months, I trudged on. The more I studied, the clearer things became. It felt like all the pieces of a puzzle coming together. I learned a valuable lesson in this process that I continue to apply to my life. As long as I employ the three Ds—determination, dedication, discipline—failure is not an option!



AFTER YOU READ: What is Curtis Braxton's "formula" for success? What is yours? Go to www.bls.gov/ooh/ and search for AutoCAD to learn more about related careers.

Curtis Braxton is an activist and a lover of life. He has used prison as a college to learn and cultivate himself. One of his goals is to work with troubled youth when he is released. He is a prison abolitionist. Write to him at Curtis Braxton, DT0787, 48 Overlook Dr., LaBelle, PA 15450.

What is AutoCAD?

The CAD in AutoCAD stands for computer-aided design. AutoCAD is a software program that designers use to create blueprints for buildings, bridges, and other construction projects. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual salary for drafters was \$54,170, and the employment of drafters is expected to grow 7 percent between 2016 and 2026.