

The Clink!

***"A hair brained idea!"
"It couldn't possibly work!"***

Just a couple of the phrases thrown our way when the idea of a fine dining restaurant inside a prison was conceived.

When people then heard that the paying customer was expected to come in to the prison to pay good money for food prepared and served by our country's "undesirables", the smirks and giggles were hard to disguise. I was one of the founding investors of the fine dining Clink Restaurant chain and have helped steer its growth ever since, but I do have to admit to also being one of the people in the above camp at the same time.

The Clink is a training restaurant where serving inmates get trained up in how to cook, wait on and everything else they could possibly need to know in order to make it into a real job once their release date is upon them.

It was a hair brained idea and there were lots of reasons why it couldn't possibly work. Next week we open our fourth Clink restaurant at HMP Styal in Manchester. Three Clinks are open and operational (book now!) and the fourth is to be ready to go. We currently run a re-offending rate of 10% which is appealing.

So what's the reason for our success and how have we managed to pull off such a feat? I can tell you it was not by taking away responsibility and stripping prisoners of self worth and pride. Shockingly, it was by doing the exact opposite.

Why does our Criminal Justice System find it so appealing to ignore evidence based theory and common sense? What we are doing is actually not new, it's not incredible and it's not revolutionary. It's simple and sensible and as a result we get results through treating individuals like human beings.

By Edwina Grosvenor
Trustee of Clink Restaurant chain

Human beings they have never had the chance to be usually due to horrific circumstance.

Why do we do it?

I, like many others have been a victim of many crimes, some serious, some less serious. So, for me personally it's because I believe we all deserve to live in a safer society where we feel like men and women are coming out of prison less dangerous as opposed to more dangerous. I am a tax payer and I'm not happy about the fact I currently invest in damaged people becoming more damaged. There are men and women who want to change behind those many impenetrable walls. We should celebrate this and help them to help themselves.

It's not enough to do nothing.

It's not enough to brand something a Rehabilitation Revolution (Government speak for recent prison changes) on the one hand whilst clearly doing so many counterproductive things on the other.

One can't always look to Government for the answers. They often don't have them. What we did at the Clink was to show Government how to do things and hoped they would join us.

I'm pleased to say they did.

The Clink represents what can and what is being done to catalyze change. We are working in partnership with the prison service, we serve the paying public inside Her Majesty's Prison walls, we help individuals to smile again, to be proud of themselves again and to ultimately live a law abiding life once they reach the outside.