

Josh Smith, Founder and CEO of 4th Purpose Foundation

Josh Smith was the founder and former owner of Knoxville's largest home-improvement service company, Master Service Companies. Smith started this company about 15 years ago from scratch, and when he sold the business several months ago, he had grown it to nearly \$30M in revenue with over 150 employees and locations across 3 different states. He sold it to pursue his true passion - criminal justice and prison reform. Why, you ask? For a 5-year period shortly before the launch of his service company, he himself, was incarcerated in a federal prison camp in Kentucky for his involvement in marijuana and cocaine trafficking.

Smith grew up in a single-mother household, lived in government housing, was removed from his home at age 11 due to abuse and was convicted of 7 felonies by the time he was 16. He entered prison at age 21 as an 11th-grade dropout with no plans to exit any differently than how he entered.

Instead, he found redemption through God and was guided by several highly educated, white-collar criminals, who he was able to learn from. But all the books he read, studying he did and plans he made didn't alter the reality of the world he was released into, one where ex-convicts are still punished by an onerous set of legal restrictions. Upon his release, the government housing his wife lived in was no longer available to them because of his status as a felon. He had to beg for his first job making \$6 an hour.

From ex-felon to successful business man, Smith has spent the last 15 years actively involved in prison reform efforts, mentoring formerly incarcerated individuals across the states of Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee; even in several Central American countries. Smith has supported several programs that provide hope, training and reentry support to prisoners and their families who earnestly want a new life, including hiring and mentoring many felons. He is a true model of successful entrepreneurship, and prides himself on mentoring others to help them reach their own, personal goals.

Earlier this year, he was appointed by Tennessee's Governor Bill Lee to serve on the Criminal Justice Reinvestment Task Force. Then, last November, using some of the proceeds from the sale of his company, Smith launched his foundation called 4th Purpose Foundation, whose mission is: to be a catalyst to make prison a place of transformation.