

**Executive Inc.: Lee Pioske finds redemption in leading Crossroads**

In the early 1990s, [Lee Pioske](http://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/search/results?q=Lee%20Pioske) was a successful stockbroker, making lots of money.

“Along the way, I started drinking, and then I started using crack cocaine,” he said. “When I started using drugs, I began to lose my ability to work well. I started to engage in criminal behavior, which led to my eventual arrest by the FBI.”

[[](http://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/news/2016/09/12/executive-inc-lee-pioske-finds-redemption-in.html#i1)Enlarge](http://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/news/2016/09/12/executive-inc-lee-pioske-finds-redemption-in.html#i1)

Pioske spent nearly six years in prison on federal and state charges. When he got out of prison in 1998, he checked into Crossroads, a residential and outpatient substance abuse program, as a resident.

He never left.

“If you stay long enough in any one place, eventually you get to run it,” said Pioske, now executive director of Crossroads, considered one of the largest residential behavioral health facilities in the Southwest.

For his group, there is no shortage of clients. Drug addiction is a growing problem, particularly in the workplace, Pioske said.

“Seventy percent of the 14.8 million Americans who use illegal drugs are employed,” said Pioske, who also is a member of the governor’s Substance Abuse Task Force.

Not many people who are released from prison with a federal felony get a second chance for a successful career. Many can’t break the barrier of low-wage jobs, which in turn impacts the economy.

“It’s been an incredible journey,” he said. “I’m an extremely lucky person. I did get that second chance.”

While he can never work in the financial industry again, he’s a perfect fit for running a drug and rehab organization because he’s been there and done that.

When he arrived at Crossroads in 1998 as a resident, he went to night school to earn his master’s degree in addiction psychology. By 2005, he was made the director of Crossroads.

He said it’s pretty common in the industry for recovering addicts and alcoholics to work for organizations such as Crossroads.

“Many of them also have had their share of legal struggles,” he said.

In Arizona, as long as a felon still owes restitution, he or she is not allowed to vote.

“I do still have ongoing restitution of $3 million,” he said. “That was money I had pilfered from my clients’ accounts, which is the reason I went to prison.”

He said he’s willing to be transparent about his past addiction struggles. Many people continue to hide their addictions because of the stigma.

The struggles of addiction don’t just go away after being in recovery for more than 20 years.

“The insanity of the disease of addiction is hard for people to understand because you would think that with everything I went through in my life and the horror that it caused me personally and more importantly other people who were hurt by my behavior, you would think I would never had the thought of crack cocaine again,” he said. “However, I tend to think of it occasionally yet.”

He has no intention of every going back to cocaine.

“But the insanity is that it’s still a thought,” he said. “It’s true with me and many other people in recovery. Once you cross a certain boundary in addiction, you’re afflicted for life. It doesn’t mean you can’t have a good life.”

With 268 beds in five facilities in Maricopa County, Crossroads is as busy as ever.

While Pioske realizes speaking openly about his addiction and criminal record might have negative consequences for him in the business world, he said there’s a greater good in sharing his story.

“Even if this message reaches five people in a good way and causes them to change, then it’s gotta be worth whatever else happens,” he said. “There will be heat, trust me.”

It’s important to him to take responsibility for his actions as it’s important for other recovering addicts to do the same.

“Nobody ever forced me to put a crack pipe in my mouth and nobody ever forced me to take a drink of alcohol,” he said. “I wasn’t tied to a chair while they poured it down my throat. Those were the choices I made. The results of those choices put me in a state of addiction. It’s a bit of an uncomfortable place. Nevertheless, it’s my responsibility.”

[**Lee Pioske**](http://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/search/results?q=Lee%20Pioske)

**Title:** Executive Director

**Company:** Crossroads

**Education:** Bachelor’s degree in political science, University of Minnesota; master’s degree in addiction psychology, Capella University

**Family:** Wife: Angelita; sons: Sam and Seth

**Your “aha” moment:** The day I was sentenced to prison

**Wish you knew 25 years ago:** Stay the hell away from drugs and alcohol

**One thing you’ll never do again:** Drink and drug

**Best gift ever received:** Alcoholics Anonymous

**What motivates you:** Doing what can’t be done

*Angela Gonzales covers health, biotech and education.*