



Goodwill
of Greater Detroit

NEWS



Victor Walker, instructor, Iron Workers Local 25 (right) with Keith Bennett, founding director, Flip the Script (left).

Another Script Flipped: Meet Victor Walker, 2025 Alumnus of the Year

Victor Walker grew up on Detroit's northwest side in the Dexter and Linwood neighborhood, where his parents instilled discipline, accountability and a steadfast belief in education. His father worked at Chrysler, and his mother was a homemaker who emphasized responsibility by quizzing her children on spelling, teaching them to cook and clean, and working hard to ensure they became self-sufficient adults.

That foundation cultivated Victor's articulate, driven and resourceful nature. By seven, he was selling candy at school. By his early teens, he was earning income as a neighborhood barber.

As Victor gained more freedom, he began to see the harder edges of his neighborhood including drugs and violence. At 13, the sudden death of a close friend in a car accident left a lasting mark.

At 15, Victor became a father. His parents stood by him but made it clear he needed to step up. He recognized that working as a barber was not enough, and he did not want to burden his family. Although hustles pulled him deeper into the street economy, he did graduate from high school and went on to college in Ohio. But, he missed home and eventually returned to Michigan where he slid further into a life of arrests, bonds and near misses.

In his early 20s, Victor was involved in an altercation that left him wounded, arrested and sentenced to 22 to 42 years in prison. The irony was bitter: although he acknowledges making mistakes and committing crimes in his past, it was the one he maintains he did not commit that stripped him of nearly two decades of freedom.

Prison could have been the end of his story. Instead, it became the catalyst for owning his future.



Victor immersed himself in learning. He studied law, business and finance. He filed motions and appeals, learned courtroom rules and procedures and, with persistence, ultimately secured a win. His sentence was overturned, though his conviction was not, and after 18 and a half years Victor was free.

Freedom was not simple, however. The world had changed, and Victor carried the weight of lost time. But he refused to look back.

He found Goodwill's Flip the Script, enrolled in the Goodwill Career Academy welding program, which equips returning citizens with in-demand skills and a second chance. There, mentors saw his drive and held him to a high bar.

Through Flip the Script, Victor connected with Iron Workers Local 25, where he became an apprentice. With focus, hard work and persistence, he continued to advance, earning journeyman status and eventually becoming the first Black Iron Workers Local 25 instructor with the highest test score ever recorded.

Victor's passion for teaching reflects the core of Flip the Script: discipline, responsibility and resilience. He is committed to training the next generation, passing on not only technical skills but, more importantly, the mindset that reshaped his life.

Today, Victor is more than a tradesman. He is a builder of people. He has recruited apprentices into Local 25, shared his story to encourage others and founded the National Association of Urban Tradesmen to support and assist individuals reentering society or pursuing new careers. He is a husband, father, mentor and living proof of what is possible when accountability and opportunity meet.

Victor embodies the mission of Flip the Script. He took the tools Goodwill provided and built a life of purpose. His journey from his



early days on Detroit's west side to the hardships of the streets and life in prison, to family man, instructor and mentor, demonstrates the power of resilience, the strength of mentorship and the truth that anyone can rewrite their future.

Victor's story is both a cautionary tale and a beacon of hope. We cannot undo the past, but we can weld together a better future, one skill, one training and one life at a time.

You can learn more about Victor's journey and his experience with Flip the Script here <https://youtu.be/94Eb7pMY9tQ>

