THE SHORT GUIDE

THE ROAD

A calm guide to facing criminal charges, for the people inside it and the families beside them

Sonny Saggar
a physician who walked it

This short guide is free. Share it with anyone who needs it.
The full book and audio are at whitecollaracademy.com.

The Map

If you feel completely lost right now, that is not weakness. It is a sign that nobody handed you the map. The worst part of the early days is not any single event. It is the not knowing, because the mind, left in the dark, fills the dark with the worst things it can imagine. So here is the first truth. This is not a fog. It is a road, with stages, and it runs in nearly the same order every time. You cannot fight a fog. But you can walk a road, one foot and then the next. This guide is that road, from the air. The full book walks it slowly, on the ground.

You Did Not All Arrive the Same Way

Some people knew exactly what they were doing. Many did not. Many believed they were in a grey area, relied on their advisors, or never dreamed the thing could be criminal at all. If you feel swept up in something you never understood as a crime, you are not alone, and you are not imagining it. But here is what matters: the road ahead is the same road however you arrived. The map is for all of you.

The First Week

The first week is dangerous not because of what the government will do, but because of what fear makes you do.

Say less. Assume you are recorded. Contact no one connected to the case. Destroy nothing. If you would not read it aloud to a judge, do not write it. Tell only who must know. And get a lawyer before you take advice. This week feels like the end. It is the first step of a long road.

Your Lawyer

Your lawyer fights the criminal case. That is the job, and a good one is worth every penny. But the criminal case is only the first body. Behind it wait the licensing board, the certification body, the exclusion, the databases, the long tail. Your lawyer does not usually handle those. That larger work is yours. Know where their work ends, so someone is watching the rest.

MOVEMENT TWO — THE MACHINERY

Federal or State

Most of this is the same whether your case is federal or state: the shock, the lawyer, the presentence report, the shape of sentencing, the stack, the family, the waiting, the life after. Only a few things differ, the sentencing rulebook, where you serve time and what reduces it, and what supervision is called. The road is the same road. Only some of the signs are written in a different local language.

The PSR and Sentencing

The presentence report is the document that follows you everywhere, into prison and beyond. Read every line. Correct every error. Put the whole person into it, not just the worst day. At sentencing, the grid produces a starting point, not your fate. The human part is where mercy lives, and it is built from what you put in the judge's hands. Prepare your allocution, the moment you speak in your own voice, as the most important short speech of your life.

MOVEMENT THREE — THE STACK

What the Court Did Not Take

Read your judgment slowly, for what is there and, just as hard, for what is not. In many cases the court does not bar your profession. It could have. It did not. That silence matters, because the court is the one body that actually examined you. Every body that comes after will pretend the court ended your career. It did not. That gap is your defense.

The Stack

The court speaks once, and then the system keeps speaking. The board, the certification body, the exclusion, the databases, each acts alone, none coordinating, and the punishments

accumulate past anything any single body intended. Naming the stack takes away half its power. You stand ready instead of being knocked flat. And you never surrender by silence, because the worst way to lose a license is the way that happens simply because no one answered.

MOVEMENT FOUR — STANDING THROUGH IT

Telling Your Family

Tell the people you love before they hear it elsewhere. With children, match the words to the age, and lead with safety before facts: you are safe, I love you, none of this is your fault. Do not over-explain. Keep the door open for years. Through all of it, the love survives. That is not a comfort I am offering. It is a fact I am reporting, from the other side.

Staying Steady, and After

You cannot control how this ends. You can control the shape of the day in front of you. Build a structure, move your body, guard the ordinary good moments, and shrink the horizon to today. Coming home is its own challenge, learn the rules exactly and stack small wins. And when it is behind you, remember: you were never only your credential. You lost almost everything, and you are still standing. That is the ground the next thing gets built on.

This was the short version

What you just read is the whole road in brief. I wrote it so that anyone, on the worst day, could read the entire thing in one sitting and feel the fog lift a little.

There is a fuller version, where each step is walked slowly, with the things nobody tells you and the parts I lived myself. It is available in print and as an audiobook at whitecollaracademy.com.

But this short guide is yours, free, to keep and to share. If someone you know is standing where you were when you opened it, send it to them.

The author has pleaded guilty to a federal offense and does not seek to relitigate his conviction or minimize his responsibility. This is general information from lived experience. It is not legal advice for any individual case.