

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH  
A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF & THEIR FAMILIES

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## Not A Supercop

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*The following is anonymous input from someone in the corrections ranks.*

Dear Desert Waters:

I've been a Corrections Officer for 16 years. I'm writing to tell you how I've been managing to stay sane. The first few years, being a Corrections Officer was my entire life. The intensity of the job consumed me. It was all I could think and talk about. I saw myself as Supercop, both at work and on the outside. I was there to rid the world of bad guys, help reform a few, and set *everybody* straight. One day a good friend asked me, *Who are you, really?* That question hit me hard. I realized that I am more than a Corrections Officer. My job is only part of me. It's not all of who I am. Before I got the job I was a worthwhile person. When I retire, I'll still be a whole person. I'm not a "guard." I'm a human being. I am a husband, a father, a fisherman, a hunter, a Little League coach, a friend, a Christian, and a Corrections Officer. I'm not a cop 24/7. It's not my job to keep everybody safe wherever I go—Wal-Mart, the movie theater, McDonald's. I'm only responsible for security and control at work. I don't pack a gun wherever I go in the free world. I sit with my back to doors in public places, and let people stand behind me in elevators. You may think I'm crazy, but I tell you, I've become a much happier person once I figured out how to take my uniform off of my soul when I leave the gate. I also try to make (and keep) friends who don't work in corrections. We don't talk shop. We prefer to talk about fun things such as sports, hunting, fishing, cars, whatever. Life is about a lot more

than what I do at work.

Don't get me wrong. I take pride in what I do, and I try to do a good job in spite of the fact that we're running short all the time. But I am more than my job, and no one can stick me in the "guard" box. I won't let them!

*Found the Answer*



**My job is only part of me. It's not all of who I am.**

Dear *Found the Answer*:

You put it all so well. What you have described to us are ways to prevent from having your identity—your sense of who you are—be swallowed up by your job.

You figured out how to not become one-dimensional—not see yourself only in terms of your very demanding and important job. I'm sure that such an attitude keeps you healthy and helps both at home and at work. At home, because you are available to truly "be

with," connect with your loved ones and your friends, and enjoy life together. At work, because you give yourself a break from the Corrections Officer role. When you report to work you have had a chance to be refreshed by engaging in activities that have nothing to do with your workplace. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with us. It is vital to remind your coworkers that you all are like polished diamonds. Your professional identity is only one of *many* facets that make you a person.

## From The Old Screw

# POLITICS

One of the worst things a new Officer and even sometimes an old Officer can get into is workplace politics. I have seen what happens to people who play politics and what happens when their fellow staff find out. A lot of staff get burnt because they try to play up to the bosses and get nothing out of it except the contempt of their fellow Officers. Even though you may think a person deserves it, it is not a good thing to see fellow workers report to work and none of their peers speak to them except in the line of duty. Most staff don't last long under those circumstances.

If you do your job and do it right, test well, and work hard, you will get the promotions and jobs you want. (Most of the time. No one ever said that life was fair.)

The best thing I can say is respect your supervisors, and learn and follow the regulations. The administrators will know who the solid and competent employees are, who they can count on to see that the job gets done. Each of you has at least one area where you excel, and your bosses can recognize it.

Take care, *The Old Screw*

## TEACHING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SKILLS

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*Teaching and modeling non-forceful ways for officers to resolve conflict is crucial because the unnecessary or excessive use of force and weapons provokes broader violence.*<sup>1</sup>

*Training for officers must improve so that they are better prepared to interact effectively with prisoners from diverse backgrounds. The skills and capacities of lieutenants, captains, and wardens—staff who have the greatest influence on the culture of prisons and jails day to day—must be developed.*<sup>2</sup>

Working in a correctional environment requires a complex set of self-management and interpersonal skills (Emotional Intelligence) which cannot be all acquired at the Training Academy, if they are taught there at all. Rather, these

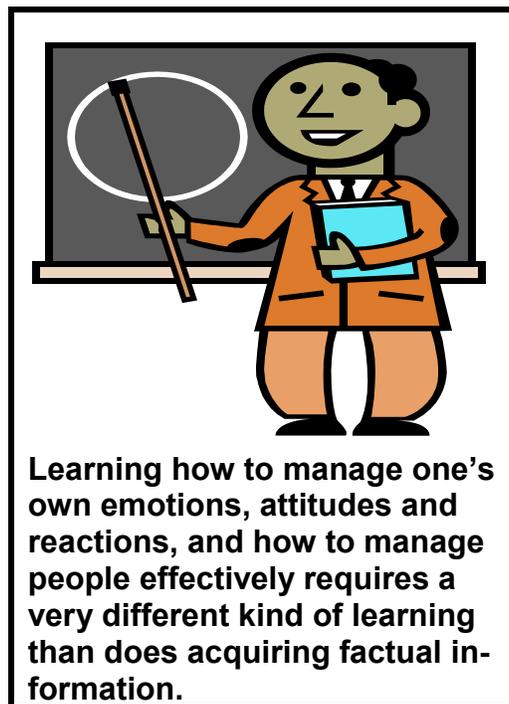
skills are developed over time through supervised experience, mentoring, and continued education trainings. These skills can make the difference

between life and death, or between the retention and loss of key staff.

The traditional approach of teaching interpersonal skills has been to **tell** trainees about those skills, offer some examples, and, perhaps, do one or two role plays. After that, the trainees are on their own. In a matter of days most of them forget the vast majority of the training. Consequently, the new tools they have been given to use are rarely incorporated in the workplace.

Learning how to manage one's own emotions, attitudes and reactions, and how to manage people effectively requires a

*(Continued on page 3)*



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## TEACHING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SKILLS

*(Continued from page 2)*

very different kind of learning than does acquiring factual information. In history and arithmetic we are given information to understand intellectually or to memorize. Two plus two equals four. The attack on Pearl Harbor took place on December 7, 1941. This information is plain and simple. It is devoid of emotional slants, values, prejudices and attitudes. To learn it, all that is needed is logical thinking and rote memorization.

Acquiring and mastering Emotional Intelligence skills, on the other hand, follows a very different “brain route.” This learning touches the heart as well as the mind, and it requires the engagement of both in positive ways for it to happen well.

In the process of acquiring Emotional Intelligence skills, our core beliefs get stirred up, as well as our fears, resentments and biases. These skills involve concepts which are intricately interwoven with deeply ingrained “blueprints” about our perception of our identity, our worldview, and our philosophy of life. Unless a trainer is highly skillful to “put out fires” during the training and address people’s anxieties, some participants may shut down and not “take in” the material.

For example, realizing that we have difficulty identifying our emotions can be an unpleasant surprise. Moreover, having someone else pinpoint our emotions while we are unable to identify them ourselves can leave us feeling exposed and vulnerable. Or having sorrow well up in us when the concept of empathy is discussed (for example, we may realize for the first time how much we longed to be treated with empathy as children, but were not) can result in our feeling stripped of our defenses and embarrassed. Alternatively, learning how to deescalate a conflict through the use of validation may feel uncomfortable and “weird” at first, as if we are wimps to have to resort to these tools as opposed to using old ways of gruffness or walking off in a huff.

Acquiring Emotional Intelligence skills sometimes

runs counter to our old way of doing things. We have to unlearn self-defeating, “dysfunctional” patterns of handling ourselves and others in order to acquire new methods and techniques. And since the old patterns are overlearned, ingrained routines, to overcome them we have to practice the new set of skills over and over. Essentially, Emotional Intelligence learning involves forming new habits of managing ourselves and others. This kind of learning requires repetition, correction, repetition, adjustment, fine-tuning, and more repetition. It works just like building muscle at the gym through repetition of weight-training routines. It also resembles mastering the game of golf—there is always room for improving one’s swing. The investment and patience required for the process of learning “new tricks” may discourage us and tempt us to give up.

However, the payoff of this kind of learning can be phenomenal. When implemented organization-wide, it can end up increasing morale and productivity through improvement of the workplace climate. And multiple studies have shown that **about 20 to 30 percent of a company’s performance is accounted for by the organization’s climate**—by how employees feel about their workplace.<sup>3</sup>

Desert Waters has been developing Emotional Intelligence trainings that are to be used facility-wide and that are accompanied by a practice schedule for the skills to become a part of the facility’s culture. You can find related information on our website under Training, under Topics. Or you can call us at 719-784-4727 or email us at [desertwaters@desertwaters.com](mailto:desertwaters@desertwaters.com).

### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.prisoncommission.org/pdfs/Confronting\\_Confinement.pdf](http://www.prisoncommission.org/pdfs/Confronting_Confinement.pdf), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002, p. 17-18.

# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization  
for the well-being of correctional  
staff and their families*

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## UPCOMING TRAINING OF TRAINERS

Stress seems to be an unavoidable aspect of correctional work—part of the “nature of the beast.” To help disseminate the latest information on helping staff manage their stress reactions at both the organizational and personal levels, Dr. Spinaris will offer a class for correctional trainers on **Stress Busting: Managing Correctional Employee Stress**. The training will include setting up a year-long



program to remind staff of stress-managing techniques and to encourage their practice. The training will be held at Desert Waters' Florence offices on Thursday October 19 (afternoon) and Friday October 20 (all day).

For more information, please email us at [desertwaters@desertwaters.com](mailto:desertwaters@desertwaters.com) or call us at 719-784-4727.