

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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

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L.U.V.E.M.™

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Corrections staff are experts at containing incarcerated individuals within correctional facilities and managing frustrated offenders. Just as important for the staff's well-being and the smooth running of institutions, however, is the ability to contain and manage conflict that builds among coworkers, between line staff and administration, and between staff and their family members.

How can conflict management (and ideally, conflict resolution) be done professionally and skillfully?

When confronted by someone or when in disagreement with them, our first urge is to try to overpower them. We try to prevail in the argument and "win" by convincing our opponent that we are right and they are wrong.

However, conflict management experts advocate that when disagreeing with others, we need to do less "convincing" and more listening to them and "thinking together" about the problem at hand.

There are several reasons for that. One is that if we try to overwhelm a person and force them to accept our view, we have just made an enemy. This guarantees that we will continue experiencing problems with that person in the future.

Another reason for listening and discussing among the parties concerned is based on the assumption that all involved in a disagreement have some validity to their perspective. Therefore, all parties can make worthwhile contributions toward resolving a challenge and managing conflict.

A third reason for working at listening well and thinking together is that these two activities are likely to provide us with the necessary data to come up with the best solutions possible.

The LUVEM™ tool described below is one way to pull together various interpersonal skills that contribute to conflict management.

The acronym LUVEM™ stands for Listen, Understand, Validate, Explain, and Maintain.

LISTEN

Listening aims to:

- Convey respect
- Understand the other party's reasoning, foundational assumptions, and concerns
- Discover what is acceptable to the other party and what they hold dear
- Discover better ways to communicate with the other party through learning their "language" and presenting issues in terms of their interests and values

Listening needs to be done:

- Calmly
- Respectfully
- Attentively
- "Deeply," that is, with the goal of trying to understand the other's agenda

The listener pays attention to the following spoken and unspoken messages:

- Verbal
- Non-verbal (expressed through facial expression, tone of voice, body language)
- "Hidden" in the communication, hinted at, implied

Listening is done by:

- Making periodic eye contact with the other person without staring or glaring at them

IN MEMORIAM

CO William Lake
November 5, 2007
Ulster County Jail, NY

Sgt. Richard Waring
Dec 25, 2007
CCF, Cañon City, CO

Christos Spinaris
Jan 1, 2008
DWCO Volunteer

CO Rudolph Zurick
Jan 2, 2008
Union County Jail, NJ

**Senior Officer
Lorrie Rodgers**
Jan 3, 2008
ADX Florence, CO

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L.U.V.E.M.TM

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- Not interrupting
- Making “ah hum” noises once in a while
- Nodding periodically
- At appropriate moments repeating back to the speaker what s/he said
- Asking open-ended questions—*What, How, When*
- Asking for clarification when unsure of what was said
- Summarizing the speaker’s statements after a lengthy amount of sharing by the other party

UNDERSTAND

Effective conflict de-escalation requires understanding the other party’s thinking process, perspective, fundamental presuppositions, prior experiences with the issue, and what they consider “sacred” and non-negotiable.

Therefore while listening try to understand the other party’s:

- Point of view
- Emotions
- Motives
- Needs
- Difficulties

VALIDATE

To convey your understanding to the other party convincingly, you need to validate them.

To validate:

- Stay away from put downs and criticism
- Point out even a kernel of wisdom, truth or usefulness in the other party’s perspective, requests, choices or behavior

Validating does not necessarily mean “accepting,” “agreeing with” or “condoning.” Validating is based on the ability to **empathize**—to put ourselves in the other person’s situation and look at the world through their eyes.

The following are some examples of validating statements:

- “I can see how you arrived at this conclusion. My intention, however, was to”
- “You really tried. And this is how I’d like you to handle it next time”
- “I can see how you ended up reacting this way.”
- “This must have been a big disappointment for you!”
- “I know. This is a handful.”

EXPLAIN

After listening, understanding to the best of your ability and validating, you have increased your chances that when it is your turn to present your side of the issue, the other party will listen.

So now it is your turn to explain:

- Your **goals** for the discussion—what you hope to accomplish through talking with the other party
- Your **position**—your perspective of the situation
- Your **objections** to the other person’s conduct (if applicable)
- What you are **willing to do** on your end regarding the situation
- What you **request** from the other party and **why**

For example, to ask for changes in someone’s behavior, you can use the following “recipe.”

When you do _____, I/we/our team gets impacted in the following ways: _____.

And what I need for you to do instead is _____.

The benefits of that to you/the team will be _____.

If you choose not to make those changes, then the negative consequences will be _____.

Usually, after you explain your position, the normal course of events is that you will need to do some more listening, understanding and validating of the other party.

MAINTAIN

There can be several rounds of these phases. Throughout the exchange it is vital to contain your emotional reactions and respond professionally in order to maintain:

- A **creative problem-solving** focus which promotes thinking outside of the box to find solutions to challenges affecting both parties
- A **respectful** attitude, communicating that the other party is worthy of respect even if their premises are fundamentally different from yours
- An **optimistic** attitude, that a solution CAN be found
- A **considerate** attitude about of the legitimate **interests of all parties** involved. “Win-win” solutions are more likely to be implemented and for longer periods of time than approaches that favor one party at the expense of the other.

So, next time you have a run-in with another staff member or with a loved one at home, remember to LUVEMTM!

Containing the intensity of a disagreement and managing a fiery conflict with finesse so solutions can be identified will help keep down the stress level of all concerned.

Choosing Life

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Tragically, we recently heard of yet another CO who committed suicide when he came under investigation. Apparently, this Officer was a straight arrow, the model CO with an impeccable professional record. Fellow staff members did not believe for a second that he had actually broken the rules. However, as per policy, he had to be investigated. Sadly, he killed himself on the day the interviews with the investigators were to begin.

When I presented a workshop on corrections staff suicide at American Correctional Association's 2007 Winter conference in Tampa, I was told of two other cases of innocent corrections officers who committed suicide when they came under investigation for some mishap at their facilities.

I've asked seasoned staff why this happens. What I've been told is that some employees have extremely high expectations of themselves. They may believe that they should remain above suspicion at all times, because that is the standard they strive for. They may not know how to tolerate any questioning of their character or their conduct. To them just being suspected of wrongdoing spells catastrophe, as if they are truly guilty, "dirty."

In other cases just the appearance of a policy violation might result in some coworkers viewing a fellow employee as suspect, guilty until proven innocent. Trust in people's integrity is a very fragile entity in corrections. Over the years staff has witnessed employees of all ranks and all reputations—from poor to stellar—being walked to the gate due to professional improprieties. So, when another one is to be investigated for violations, it doesn't take much for staff to wonder—"What if s/he is also 'dirty?'"

Sensitive employees under investigation may have difficulty getting past peers' stares, staff giving them the cold shoulder or whispering behind their backs. The stress of being under suspicion by your own is horrific. Because corrections staff tend to not confide in family members (to not cause them to worry or because it is too hard to explain some things about work), if peers pull away from them, they lose their support system. They have no one else to turn to. So they are left to grapple with their hurt, fear, shame and anger all alone. Staff under investigation may also endure sarcastic comments from offenders. They may come to believe that they lost their ability to effectively exercise authority over the offenders, that they can no longer carry out their mandate to maintain "law and order" in their area. How can innocent staff build the resilience they need to get through an investigation?

If you are under investigation, yet you are "clean:"

1. Build a supportive network around you of people who believe in you and who are willing to be there for you when you need to vent or cry on their shoulder. Since it is very difficult to build a support system while highly stressed, it is vital to have a safety net in place ahead of time. That is, you need to be working on establishing that now. You will need it anyway for various reasons, even if you never have to be investigated.

2. Realize that what matters the most is that you and God know that you are innocent. What is hidden will finally be revealed. The truth WILL triumph in the end. All you need is to hang in there through the ups and downs of the investigation, and keep your cool as best you can, using all your support systems, till it's over.

3. Come up with coping strategies other than addictive behaviors. Exercise, spend time outdoors, play sports or other games with friends, journal, watch funny movies, read inspirational books, or watch videos of people who overcame adversity.

4. Effective ongoing counseling can help you manage your anxiety, embarrassment and anger.

5. If need be, seek your physician for medications for depression or anxiety.

6. Live one day at a time, sometimes one minute at a time. Rein your mind in, keeping it from stampeding down the road of the "What if's." Most of what we fear never comes to pass.

7. See through the offenders' taunts. Don't feed them with your anger. Stay professional. This too shall pass.

8. You are more than a corrections employee. If the work environment becomes so unpleasant that you do not want to put up with it anymore, there ARE other options for you. If that means taking a cut in salary through a demotion or a new profession, that is infinitely better for you and your loved ones than cutting your life short.

If a coworker is under investigation, remain polite and kind to them. Resist the temptation to pull away from peers before the evidence is in. If you believe they are "clean," express your support to them and let them know that you are available to listen or spend time with them as needed. And be civil to them, even if distant, no matter what the outcome of the investigation. "Judge not."

If corrections employees are indeed guilty, it would be a lot more courageous to face the consequences of their actions than to opt for suicide. Gifts of wisdom and personal growth are wrapped in those consequences. To unwrap them, one has to take one's lumps.

Bottom line: **Your life matters** much more than what others think of you. Your loved ones need you. And there is life outside corrections and after corrections.

Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

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MANY THANKS!

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BLOGS

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REACHING BEHIND THE WALLS
DWCO Conference on Staff Wellness
May 8 & 9, Colorado Springs, CO

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1-866-YOU-VENT
(866.968.8368)
youvent@desertwaters.com

From the Old Screw

Proud But Also Concerned

This is a letter to a group of people who have done something I never did, and that is serve in a combat zone. I was in the National Guard for over 17 years, but was never on active duty. I do have friends and loved ones who have served and I listened to what they said and, more importantly sometimes, I listened to what they didn't say.

Departments of Corrections and other branches of law enforcement across the country these days have the challenge of Vets coming back from active duty and experiencing problems.

I understand not telling the brass about having problems sleeping or the anger and frustration you experience. You want to come home and are worried that if you admit to having problems related to combat, you might not get to come home right away. So now you still have these problems and are back working in a jail or prison. You are struggling at home and don't know what to do or where to turn. Sad to say, some think the only way out is to bite the bullet.

Please, know that there are people out here that will help you. We at Desert Waters do care what happens to you and will listen to you share about the stress you went through. We will help in any way we can, both through peers and professional counseling. EAPs are also there for staff, and there are other groups out there that will help. Counseling is confidential, except of course if you lead the counselor to believe that you are a threat to yourself or others.

People do care and will not judge what you had to do to come home to your love ones. I am honored to know and shake hands with any Vet. The only way I have to help is to let you know that we do care by writing articles like this one. Please talk to someone. It is a shame that you fought so hard to live and come back home, and now you have to fight to keep you sanity and hope.

Take Care, The Old Screw