

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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The Twenty Minute Trainer: What Do You Tell a Rookie

© Gary F. Cornelius, First Lt. (Retired)

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Recently I entered a new phase of my correctional career—conducting jail officer basic training in the Commonwealth of Virginia. After I retired from jail duty, I got back into writing and conducting jail in service training. I have now been asked to help out several academies by conducting state approved jail basic courses in legal matters, special inmate populations and suicide prevention. I have to admit—I enjoy it. New recruits or what we affectionately like to call “rookies” not only need the book learning and skills training to pass the academy, but they need the wisdom and lessons learned by us veterans. All of us veterans who have worked in corrections a long time know that we are different at this point in our careers than when we started.

With that in mind, I sent out an e mail to several colleagues asking them for feedback as to what advice they would give to “rookies”. I received several good comments.....and away we go.....

From John Prewitt, retired jail officer, Tarrant County (TX) Corrections Center:

- Don't become complacent. Complacent officers walk in front of inmates. An inmate with little or nothing to lose may try to escape or assault staff. You are in a dangerous profession. Keep alert at all times and in all areas.
- Be aware of your surroundings and what is going on around you. Inmates like to see officers not paying attention. It emboldens them. An inmate was walking around openly with envelopes that he had stolen from the law library. Finally, an officer confronted him as he was entering his housing area and inquired as to why he had 100 envelopes in his possession. That time it was envelopes—what else could the contraband have been?
- Always search inmates when they enter or leave their housing areas. Inmates are counting on officers not to do this, especially in those “delicate areas” such as the groin. One inmate carried a 12 inch knife from the kitchen. None of the officers checked his “private” area. Fortunately, he later turned the knife in and stated that he was not searched.

IN MEMORIAM

CO Jayme Biendl

January 29, 2011

Monroe Corr Complex
WA DOC, WA

Slain in the line of duty

CO Casimiro Pomaes

January 28, 2011

Eastern Correctional Facility
NYS DOS, NY

Corp Mike Phillips

December 23, 2010

Winfield Corr Facility
KDOC, KS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

NEW OFFICER ON THE BLOCK	4
DWCO IN 2010	5
WHY ME	6
CORRECTIONAL NURSING	7
MANY THANKS	8

THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE

866-YOU-VENT

youvent@desertwaters.com

(Continued on page 2)

Rest In Peace CO Jayme Biendl

We grieve the loss of life of CO Jayme Biendl in the line of duty on 1/29/11. This incident is a worst-case scenario nightmare. Staff safety *has to* be the Number One priority in correctional institutions, as it is the most fundamental necessity and requirement for a facility to run properly. May her death not have been in vain.

The Twenty Minute Trainer *(Continued from page 1)*

- Know who you are dealing with. Inmates are never to be trusted, no matter how nice they are. You do not know if you are being played on. Keep your personal life private. Do not discuss personal information in the dining room or in the housing unit. Jail walls have ears and inmates would like to know where you live, where your children go to school, what problems you are having, etc. What could an inmate do with that information? Befriend you? Threaten you? Play upon your sympathy? Think about it.

From Kraig D. Emery, officer, Merrimack County (NH) Department of Corrections:

- Slow down and absorb the training. During both the classroom phase and the on the job training (OJT) period you may feel the “itch” to “get in the game”. Training appears to “drone on and on”. It may not appear challenging. But think of this illustration. Remember the movie “The Karate Kid”? Remember how Daniel had to clean “wax-on-wax-off”? Mr. Miyagi was training Daniel in muscle memory—how to do something critical automatically. The same principle applies to your training—automatically performing a task correctly such as searching an inmate or cell, keeping an inmate at a safe distance, engaging in defensive tactics, etc. This approach may save your life. Also remember this—there is no such thing as being overtrained. Absorb and take advantage of all of the training that you can. Never assume that you “know it all.” You don’t.
- Remember that there is an adjustment period in all that we do. In a corrections career, there is change. This change can take the forms of promotion, transfer, undergoing training in new skills, work assignments and shift work, just to name a few. Each of us, like a fingerprint, has our own adjustment period—some longer than others. For example, for some officers it may take a year. Embrace the adjustment period, be patient and learn. Also, remember that your life outside the jail and those in it—family, friends, those close to you—have to adjust, too. If your adjustment is hard, deal with the resulting stress in a positive way.
- Be confident in your job skills and perspective. You will develop insight and skills. For example, having a quiet shift is having a good shift. You may like the action at first—but there are ways at times to deal with inmates without intimidation and force.

From Joe Bouchard, prison librarian, Baraga (MI) Maximum Correctional Facility, corrections trainer, author and blogger:

- Learn to say NO. Saying no to inmates can be a skill. It can protect you. You do not automatically say no to everything. You will learn discretion as you become more seasoned and experienced. But if an inmate persistently asks for you to grant a request that violates policy, procedure or common sense security, the way you say no should not be weak, but firm. You may consider saying “negative”, which gives no doubt to your meaning, especially to a persistent inmate. You can check the request out with your supervisor and get back to the inmate.
- Maintain a quiet presence. You do not have to be vocal to do your job. Look and act professional, carry yourself with confidence. Let the inmates know who you are—without arrogance. Maintain a command presence and good eye contact.
- Do not let friendships and personal relationships get in the way of the goals of the institution. It is important to have friends and a good relationship with fellow officers. But if your friend and colleague is making serious mistakes or is not up to the job tell the person and tell your supervisor. No one wants to say to Internal Affairs, “I knew he or she was screwing up, but I thought it would work itself out.”
- Back up your word. If you tell an inmate you are going to do something, do it. For example, if you give

(Continued on page 3)

The Twenty Minute Trainer *(Continued from page 2)*

an inmate a warning with future disciplinary consequences and the inmate continues to behave badly, initiate the discipline. More simply, say what you mean, mean what you say. In a related note, be honest and do not lie to staff, supervisors or inmates. Honesty is always respected, admired and appreciated.

- Lead by example. If you want to move up, be willing to do tasks and live by the expectations of the agency. This is essential to becoming a good leader and getting staff to follow you. If you perform tasks, they will too.
- Corrections is not for everyone. You will see that people leave corrections for a variety of reasons. Some will leave due to stress, some will find better paying jobs, some will leave because their spouses and loved ones want them to. The reasons vary. No two goodbyes are the same. You will have days where you are stressed out, tired and will think that leaving the job may be beneficial. You must decide in view of the dangers, stress and demands of the corrections field if you can handle the job. You may decide to find something else.
- The job will get easier. “The more you do something, the easier it becomes.” Do not forget that—and easier does not mean sloppier or faster. You can weather difficult times as your training kicks in. Think: “This too shall pass.” Being a correctional officer is not pretty or comfortable, but it is what you signed up for.

From Gary F. Cornelius, retired deputy sheriff:

- Remember that corrections is a noble profession worthy of the public trust. You are performing an essential function of the criminal justice system. You wear a badge, your uniform represents the faith that the agency had in hiring you, training you and entrusting you to keep people accused of and convicted of lawbreaking safely and humanely confined. Not everyone can do what you do and do it well.
- You walk a tightrope. You are charged with keeping inmates under control and safe from each other and themselves. Also, you must do everything in your power to be assertive, exercising both physical and behavioral control of inmates when appropriate and authorized. But you are in a human services profession, caring for the people in your custody. You will find the balance between assertiveness and empathy.
- Remember that inmates are people. Treat them as you would like to be treated, with basic decency and respect. It is all right to call them Mister or Miss. Most likely, the response from them will be positive. Remember also that there will be some inmates that will not respond well to such acts. People have problems: substance abuse, mental illness, etc. These can make your job difficult.
- Do not be judgmental. Officers who stereotype inmates into a “sub human” class will have a hard time interacting with them. Yes, inmates are accused or convicted lawbreakers. It is your job to keep them safely and securely confined until the criminal justice system is through with them. You are not to judge them. The courts will. Be aware of their charges and histories. That is good common sense. Brutalizing inmates to serve “justice” is dangerous. Many an officer has ruined his or her life by such acts.
- Be careful who you view as a mentor. You are out of the academy, you report for duty, and you feel like you are on top of the world! You will meet many types of officers, plus being supervised by a field training officer. Some you may admire and want to emulate. But be careful. If the officer you admire engages in abhorrent, negative behavior, ask yourself: “Do I really want to be like him [or her]?”
- Trust your gut. You will hear this throughout your career. Your gut—those inner feelings based on experience and intuition—is an accurate barometer.
- Learn to communicate well and accurately in writing and speech. Corrections, as in other areas of law enforcement, is a profession where an officer must clearly communicate in writing—logs, reports, etc.,

(Continued on page 4)

The Twenty Minute Trainer *(Continued from page 3)*

and orally. If communications are not clear, people can become injured, inmates can escape, inmate criminal activity will not be detected or convicted, and someone may die. Never tire of the written word.

- Manage your stress. This occupation is stressful. Learn to manage stress, and do not take it home. Maintain a physically and mentally healthy life outside of the job. You will most likely feel better and live longer. To relieve stress, maintain a sense of humor.

Now, you veteran officers, trainers, and supervisors working with “rookies:” What advice do YOU have???????

More by and about Gary Cornelius at http://www.corrections.com/gary_cornelius/.

From the Old Screw—New Officer On The Block

Being a new Officer in Corrections is something hard to tell anyone about. It stirs up all kinds of emotions. Thrill, knowing that not everyone can do our job. A little fear, knowing that in our line of work we might not go home someday. Doubt, not knowing if we will be able to handle our jobs and meet everyone's requirements. Hope, that we will not let our loved ones or fellow Officers down.

Almost every new Officer wonders, “How do I treat the inmates? Do I let them know who is boss? Do I act as if I'm human?”

A few will try to be a good ol' boys and act friendly toward the inmates. A few will try to show how big and bad they are. The smart ones will watch the experienced staff. Of course sometimes that doesn't work because veteran staff may have their own problems. In the end it all boils down to a training experience as you learn what not to do and why.

So treat every assignment as a learning experience. If you make a mistake, tell someone before the inmates do or before they act as if they are protecting you. Inmates love it when new Officers make mistakes. What they love even more is when you try to cover your mistake up. I guarantee you, whatever you cover up, someday will come back to haunt you. When you make a mistake, it'd be best that you let your supervisor know right away, before inmates start working on you.

New staff looks for approval, but they must not seek it from the inmates. If inmates tell new staff that they like it better when *they* are on duty, staff need to stop, step back, and review how they are handling things. When you hear this from an inmate, you can be sure of one thing: you are doing something wrong. Not every new Officer will mess up, but again not every Officer will be there at the end of six months or a year. No one expects new staff to do everything correctly right off the bat. But if you are ready to learn, you will learn from your mistakes and others'.

New Officers tend to overreact and that is part of the learning curve. If you catch yourself getting uptight, stop, count to ten, take a deep breath, and continue. New staff must realize that the inmates will continue to check you out, and will try to push your buttons and manipulate you to see if it will work. If you lose it, they won.

If an inmate tells you, “I do this all the time when Officer X is on duty,” tell them you will check it out and see if it is OK. Until then, they must wait for that other Officer to come back on duty. The more they protest, the more you know you have made the right decision by not giving in.

(Continued on page 5)

New Officer on the Block *(Continued from page 4)*

New staff must also learn not to get caught up in the rumor mill. At times Corrections is a very boring job. Judge each staff member by the way they treat you, not by the bad word someone puts out on them. The Officer someone badmouthed may be the same Officer who puts his or her life on the line for you when an incident happens. Yes, that old grouch that people put down may just be tired of all the cowboys and seeing so many staff come and go. If approached with respect, he may be only too happy to help you all he can. I've been there and I've seen it happen.

Take care,

The Old Screw

DWCO in 2010

Yet another year has flown by! It has been our busiest and most diverse yet. Here it is in a nutshell.

Budget: In 2010 DWCO raised \$71,266. Our projected budget was \$98,855. The shortfall affected wages, pro bono counseling, research and marketing. DWCO's budget for 2011 is \$99,728. Will you help us raise these funds?

National PTSD Pilot Survey: In the spring of 2010 we conducted the first ever US survey examining post-traumatic symptoms in corrections staff nationwide. The results were highly disturbing. For a summary of the results of this pilot study, please go to http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=666.

Professional Counseling sessions: 374

Redesigned Website: Check it out at www.desertwaters.com. We thank Josh MacDonald for his creative work.

Research Branch: DWCO set up a DBA branch named Institute for Corrections Research in Employee Wellness (ICREW) to emphasize our increasing interest in **research** on corrections wellness issues, in addition to providing **treatment** through counseling, and equipping staff with coping strategies through our **trainings**. Details at http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=663

Trainings: Twelve, including the Conference *Creating a Healthier Culture*.

Training Attendees: 540

Ventline Contacts: 143

Volunteers: 39

DWCO would not exist without our faithful volunteers—starting with our Board members—and without our donors. We thank you from the depths of our hearts from your caring, help and dedication. We could not do it without you!



T4T-Corrections: From Fatigue to Fulfillment

This is our most frequently requested training. Now we are offering it as an 18-contact hour Training for Trainers, so you can equip your own trainers to provide the CORRECTIONS: FATIGUE TO FULFILLMENT training to your employees on a regular basis.

More at http://desertwaters.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/DWCO_T4T_05_20111.pdf

Why me? Venting versus Whining

© Joe Bouchard

Research with Police officers has shown that venting with a problem-solving perspective has beneficial impact in terms of increased staff resilience, whereas emotional venting (blaming, complaining) with no attempt to problem-solve does not. CST

It is certain that everyone has a dose of bad luck from time to time. For example, there is nothing like a delay in the airport to prompt one to feel a bit of self pity. When travel plans are disrupted and uncomfortably extended due to no fault of your own, what else can be asked but, “Why me?”

I realized (once again) that I had no control over the mechanical problem in an airport far from my home. For the sake of my mental health and the comfort of those around me, I simply had to work out my frustrations. The six hour flight delay was a bit of an opportunity. I would not have otherwise stopped for a delicious, slow paced meal. I was also given ample time to think about and create that which you are reading now. And, I literally walked on the length of all concourses at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. In other words, there are other productive things to do than to complain – no matter how tempting complaining may be.

Many of us in corrections may vent a bit when it seems that the universe conspires against us at every juncture. I believe that a certain amount of venting is necessary to ease the stress of daily operations weigh on us. A short burst of complaint helps us to break the tension.

Under normal circumstances, most of us can move on from the events that caused us to question the wanton vengefulness of unseen forces. Unfortunately, not all of us rebound so quickly. It comes to no surprise that every worksite has a chronic complainer in their ranks.

Of course, Dear Reader, the irony is not lost on me. This article appears to be a complaint about complainers. Consider this, if you will, as a safety check. Regarding the griper, what many of us consider a distasteful character flaw can morph into a viable danger to staff, offenders and the public. Granted, that is contingent on many events happening. But, it is not unheard of for a disenfranchised griper to land in the cross hairs of a would-be manipulator.

Seeking *any* sympathetic ear, once the grouser finds a suitable sounding board, “friendships” may form and favors could be exchanged. It may seem like chance that brings an enterprising offender who is a good listener to the staff griper. One should wonder if this is more than coincidence. The walls have ears and manipulators assess targets for neediness.

Part of our vocational armor is comprised of camaraderie. Even so, it is difficult to cultivate a professional relationship with a complainer. Still, that is the best antidote for the ever-present diseases of staff disunity and manipulation.

Sometimes, we are the problem. As professionals who ideally spend ample time observing others, it is not always easy to analyze our own behavior. We can gauge our complaining factor by assessing how our colleagues react to us. Another test is to compare your actions and reactions to similarly situated people. Also, our tolerance for colleagues who need to vent may be lower than it needs to be.

This too shall pass. Bad luck or, if you prefer, a series of events that justify grumbling, will not be a permanent state. As you assess yourself, this is an important realization. It may be easier to plan to make lemonade out of lemons than to do it. But it becomes more imperative when weighed against the possibility of vulnerable staff.

It is naïve to assume that all bad events are opportunities without frustration. But it is better to deal swiftly with frustration rather than allow it eat away at your patience. Venting in moderation is useful. Rampant complaining in corrections provides fertile grounds for the seeds of staff division. In the end, we need to ask, is it venting or is it chronic complaining?

More by and about Joe Bouchard at http://www.corrections.com/joe_bouchard/.

Correctional Nursing—What Is It?

By a Correctional Nurse

After 16 years of serving as a Correctional Nurse, I have no easy answers to the question of what correctional nursing is about.

I deliver nursing care in a correctional environment. I work in a highly charged, highly stressful, limited resource environment, dealing with human beings who are adults, and who on some days seems to enjoy plucking my last nerve. On any given day it seems like I am dealing with a very large group of very immature teenagers. (Maybe I am showing my age.)

I know one thing for sure though. Sometimes it is hard to determine who is more immature—the offenders, other staff or even myself.

Care is limited in scope, focus-driven, within Agency policies and different state regulatory boards (Nursing, Pharmacy and Board of Medicine). We have a formulary which limits medications that are prescribed. (Those of us who have our own health problems know very well what that is like, because we have to deal with our own insurance companies and their formularies. We are all aware of what our insurance is willing to pay for and what it will not cover.)

Now Corrections no longer has a bottomless pot of gold, which is hard for staff and offenders to understand. I remember when we were doing cosmetic surgeries, from breast implants to nose jobs. I also remember referring offenders out for a lot of procedures that we now take care of in-house.

So, did I really answer my own question? In a nutshell, correctional nursing is delivery of nursing care inside correctional institutions, dealing with human beings who vary in maturity, opinions and habits that cause them to commit crimes. We deal with the whole range, from social misfits to stone-cold killers.

The question I didn't answer is, "Paul, why do you do this?" I do it because it is something I do well. It is worth doing, yes it is. (But of late it has not felt that way.) In spite of limited resources, I meet challenges, and on rare occasions save someone's life, be it an offender, staff or visitor.

Correctional nurses are part of a team that has many disciplines that focus on protecting society from offenders. Sometimes we forget that mission and it is easier to throw rocks at each other when something doesn't go right. We look at what we are not doing, instead of focusing on what we are doing well day in and day out.

So this is the challenge I try to rise up to daily—delivering just plain, good nursing care. Would it be nice to get a pat on the back for a job well done? Yes, it would, but it is no longer necessary. I now know I do an important job and I do it well.

Paul (the man who works in a little room)

dreaming about a website or a solution to that tech situation you've been avoiding?



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Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

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www.desertwaters.com/a-donations.htm

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DWCO Mission

To increase the occupational, personal and family well-being of staff of all disciplines within the corrections profession.

Quote of the Month

Don't worry about the level of individual prominence you have achieved.
Worry about the individuals you have helped become better people.

*Clayton M. Christensen
Harvard Business School Professor*

ICREW Contributions

We welcome tax-deductible contributions to ICREW (Institute of Corrections Research in Employee Wellness) toward our 2011 study on the impact of the corrections workplace on staff well-being. Please send your gifts to ICREW, PO Box 355, Florence, CO 81226. Contact us for additional information on this crucial research project.



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