

# 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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## Leadership Philosophies

*This input is provided by leaders in various disciplines of the corrections profession. Read and enter their worlds. Please note the remarkable effort exerted toward both employee development and task completion. Used with permission.*

### From a Probation and Parole Field Service Supervisor:

I try to remind staff of our purpose—public safety and helping the offenders become productive citizens. If we all realize and work towards this, there is a much higher chance of overall success.

In day-to-day business I try to let the agents think and do for themselves. Most of the time they come to their own conclusions if the supervisor asks the right questions. If they do not, then I give them some suggestions or more of a range of what they can do. In doing so they have a second opportunity to come to their own conclusions.

For instance, knowing an offender needs to be sanctioned, I may tell them the least amount that would suffice and then the most. If they have an idea of what ballpark they are in, then it is much easier for them to decide what (and how) to accomplish what they need to. Each time we have one of these discussions, I notice it is much further down the road that we have the same type of discussion. Either they are developing their own style (most of the agents have been here for less than 5 years), or they are avoiding me! I tend to think they are developing though, as most of the situations they bring to me are the complex ones. I overhear them from time to time helping each other, and what I hear is usually right on the money.

I would like for them to be their own think-

ers. It is okay to ask coworkers for help or advice, and I want them to. I do not want my opinion being laid down as law, and agents cringing at the thought of what my “ruling” will be on their situations. When they do need specific direction, I will give it. But I've noticed that when this happens, I need to give the agent time to follow through. Otherwise it appears as if I'm watching over their shoulder. I think my approach instills trust, that I trust them to follow through with tough choices or decisions. This is not for appearance only, as I do trust them (well, most of them) to do what needs to be done. I still follow up on decisions, but I do it in a non-confrontational manner—more of a progress report than “Did you do what I told you to?”

When agents are gone—vacation or illness or whatever the case, I pitch in and help cover their caseloads. I take calls at home on their offenders and follow up on them.

I try not to throw problems in my agents' laps and tell them to “just deal with it.” When I can, I make an effort to do the work that they do. I assist them with home visits, searches, drug testing, whatever they may be doing. I see this position as one of a player-coach. I do not expect the agents to do things that I would not do myself. I try to represent them the best I can, and try to keep them from making the big mistakes that I made when I was an agent. Now if they are on track to make a learning mistake that has no real consequence, that is a different story. Some things you cannot teach. Some things have to be learned first hand.

### IN MEMORIAM

**Mark D. Larson**  
Superintendent of Industries  
FPC Alderson  
12/26/2009

**Detruis L. Holbrook**  
Senior Officer Specialist  
Atlanta USP  
1/12/2010

**Walter A. Murray**  
Senior Officer Specialist  
Atlanta USP  
1/18/2010

**Gerald “Jerry” Woltz**  
Superintendent of Industries  
Cumberland FCI  
1/25/2010

**Donald Lamar Gipson**  
Senior Officer  
Honolulu FDC  
1/29/2010

**Leonard “Sandy” Wall**  
Correctional Officer  
Jack Jones Juvenile  
Detention Center  
Beaten by three juveniles  
1/30/2010

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# Stopping Correctional Worker Suicide

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On May 6 and 7 DWCO will be hosting its 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, with the theme *Creating A Healthier Culture*, in Cañon City, CO. Our conferences are one way to fulfill DWCO's mission to increase the occupational, personal and family well-being of staff of all disciplines within the corrections profession.

One of the conference topics is *Officer Suicide*, a 4-hour training presented by Denver PD Sgt. John Coppedge. His lecture includes a videotaped interview with his Chief and several officers surrounding a Detective's suicide attempt, and an interview with the Detective about what led him down that path.

The corrections field is plagued with the scourge of staff suicide. Recent statistics from New Jersey show that **corrections officers commit suicide at over double the rates of police officers and the general population.** From 2003 through 2007, for males ages 25-64, per 100,000 the suicide rate for C.O.s was 34.8, for police 15.1, and for the general population 14.0.

([http://www.state.nj.us/lps/library/NJPoliceSuicideTaskForceReport-January-30-2009-Final\(r2.3.09\).pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/lps/library/NJPoliceSuicideTaskForceReport-January-30-2009-Final(r2.3.09).pdf).)

These are startling numbers. What might they be due to? Corrections workers have to deal with whatever we all face—financial, family and personal issues. On top of that they are regularly exposed to the darkest of the dark of the human condition—violence, horrific crimes, mental illness, suffering, investigations and jaded coworkers. Life is very cheap behind the walls, perhaps making one's own death a more acceptable option to some.

Here are some grim examples of recent correctional workers' suicides, including a gruesome murder-suicide.

On 8/4/09, Essex County, NJ, Corrections Officer Kelley McKenith wounded her boyfriend and then shot and killed her 4-month-old baby before taking her own life.

After leaving the Union County Jail, NJ, at lunch hour on 9/2/09, Frank Congiusta, a 16-year veteran Corrections Officer fatally shot himself with a handgun inside his vehicle parked just down the street from the jail.

Of course the same pattern exists in other states. On 1/25/10 a 6-year North Carolina Correctional Officer on perimeter patrol at the Pasquotank Correctional Institution, a high security prison for adult men at Elizabeth City, used her service revolver to kill herself on the job.

Correctional worker suicide is not limited to the U.S. In the Gauteng region of South Africa in 2009 alone FOURTEEN (14) Corrections Officers died by suicide!

What can we do to stem this suicide epidemic among corrections personnel?

Let us examine what our neighbors to the north have done to address the issue.

From 1975 to June 1992 the Toronto Police Service experienced twenty-two (22) Officer suicides. However, after interventions were implemented starting in 1992, that number was reduced to ZERO Officer suicides at least until July 2006. (Statistics are provided only until that date on <http://efap.torontopolice.on.ca/suicide.html>. Now, THAT'S Best Practices! How did the Toronto Police Service do it?

The author of the website article, Jaan Schaer, B.A., states, *Officers and their families have to be assured that the Service cares about them and provides support services that they have the confidence to access. Through ongoing proactive educational sessions officers develop life skills that they can use when the need arises. Effectiveness of these initiatives relies on the co-operation and commitment between the stakeholders, stringent confidentiality guidelines and adequate resources being dedicated to the programs. Times have changed in the Toronto Police Service. It no longer is acceptable to ignore your own or someone else's pain. Maturity and professionalism is shown by a member knowing when it is time to seek out a support contact.*

Below is a summary of Toronto Police Service's steps to support staff. What stands out is the collaboration between administration and union; the comprehensive nature of the approach; unlimited funding for traumatic stress treatment; strong emphasis on confidentiality; and starting with the new recruits at the training academy.

1. The Command Officers (management), Police Association (union) and Senior Officer Organization set up the Employee and Family Assistance Program.
2. The Chief of Police autographed and personally presented the book "To Love a Cop" by Dr. Ellen Kirschman to all recruits and newly promoted Sergeants.
3. The Chief of Police addressed graduating Police Officers and emphasized the critical need for them to maintain a healthy family life and a personal wellness program.
4. Policies and procedures are in place to protect confidentiality.

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## Leadership Philosophies

*(Continued from page 1)*

### From a Captain:

My leadership philosophy is focused on developing the best people for the best positions to improve the organization as a whole. I strive to mentor people to reach their potential by helping them define a clear set of goals to achieve. I am doing this by taking time to know them individually, inspire them collectively, and work diligently alongside them as a positive example.

My belief is that if you raise expectations about anyone on your team, they will generally rise to meet that standard. Most people by nature want to do well and please others. By focusing on their good attributes many doors are opened to really know my team and to be placed in a position of servant leadership.

I choose to be a leader that will serve my team because I understand that if I am willing to be a helping hand people will work very hard for me, especially when I take the time to understand them individually.

I believe it is important to allow my team to play their part together. It is also very important to make allowances for mistakes and give them grace to learn and to succeed.

As I do so they will keep growing and so will I.

### From a Food Service Manager:

My leadership philosophy is short and simple. "Come in, cook food, clean up, go home." This is what I drill into new supervisors and this is what I have operated with for twenty plus years.

So come in, work as hard as you can, fix what you can, watch out for everyone you walked in the gate with, everyone goes home.

Training a group of civilian Food Service supervisors in a prison differs from training Food Service supervisors in a restaurant. In prison they have to understand that inmates spend 24/7 getting into their heads. It is important to teach that to new supervisors immediately.

On the other hand I do NOT need to know that one of my inmate cooks boiled their two-year old to get the devil out of them while they were high on something. It does not help me teach them how to make coleslaw. Knowing what they are in for could in fact hinder me in working with them. Some things are repugnant to me as a parent, brother, husband, child. Knowing that someone killed my cousin-in-law's best friend does not help me put meals out. My job is to provide Food Service.

The second word of my job title is "Service." It is important to remember that inmates are my customers. I protect my fellow workers by producing the best meal I can within the budget I am provided. I did not sit on the inmates' jury. I sit upon their menu. When I receive kites from inmates that used to be housed out of state telling me they are glad they are back, that ours are the best meals they have had in 16 months...that is how I serve my customers.

My job saves lives. 93% of uprisings happen in dining rooms of penitentiaries. This is a fact. Putting out decent meals to my customers means that if something goes down it won't be because I served them fried bologna with greasy gravy. My penitentiary has had and will have the best product available to the population that I can afford by law, and the best cooks with the best sense of taste that I can provide. No one messes with my meal schedule unless the Warden dictates it. If I have an hour and a half, I can change the meal for 925 people. No meal will be substandard if I have anything to do with it.

I expect my best supervisors to be able to do the same and I place them in the position to do that. I make sure that my supervisors uphold my standards and philosophy to the highest degree. When I am away not one of my lead shift supervisors puts out a questionable meal. Not one. I back my employees one hundred per cent. They are well-trained and are rarely wrong.

### **Thank You Colorado Combined Campaign Donors!**

We want to express our gratitude for your steadfast support. As we are not given donor names, let us know who you are if you would like us to acknowledge your gift personally. You help make DWCO's operations possible.

### **DWCO's 3rd Annual Conference—Creating A Healthier Culture**

**May 6 & 7, 2010, The Abbey, Cañon City, CO**

With Eugene Atherton, Barbara Batulis, Richard Boldridge, Brenda Crawford, John Coppedge, Randy Foshee, Anne Gard, Jerry Gasko, Pete Hoppen, Susan Jones, Mike Krauth, Gary Ouillette, Brent Parker, Mike Raneses, Caterina Spinaris Tudor.

**Come network, share and learn!** [http://www.desertwaters.com/DWCO\\_FLYER\\_2010.pdf](http://www.desertwaters.com/DWCO_FLYER_2010.pdf)

# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

**Caterina Spinaris Tudor, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

**P.O. Box 355  
Florence, CO 81226  
(719) 784-4727**

DESERTWATERS@DESERTWATERS.COM

**WWW.DESERTWATERS.COM**

**Contributions are tax-deductible.**

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## Stopping Correctional Worker Suicide

*(Continued from page 2)*

5. Services are available to all employees—past and present members, retirees, dependants, and auxiliary staff.
6. There is an off-site confidential assessment and referral center accessible 24/7 for Critical Incidents, family/spouse/bereavement issues, and addiction issues.
7. There is a list of screened community Mental Health Providers for referrals.
8. There are 50 volunteer peer supporters from a cross-section of the membership and job categories.
9. Critical Incident Stress Management is provided by a trained Debriefing Team.
10. There is unlimited coverage for trauma therapy.
11. Proactive and ongoing educational initiatives are provided together with training for supervisors to manage troubled members, wellness articles, monthly ads, brochures, and information packages.
12. There is a medical fitness for duty team.
13. Instructors at the training college are trained to observe and intervene with members exhibiting signs of distress.

It is high time to implement such proactive steps in our correctional agencies across the nation. Of course they are costly. But what is a human life worth?

In closing, here are some thoughts on the subject by a former C.O. Take them to heart. He cares deeply for you all and so do many others.

*We have all been in some very dark places in our lives. I know that I have, and sometimes suicide seems like a solution. What has helped me to hold on in seemingly hopeless times is something my father shared with me in my darker days. "No matter what position you are in, there is always hope and potential while you still have life. Once your life is gone there is no hope, there is no recovery. It is over, and there is no getting it back." If this reaches anyone out there who is contemplating this as an option, **please talk to someone.** Call the Ventline. I hate hearing the news of corrections workers killing themselves. Everyone makes mistakes, poor choices, and is afraid of consequences. But no consequence is so severe that one should do this to themselves. God bless you all. Take care of yourselves and one another.*

**THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE™**

**866-YOU-VENT**

[youvent@desertwaters.com](mailto:youvent@desertwaters.com)