

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 11

Combined Federal Campaign #82466 ♦ Combined Colorado Campaign #3908

Nov 2009

Light Your Candle

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Here is an excerpt from an email we received recently and my response to it.

Greetings! I need your advice on HOW TO DEAL WITH NEGATIVE PEOPLE. I am referring to staff, not inmates. You know the kind, they breathe negativity. Their whole life is about bitching, complaining about management, the inmates, the union, or whatever. These are same people who suck the oxygen out of the room.

Dear Friend:

Someone has wisely said, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." My thoughts in response to your query are along the lines of lighting your candle—or turning your flashlight on, whichever you prefer. Easier said than done. I know. But what other viable option do we have?

It takes tremendous grit to consistently maintain a positive course in the face of negativity. The good news though is that negativity CAN be stopped. The key is that this occurs as each person does *their* part when given the chance. Never underestimate the impact of one lit candle!

Here are some ways you can let your light shine in your workplace and overcome the darkness of negativity.

Begin by observing those around you who tend to be more positive overall. (No one's perfect.) Hang around them as much as you can. Study what they do and what they do not do. Start imitating them.

Take small steps. Greet staff with a smile and a friendly tone of voice. "Fake it till you

make it," if you have to, but do it.

When asked how you're doing, instead of answering with a litany of complaints, give a positive response. CO Jane told me that one of her supervisors suggested that she overcome her negativity by answering "I'm great!" when asked how she was doing. She was advised to practice the habit for 30 days before she decided if it worked or not. At the end of the 30 days she discovered that the trick did work. She did feel better and others around her seemed more uplifted as well.

As your schedule allows, come out of your cocoon. Ask co-workers how they are doing and then stop, truly stop, and listen. Express your support, empathize or rejoice with them. Show your care.

Be a team player. Offer to help fellow staff and then follow through. Welcome and mentor new staff in your area. Do a good turn to people without seeking recognition for it. Share the credit for accomplishments. Help coworkers succeed. Make them look good.

Encourage people. Instead of criticizing or being a prophet of doom, point out positives in situations. Remark on what is going right. Point out progress, no matter how small. Speak words of hope. The glass is indeed half full. So why not focus on that?

Empower your colleagues. Tell them what value they contribute to the team. Spell out character strengths and skills they exhibit when they do something well.

IN MEMORIAM

CO Frank Congiusta
9/2/09, Union County Jail, NJ

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DWCO MISSION

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

THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE™

866-YOU-VENT

youvent@desertwaters.com

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Feedback about DWCO's Services

- *I just wanted to thank you for all you have done and for sometimes just listening. I really don't know where I would be, or if I would be, if I hadn't leaned on you for support. I realize sometimes we have to hit bottom before we can climb back up. I am doing so much better now. I have been on medication and have been completely open with my psychologist. I just feel so much lighter, like a tremendous load has been lifted. It is all because of you and my friends who cared enough to listen. THANK YOU!!*
- *Hi! I just found your site and have sat here crying reading it from start to finish. I have so much more respect and empathy for my husband than I did before. I have always been proud of him for doing such a difficult job, but I had no idea. Thank you for your site. I would like to get on your news letter mailing list.*
- *No good deed goes unnoticed! Desert Waters is truly a blessing from GOD above!*
- *Thank you for all that you are doing for our staff and those throughout the country. You have created a framework for helping staff to wellness and for developing a process for changing the culture.*
- *Thank you for all your hard work and support. I know you may not hear it often, but many of us sincerely appreciate the energy you put forth in helping bolster those of us who work in the field.*
- *God Bless you all for caring for the forgotten Cops.*
- *Keep doing what you are doing, lifting our eyes up and outwards from the immediacy of our situation.*
- *Quality work deserves recognition! I think Correctional Oasis is quality work. Please relay that to your staff.*
- *I really look forward to reading your newsletter. You do an awesome job! Keep' em coming... :-)*
- *Keep the e-mails coming. You make our job better!*
- *I am forwarding your newsletters on to our staff in hopes that something said in one or more of your excellent articles will pull them through a dark moment.... Seeing concerns put into words certainly can make our fears diminish just knowing we didn't dream these things up alone.*
- *Wow! These articles were very moving and disturbing. We on the outside have truly no clue what the real "life" of officers entails. Thank you for sharing such an awareness for their sake. I personally think what your doing in this field is "priceless."*
- *You and your Staff seems to know the subject to pick each month for your Correctional Oasis NL. There are times when I hear of fellow COs talking about what the h--l they are doing here. Officers are just getting burned out and feeling a sense of hopelessness. One thing that does help is your DWCO NL. Your articles brings about a sanity check, a way of taking yourself out of auto pilot and straightening out and flying right.*
- *You are a Patron Saint for the Corrections Officer.*
- *DWCO provides Prison Fellowship with a unique referral to meet the needs of correctional staff.*

From the Old Screw

Your Help

Once again, it is time to ask for help from those of you who do not yet give to Desert Waters. We need your help to continue helping you and your families. You may or may not know it, but Desert Waters provides 24/7 support through the Ventline and some counseling services at no cost to corrections staff and families. The Correctional Oasis is sent out thousands at no charge, both by regular mail (still) and by email.

I'm not asking for a lot from you. Your families come first. I am asking that you donate \$3.00 a month to Desert Waters. More would be nice, but only if you can afford it. This will also leave funds, if you have them, to donate to others. Correction Peace Officer Foundation, like Desert Waters, can also always use help. We help you in some ways and they help you in others.

So please remember us with a \$3.00 donation each month. Will it help? Very much so. And it may mean the difference between Desert Waters helping you and your families and no help at all. Take care, *The Old Screw*

Leading In Tough Times

Key points from the address by Wyoming DOC Director Bob Lampert at the West Central Wardens and Superintendents Correctional Association Conference, Saratoga, WY, 09/14/09. Reprinted with permission.

**Leadership = Clarity + Vision + Decisiveness
+ Responsibility + Courage.**

Leadership is the process of determining what one believes (*Clarity*), developing values-laden direction based on those beliefs (*Vision*), acting on that vision (*Decisiveness*), and standing behind that action (*Responsibility*), despite the varied responses you will receive (*Courage*).

Visionary correctional leaders recognize that community safety depends on more than bars and bullets.

Leadership needs to be situational. Difficult times require stylistic and approach changes. During such times you may have to be more decisive and action-oriented. You especially need to focus on building competencies and skills that inspire "followship." These will encourage loyalty and commitment in the good times as well.

When Times Are Tough:

1. Don't assume the worst.
2. Don't ignore or retreat from what is difficult.
3. Don't sacrifice good communications.
4. Don't mistake acting decisively with acting precipitously.
5. Don't forget your ideals.

Leading in lean times requires leaders to:

1. Adopt a visionary view. (*Create a Compelling Vision.*)
2. Encourage risk. (*Challenge the Status Quo.*)
3. Be in the trenches. (*Model the Way.*)
4. Listen deeply. (*Establish Shared Values.*)
5. Stay on target through others keeping the mission and vision in mind. (*Enable Others to Act.*)
6. Keep the lines of communication open. (*Encourage the Heart.*)

Six Action Steps for Tough Times:

1. Develop employees as problem-solvers.
2. Double your visibility, and be approachable as well as visible.

3. Use the time to develop, update and close gaps in operational policies and procedures, and to engage in strategic planning.

4. Maximize your available revenue sources and look for grant opportunities or fiscal partnerships.

5. Reflect your values in your vision, your vision in your strategic plan, and your strategic plan in your budget. Then justify what you are asking for with outcome data.

6. Be creative and look for ways to eliminate waste and improve efficiency. Thomas Edison once said, "There is a better way for everything. Find it."

A Budget-cutting Preparedness Exercise

This concept was developed by Air Force General Steven Lorenz.

1. Write down all the things your institution or agency does. Begin with the mission statement and write down all the tasks required to fulfill the mission. Also write down the things you do that your mission statement does not capture.

2. Once you've captured about 80% of what you do, you're ready to move on.

3. On another sheet of paper draw three concentric circles. (One small circle inside a medium-sized circle, inside a larger circle.)

4. Label the small circle in the middle "CORE," the medium-sized circle around it "SUSTAINABLE," and the larger outer circle "ENHANCED."

- The core tasks are the things you absolutely have to do to accomplish your mission.

- The sustainable tasks are those things that allow you to accomplish the mission with a high expectation for success and a comfort margin.

- The enhanced items are those that could be dropped without appreciable degradation to the mission, even if this might be painful to some.

5. Place each task into the appropriate circle and then review with an eye towards efficiency.

6. In lean times we must protect the core tasks. This means being ruthless in cutting the enhanced items first, then figuring out walk-arounds when sustainable items have to go.

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

MANY THANKS!

Individual donors: Anonymous donors, Paul & Cindy Bowen, TC & Joellen Brown, Bill & Victoria Dent, Steven & Pamela Fox, Peter & Susan Hoppen, Harold & Becky Hutson, Ron Jansen, Jeff & Connie Mueller, Kevin & Robin Rivard, Russ & Cherrie Scharf, & Victoria Yergler

Business donors: Janice Barnett, CPA; Bridge to Life Assembly; Hoppen Advertising Specialties; Vineyard Christian Fellowship

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Special thanks also go to: Rob Adams, Michael Alcala, Jim & Kim Beicker, Tom & Debby Beneze, Charlotte Burrous, the Civil Air Patrol Color Guard, DWCO Board, Florence UMC Women, John Freyta, Elizabeth Gamache, Pete & Susie Hoppen, Frank Jaquez, Lana Kennedy, Mike Murphy, Bryce Nelson, Joe Ortiz, Tibor “Ted” Sarai, Kevin Rivard, Cory Sondrol, George Wagner

Light Your Candle

(Continued from page 1)

Say something like, “You bring ____ to our unit.” Or, “You have such a knack for ____.” Or, “Your approach with ____ was great. It worked!”

Extend grace toward staff, even while holding them accountable for their actions. When those you supervise blow it, respectfully point out their errors and ask them for ways to correct them. Remind them that mistakes are indeed learning opportunities. Then help them learn.

If someone has disrespected you, confront them. Let them know that it is not acceptable that they treat you that way. Set limits with them, then continue to treat them in a civil manner.

Unless policy violations are involved, ignore negative comments. Turn the tide by saying something positive, even if it is about the weather. Be a bearer of good news. Say good things about people in their absence. Express your appreciation and gratitude for help you have received.

When dealing with negative people, dish out a double dose of graciousness to them. Make the con-

scious decision to care instead of being indifferent or cynical. You have no idea what coworkers are going through, why they are so angry or unhappy. Instead of being contemptuous or dismissive, be civil. A little kindness goes a very long way.

Hate is a huge stressor and a hotbed for negativity. Do whatever it takes to keep from hating people. Forgive, laugh, let go, accept, move on. Life’s too short to be consumed with hate.

When off work, make time to “detox” and “refuel.” Nurture your key relationships, laugh and relax. Engage in things you enjoy. Work out. Spend time outdoors. Confide in trusted people. Reflect on the day’s events. Remind yourself that your work is what you do 8 hours a day, not who you are. And lastly, make sure you have a vibrant love loop in your life—love coming in, and love going out. Negativity shrivels up and dies in the presence of love.

So let your light shine. Do not succumb. Overcome.

*Do not be overcome by evil,
but overcome evil with good.*

Romans 12: 21