

# 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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## Creating Happiness

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When asked what they want out of life, most people would say that they want to be happy or that they want their loved ones to be happy. The pursuit of happiness is even at the heart of the Constitution of the United States of America.

The million dollar question however for most of us is, how do we go about successfully pursuing and finding happiness in our everyday lives?

According to psychologist Martin Seligman, Ph.D., there are three distinct routes to attaining happiness. The first involves seeking to generate positive emotions and pleasure—the *pleasant life*. The second involves engagement in activities and relationships—the *engaged life*. The third is about meaning, being involved in whatever gives a person the sense that what they are doing has an enduring beneficial impact—the *meaningful life*. Dr. Seligman's research has shown that the most satisfied people are those who pursue all three avenues, but mostly engagement and meaning.

Dr. Seligman's team designed practical exercises to help individuals augment their sense of happiness. One of these exercises, the three good things exercise, is to daily, for seven days, list three things that went well each day and their causes. The exercise requires people to write down these three good things nightly (at the end of one's day), and to state why they thought these things went well.

Another exercise devised by Dr. Seligman's team involves identifying one's "signature strengths" and then using a top "signature strength" in a new and different way every day for one week. (You can determine your "signature strengths" by going online to [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org) and taking the VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire.)

A study performed by Dr. Seligman and his colleagues found that doing the above two exercises increased participants' happiness ratings and decreased their depression ratings **for six months!** This is a very impressive result, especially given the simplicity of the intervention.

I suggest that we make the three good things exercise a life-long habit! At any point during the day we need to ask ourselves, "What is going right so far today? And why?"

If we're in such a "down" place that we can't think of any positive examples in the course of our day, we can always be thankful for our physical health, the fact that someone loves us, we have a roof over our heads, or a vehicle that runs. To increase the beneficial impact even more, we can give thanks out loud for these blessings.

What we focus on has a  
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### IN MEMORIAM

Kristin Hallbauer

September 12, 2007

### IN MEMORIAM

April Linham

September 18, 2007

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**Mr. Ari Zavaras**  
Executive Director  
Colorado DOC

#### Tickets

\$30/person; \$50/couple  
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For tickets, call DWCO  
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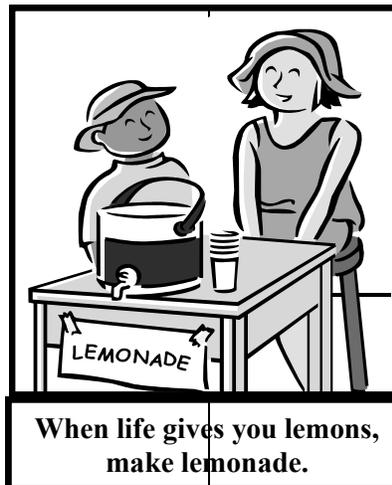
# Creating Happiness

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powerful impact on our attitude, our mood and our overall well-being. Someone has said, **“What you take takes YOU.”** Whatever we choose to entertain in our minds grows in dominance and influence in our souls. If we choose to stew about things going wrong, magnifying the bad and downplaying the good, we are guaranteeing ourselves feelings of unhappiness and misery. If, on the other hand, we choose to identify ways that life is going well or ways to make it better, we cheer up. The battle for the emotional quality of our life is shaped by our outlook, what we pay attention to and what we say.

So learning to find even one shred of something good in challenging situations is a key weapon in winning the battle of the mind. The ability to identify benefits in the middle of apparent losses can replace hopelessness with a positive vision for the future. Folk wisdom has captured this truth in sayings such as, “Every cloud has a silver lining,” “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade,” or “Let your stumbling blocks become your stepping stones.” We need to discipline our thinking process to detect openings and opportunities in the face of opposition or apparent defeat. We also need to learn how to find the positive in mistakes, mishaps, and bad experiences.

Another way to counter negativity is to let our minds meditate on things of beauty, nobility, purity, innocence, loveliness. Think back on examples of healthy children or pets playing and laughing in all-out exuberance and joy. Remind yourself of people you admire for their courage, wisdom, or kindness. Come up with examples of individuals who bounced back after bone-crushing adversity. Saturate your mind with images of places of breathtaking natural beauty. Even better, as much as you can, surround yourself with loving relationships, and make the time to enjoy the majesty of creation.



**When life gives you lemons,  
make lemonade.**

In your free time, instead of playing violent videos or watching movies filled with hate and death, engage in positive activities. Create love-filled memories through joyful interactions with family and friends. Playing and laughing together is a massive stress reliever and a powerful bonding agent. Tell your loved ones what you appreciate about them. Point out their strengths and also areas where they are improving, maturing, or mastering skills.

You can do the same at work. Catch people—staff or inmates—doing something right and praise them for it. Commend them for their efforts. Encourage them for any progress they make, no matter how small it may seem to you.

When your mind slides back to its habitual setting of negativity and fault-finding, train yourself to come up with three good things about the person or situation you just put down. (And that includes yourself, as well!) Do that repeatedly until the default setting of your mind becomes the positive option. Get stuck on “positive!”

Being positive energizes you and those around you. Negativity on the other hand drains you and poisons your environment. Putdowns and ridicule discourage people and prompt them to give up.

Going against negativity takes discipline and determination, because pessimism, cynicism, and a general negative outlook are like the pull of gravity. They drag us down automatically. It takes effort and courage to keep our spirits up, in the same way that it takes energy and power to break free from the pull of gravity and fly.

<sup>1</sup>Seligman, M.E.P., Park, N. & Peterson, C. American Psychologist, July-August 2005, Vol. 60, No. 5, 410-421. *Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions.*

***The last of all human freedoms is the ability  
to choose one's own attitude  
regardless of circumstances.***

Viktor Frankl  
Nazi concentration camp survivor

## Depression in the Workplace

According to [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net):

- When considering the impact of depression on absenteeism from work, lost productivity and direct treatment costs, it is estimated that clinical depression costs the U.S. economy more than \$43.7 billion annually. This makes the economic impact of depression comparable to that of heart disease and AIDS.
- Depression ranks among the top three workplace problems employee assistance professionals have to deal with, followed by family crisis and stress.
- Three percent of short-term disability days are due to depressive disorders. In 76 percent of those cases the employee is female.

That latest statistic suggests that women suffer more from depression than men. Studies have repeatedly found that twice as many women as men suffer from depression. However, psychologists have been arguing lately that men are just as vulnerable as women to depression, but that their symptoms may differ. (The argument that men suc-

cumb to depression as well is bolstered by the fact that men's suicide rate is four times that of women's, and suicide is usually the outcome of severe depression.)

The answer to this apparent puzzle of the "depression gender gap" may be the under-diagnosis of depression in men. Depressed men tend to present differently than women. Depressed women may be sad, tearful, and appear helpless. Depressed men come across as irritable, angry, and hostile. Their primary complaints may be about problems on the job, not in their personal lives. Men also mask their depression by self-medicating through substances, such as alcohol. Women are more likely to seek help from other people.

Could it be that some of the male corrections staff who are chronically short-tempered, heavy alcohol consumers, and dissatisfied with work, are in fact suffering from the very treatable condition of clinical depression? If you recognize yourself in this description or in parts of it, please consider getting assessed for clinical depression. You and your quality of life are worth it!

## Will You Help?

Dear Friends:

I want to take this opportunity to ask you for your help. I imagine that you come across various worthwhile causes and charities that need your support. As you contemplate about your giving, I want to remind each of you about us. When I say "us" I mean you and me, everyone who works in or who has worked in corrections. We now have a charity that focuses on us and our wellness needs, Desert Waters Correctional Outreach. We all can potentially benefit from what Desert Waters is all about. Desert Waters is a non-profit with **YOU**, the correctional worker and your welfare, as its main objective. Desert Waters is **totally about YOU**.

As you hear about assaults on staff nationwide, you should all be asking yourselves, "How we can help?" as this could have happened to you. One way you can help each other is to give to Desert Waters. Your tax-exempt contributions will enable Desert Waters to reach out to help those individuals who are affected by their work

environment, and also to continue designing and offering materials on improving the corrections workplace.

We need your support more than ever before. There are so many needs nationwide crying out for our trainings, consultations, attention and help. When you assist us, we then can help assist you and your co-workers.

I worked in the field for many years and did not realize how much it had affected the way I looked at things in my everyday life. Oh, how I wish there had been a place like Desert Waters when I needed to vent! I now serve as a Board Member for Desert Waters because I believe in what the organization is doing. I want to give back to the community of co-workers and friends I have made along the way.

Please consider partnering with us. Help Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, so it can help you!

Thank you in advance for your support.

Anne Gard

# 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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## Selling Our Souls?

*The writer below addresses the subject of questionable ethical practices and their impact on staff who witness them or are invited to participate in them. These practices may fall in a "grey zone," where the letter of the law is not being violated, but the spirit of the law is, or when the issue becomes a matter of interpretation. This article also touches on the "code of silence" and the price staff pay eventually if they choose to abide by it.*

What do I mean by "selling our souls?" We "sell our souls" when we choose to place financial gain (job security) and our coworkers' acceptance above our moral and ethical standards. The boundaries for these standards differ from person to person, but it's safe to say that we all have a heart (at least I hope so), and, when something isn't right, we feel uneasy and uncomfortable.

While working in the prison system I was placed in situations where I felt uneasy. It's hard when your peers or supervisors ask you to do or take part in something that causes you moral discomfort. Your rational mind tells you to just go along, tolerate, or look the other way. However, this comes at a great personal price. The more you detach from your heart (your emotions and conscience) so as to function in this way, the "colder," "deader" you become. I know there are many within the system that would say that you need to detach in order to be productive, but I chose not to believe that. Why? Because it just takes too much effort to be someone that you're not and to violate your principles. It's like trying to cover up a lie that eventually becomes too big to conceal anymore. The more we attempt to go against who we are and what our heart and conscience dictate, the more pain we endure.

Eventually I did walk away from prison work. I left with great insights as to who I am and how much I'm willing to tolerate—lessons that will only serve me well in the future. I walked away without regrets, and with the privilege of never having been assaulted, and not having to stay awake at night due to some act I had committed or witnessed. For this I am blessed. For those that remain within the prison walls, especially those who do so at great personal expense, I leave you with prayers for a brighter future, and with this quote from a motivational speaker: "If the work you are doing does not come easily, I would venture to say that you have strayed from your path."