

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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Desert Waters in 2010

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On March 12, 2010, DWCO will be seven years old as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. We are so grateful to be part of this outreach of compassion toward corrections staff and families. Following our Board's strategic planning meeting this summer, Desert Waters plans to continue its existing programs and activities in 2010 and begin some new ones. Here is what we intend to offer in 2010.

- Trainings on impacting the workplace culture, supervisor skills, leadership, post-traumatic issues, gender issues in the workplace, and individual wellness.
- Professional counseling for individuals and couples. For those out of state we offer an intensive 20-hour, 5-day counseling package.
- *The Corrections Ventline*, our 24/7 phone and email service to staff and families.
- Our monthly newsletter and e-letter, the *Correctional Oasis*.
- Our third Corrections Staff Wellness Conference on May 6 and 7 at The Abbey in Cañon City. This year's theme is *Creating a Healthier Culture*.
- Our Fall Fundraiser, *Honoring our Community Protectors*, on 9/11 in Cañon City.

In addition to the continuation of these existing programs, we are looking to offer professional and life coaching for those who wish to develop their skill sets further for a balanced life and effective management of self and others at work. We are also planning on getting Desert Waters on Facebook.

We invite you to join us in this venture in any way you are willing and able. You may wish

to volunteer as a peer supporter or Responder on the Ventline. You may send us articles to consider for publication in the Correctional Oasis. If you are in our area, you may opt to volunteer to help during yard sales, our Fall fundraiser or our Spring conference. Or you may assist us through your membership or tax-deductible gifts that will go towards our raising the \$99,000 we need for our 2010 budget.

Helping Desert Waters continue its mission will amount to helping your colleagues nationwide, their families, may be even yourself.

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A Way to Enduring Change

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As I write this, 2010 is only 15 days away. When a new year rolls around we tend to take stock of ourselves—how we are doing and areas where we want to improve.

Anyone who has tried to change, however, knows that the process is TOUGH. New, improved and 33% more does not come easy. Our habits become hardened cement. For lasting change we need to gradually and systematically pour out a whole new slab. To do so we have to identify new behaviors we need to practice and then remain motivated to repeat, repeat, repeat, till we build enough new connections, new pathways in our brain, to overcome old habits. Motivation and repetition are two keys to behavioral change.

Here are a couple of exercises to get you started with change.

1. Name one behavior or attitude in your personal life you want to change and list one to three specific ways to accomplish your goal. Then put your plan to practice. Daily visualize acting in the new way, and also actually do things the new way every chance you get. Reward yourself for every step of progress.
2. Repeat this exercise for one behavior or attitude in your professional life. Then sit back and watch change take place!

From “Scars and Bars”

This is an excerpt from Sgt. Barry Evert’s book entitled “Scars and Bars.” We are thrilled that his e-book has finally been published. It sells for \$9.99 and is available in PDF format at

<http://store.corrections.com/products/scars-and-bars>.

Some Chapter titles are Prison Hierarchy, Hell on Earth, Battle of the Sexes, Unconventional Force, and Keeping Your House in Order.

The first two years as an officer will shape your career and your life. How you deal with situations will dictate your ability to grow and learn.

You will start this process by making mistakes, lots of mistakes. If you pay attention to the senior officers, your mistakes will be minor and harmless. If you choose to ignore these senior officers and try to “wing it,” you will likely get yourself, or someone else, killed or injured. So pay attention!

You are now officially a “rookie”, a “fish”, or the ever-popular “new booty.” Let me pause there for a minute. Do not misunderstand any of these terms as a negative reflection on your personality, gender, or ability. They are common terms that have been used for a long time, and even with a great effort to make us “more sensitive,” we continue to use them. The terms are a quick way for officers to identify who is new and who isn’t. I found it easiest to introduce myself as a rookie. This breaks the ice with senior officers as it shows that you understand your place in this new environment. I always tell people, even now as a supervisor, that if I make a mistake, tell me. This does not mean that a senior officer should ever yell at you in front of another officer or inmate, as this is unacceptable.

Having said that, you need to be aware that you will be yelled at several times early on in your career. Correctional officers are usually passionately aware

of their duties, and tend to get pretty frustrated when someone goofs. I do not encourage any officer to yell at new officers, but I have done it myself. In my defense, it was in the privacy of an office, and always after a mistake that could have gotten, or did get, someone hurt. This doesn’t make yelling the right thing to do, but it drove my point home. I have never corrected an officer I did not care about though. If you notice that everyone is critiquing you, it means that people see potential in you, and want to help you. If your supervisor writes you up on a weekly basis, it means you are not learning properly, and you need to adjust your attitude.

Your number one priority through your first week of work will be to avoid messing up too badly. Here are some tips for your first week:

- Come to work dressed in proper uniform. Show pride in your appearance.
- Introduce yourself as a “rookie” to every officer you work with and ask them for their help today.
- Thank every officer that offers you help or critique.
- Even if you think you didn’t do anything wrong, apologize for your mistakes.

Remember that you do not understand the procedures yet, and you may have violated them trying to do the “right thing” in your mind.

- Walk with a purpose, stand tall and give clear directions to inmates, in a loud, confident voice and a smile on your face.
- Do not respond to inmates jeering you about being new. Ignore them and keep talking to your partner instead.
- DO NOT lose your temper, especially with inmates.

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3rd Annual DWCO Conference—Creating A Healthier Culture—May 6 & 7, 2010

The conference will be held at the Abbey, in Cañon City, CO. Topics will include Positive Psychology at Work, The 7 Habits for Staff, Living a Balanced Life, Women Working in Corrections, 21st Century Leadership, Effective Supervision, Preserving Your Marriage & Family, & Recovery from Trauma. Attendance fee: \$49/day, \$89 for both days. Includes lunch. Some scholarships available. Purchase orders accepted. More details about the conference and lodging, and the registration form will be posted at www.desertwaters.com soon. Sponsors & vendors welcome. For more information, contact us at desertwaters@desertwaters.com or at 719-784-4727.

From “Scars and Bars”

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- Show respect to the inmates. At least give the appearance of showing respect.

This may sound strange but many inmates, particularly gang members, feel that the whole world has disrespected them. You can show respect while remaining stern in your duties as an officer.

- Be fair at all times.
- If there is an incident in your area, be the first one there, and the last one out. Learn as much as you can about how your institution handles emergencies, and show you are not afraid to be there.
- Don't worry if you're scared. It is completely normal, just don't show it. Stand tall and walk with a purpose.
- Do not run anywhere unless there is an emergency.

Like I mentioned above, don't be discouraged by your natural fear. My first real incident was also one of the biggest riots in decades in the United States. It was an awakening for me.

My first assignment was at a prison in Northern California notorious for inmate violence. On February 23, 2000, my job assignment was that of an administrative segregation property officer. I had a different

position every day, covering for officers who were out due to illness, vacation, or other personal reasons....

As I crossed the yard to get supplies for the officers, I heard the yard next to us explode into violence. I could not see what was happening as my view was obstructed by walls, but could hear the unimaginable screams coming from the other side. Eventually I made it to the other yard, and saw stuff I still have difficulty talking about today. I can't get into what I saw or did, but I assure you it had a profound effect on me.

This incident made me realize that our prisons were not only dangerous to work in, but could slowly, methodically, break someone down emotionally and mentally. I had never been so scared in my life as when I walked onto that yard that day, but walk onto it I did.

This fear is what keeps us all alive, as long as we can hide it well enough to go undetected. This fear helps our training kick in automatically as we react to danger.

Sometimes this fear creeps up within us before we have hard evidence that something is about to come down. Some call this kind of fear, this warning, a “sixth sense.” Others call it intuition. Whatever you call it, it is that part of your brain that tells you to be careful and that something is not right. Listen to it and you'll be a survivor.

The Corrections Ventline

If you've been reading our newsletter or been on our website, you will have seen information about the Corrections Ventline, our 24/7 hotline which is available at no cost to corrections staff and families. I consider the Ventline to be our most valuable (even though our costliest) program.

The Ventline provides a safe place to vent, support while exploring options, crisis intervention, resources and information. From 2005 to 12/16/09 the Ventline has had 525 contacts, of which 29 were with suicidal individuals and 9 with others worried about a potentially suicidal staff or family member.

People call, email or even walk into our office. They share mostly about work-related stressors, broken relationships, financial difficulties, mental health struggles,

physical health issues, and substance abuse.

This is what we often get from our Ventline contacts: “Thank you for caring.” “I had no one else to talk to.” “I feel better already.” One caller even commented that she couldn't believe that people would VOLUNTEER to listen to angry individuals!

The phone branch of the Ventline is available to staff who work in U.S. prisons, jails, probation, parole, community corrections and juvenile justice. Email of course is global. So far we've had emails from across the U.S., Canada, Australia, and South Africa.

The Ventline email is youvent@desertwaters.com for corrections staff and family members.

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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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The Corrections Ventline

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The Ventline callers dial 866-YOU-VENT (866-968-8368) and they reach our answering service. The operator then calls the Responder on duty and patches the call through to them. Our Caller ID shows the number of the answering service. Your number is not available to us as we talk with you, and we do not ask for names. (To block your number on all Caller ID systems, dial *67 and then the number.) The content of the contact is confidential with the exception of reports of child or vulnerable adult abuse, serious suicidal thinking or behavior (we ask for identifying information to send people help), or threats to others (we seek to identify both the caller, to report to law enforcement authorities, and the potential victim, to warn them).

Our Responders are trained civilians, retired corrections personnel, and mental health providers. Ventline users can ask for one screening/consultation per year with a mental health provider at no charge.

It is such a joy when we witness the transformation of those who contact us from dejected to comforted or empowered to proceed with the next step regarding their well-being.

Costs of the Ventline include the 800 number, answering service, long-distance charges, Responder training, mental health services and literature printing. Just phone calls this year averaged \$300 per month. The number of calls we receive is rising, and so do our phone costs. We also need additional volunteer Responders.

Please consider investing in the Ventline by sending us a monthly or a one time tax-deductible donation of any amount. Just indicate that you want the funds to go toward Ventline expenses.

Businesses can also sponsor the Ventline. For \$250 we list your business name in our newsletter and on our website (with your website link) for 3 months, \$500 for 6 months, and \$1,000 for a year. Please consider giving in this simple, yet crucial way.

Your support will be a life saver. You will most likely never meet those you help, but rest assured you that your investment WILL make a difference in people's lives, perhaps for someone who has your back. Your generosity will be much appreciated by many.

THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE™

866-YOU-VENT

youvent@desertwaters.com