

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 7

Combined Federal Campaign #82466 ♦ Combined Colorado Campaign #3908

JULY 2008

Injuring The Soul

Sgt. Barry Evert

At some point, officers are faced with injuries in our line of work. Some are more severe than others, but many take us away from our jobs, and sometimes even from our normal lives.

I have been faced with numerous injuries that have taken me out of commission for short periods of time. The injuries were mostly minor, and I was able to return to work rather quickly without any major disruption of my daily life. Broken bones and concussions are part of the job, and most of us recover quickly.

For some of us the time may come when a truly debilitating injury puts us on the "injured reserve" list for a longer period of time. This happened to me a couple of years ago.

What started as a relatively minor problem blossomed into the loss of sensation and loss of meaningful use of my hands for months. During this time I came to realize that some of our injuries go deeper than bones and flesh. They wound our soul.

This may sound a little too dramatic, but few can appreciate the feeling of worthlessness when we are injured to the point that daily tasks become a struggle. Whether it is temporary or permanent, the effect this has on many of us needs to be recognized. I have known officers who have become injured on the job and have suffered horribly because of that. Most of us talk amongst ourselves about how bad we feel for the officer. But do we ever do anything about it?

If you know someone who has suffered a serious injury, be it on or off-duty, you should understand some basic facts.

Officers may push away offers of help in order to

mask their disability. They are often in much pain, both physically and mentally, and may even begin to blame themselves for the injury.

Officers have spent much of their adult life as "protectors and defenders." Now suddenly they may not even be able to complete simple daily skills, such as bathing or using the restroom, without help. The disabling effect on the officer makes them feel like they are less of a person because they can't do what they used to.

To make things worse, they may be starting to understand that their career is over, and may not have an alternative means to take care of their household. This is another blow to their psyche.

All of this combined may eventually lead to a severe depression. I wrestled with depression and feelings of worthlessness as I struggled to recover from my own injury. I have spoken with other officers who have been severely injured and have found the same to be true for them.

So how do we even begin to deal with all of this?

The answer is simple. *Love and support your brother and sister, even when they are not at work.*

IN MEMORIAM

Brent Gall

June 8, 2008
ADX FCC Florence
Florence, CO

Tim McGill

June 10, 2008
Sterling Correctional
Facility, Sterling, CO

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THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE™

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The “Women in Corrections” Project

Thanks to an initial grant of \$5,000 by the Abdoulah Family Foundation, Desert Waters is launching its *Women in Corrections* project. We are deeply grateful to Colleen Abdoulah for her vision and her support.

One of the fastest growing demographics in the corrections workforce is women. In several states women compose one-fourth of the corrections employees.

In 2007 Caterina offered the training “Professional Boundaries for Women in Corrections” at ACA’s Congress of Correction. This resulted in requests for gender-specific training for women employees, and for materials to facilitate interactions of men and women staff.

That is why we decided to devote time and resources to develop such materials and make them available to institutions and individual professionals. Over the next two years we aim to produce training CDs, booklets and other resources to contribute toward the equipping of women in corrections, and to facilitate women’s professional interactions with both offenders and coworkers.

To succeed in this endeavor we need your help. Send us your thoughts on what may be valuable training tips or interventions. Email us examples that illustrate effective interactions between female staff and male staff or offenders, and also among women workers. Send us suggestions about problem areas that you believe need to be addressed. To contribute funds toward this project, please designate your tax-deductible contribution for “Women in Corrections.” Help us develop materials that will help improve everyone’s work experience!

Miscellaneous

- In April Caterina offered the two-day training *Secondary Traumatic Stress* to 20 field (probation & parole) and facility supervisors of the Wyoming DOC.
- Desert Waters’ May conference was attended by 54 people from 12 states: CA, CO, IL, KS, KY, MA, MD, MT, NM, OR, WV and WY.
- On June 16 Caterina attended the training *Combat Stress & PTSD: Working with Veterans & Their Families*, as Desert Waters’ occasionally deals with corrections staff who are also veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Forgiving

© Caterina Spinaris Tudor, Ph.D.

There is much talk in corrections about the stressfulness of the job. Mention is made of offender overcrowding, short-staffing, “difficult” coworkers. However, often some staff appears to be more affected by negative conditions than others. Why is that? What is the vehicle through which external stressors “get to” those exposed to them?

Stress happens through people’s perception of and reaction to events in their environment.

The perception of insult or danger, and the reactions of anger and fear are big stress-generating culprits. They trigger in our bodies the same biochemical reactions we would experience had a Siberian tiger pounced on us.

One form of anger is resentment, rehashing a hurtful incident and re-experiencing its insult repeatedly. People who “did us wrong” may be dead and gone, yet resentment keeps tormenting us. The only way I know to end this misery is letting go, forgiving. In fact, psychological research shows that forgiving has beneficial influence on our health—body, soul and spirit.

In my exchanges with corrections staff I have noted that to some forgiving amounts to defeat and “loss of face.” For them the pursuit of justice clouds their understanding of the nature and value of forgiveness. So here are a few thoughts on what forgiving is and what it is not. May reading these notions make it possible for you to get rid of some stress by purging old resentments and finding more peace.

Forgiving Is NOT...

- Forgetting (having no recollection) of the hurt/wrongdoing we suffered.
- Feeling no pain from the wrongdoing.
- Acting as if we have not been affected by the hurt.
- Denying or minimizing the accountability of the person who mistreated us.
- Believing that the person who mistreated us should get off scot-free.
- Being able to trust the person who mistreated us as if no offense had ever taken place.
- Being able to be friends with the person who mistreated us.
- Condoning/approving of/not minding the hurt we experienced.
- Acting as if we should not protect ourselves from those who mistreated us.

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Injuring The Soul

(Continued from page 1)

If you know a colleague who has been severely injured or is suffering some type of disabling disease, don't be too scared to act. Be there for your partners. They are counting on you, even if they don't say anything. I have spoken many times about officer suicide. At times like this the risk of officer suicide rises. Do not be afraid to support your colleagues, even if all you can do is call and tell them you miss them at work.

No one is expecting you to be the officer's counselor or doctor. A simple call, reminding them that you are thinking of them, can mean a lot. There is no greater feeling than getting a telephone call from people at work to check on you after being away for a while.

You do not have to put yourself in the officer's situation. Let them guide the conversation. If they want to talk about their injury, let them vent on you. But, if they do not talk about it, simply make small talk about family and life. This little conversation may pull them out of a daze. Remember that we allow this type of venting from offenders all the time. Why wouldn't you do the same for a fellow officer?

One of the hardest things for injured officers is to really enjoy their time at home. Many miss being part of "the action," and may feel out of sorts when they don't know what is going on at work. Remind them to enjoy their family time while they are off, and that work is the same as it has always been.

Do not exclude them from what had been normal activities outside of work before the injury. If the injured officer was always there on poker night, invite him back. If he can't make it because of their injury, offer to move the game to his bedside if needed.

If you are the injured officer, keep in mind that a lack of phone calls does not mean you are forgotten. Many of your partners hesitate to call you because they think they have to have the answers to your problems before they can call.

Feel free to call them to see what they are up to. This will make it easier for them to talk. And it will

make you feel better when they tell you that they have been thinking about you.

Try to enjoy your time with your family. After all, you are at home with the ones you love.

I understand that you have worked the "toughest beat" in the nation, and that you have never backed off of a fight. I know that you were the first one in and the last one out. And we all understand that you can't do these things right now or maybe ever again. Does this make you less of a person, less of an officer? Of course not. *You are no less of a human because you are injured!*

Instead of feeling useless, teach others to learn from your mistakes, and dedicate yourself to the training and development of the next generation of officers. You have never run from a fight, so don't run from this one.

The loss of physical ability can be devastating. But no pain is as great as the belief that you are less important than you were before your injury. This type of depression can lead the officer to quit trying to get better and simply give up. We have lost many good officers over the years to this, and it is high time we do something about it.

We are an unbreakable team when we go into battle on duty. It is time we form the same bond for our off-duty battles.

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Mark Your Calendars!

DWCO's Fundraising Banquet

October 23, 2008

The Abbey, Cañon City

DWCO's 2nd Annual Conference

May 7 & 8, 2009

Glen Eyrie, Colorado Springs

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, Laurie Bailey, TC & Joellen Brown, Arthur & Fredna Carter, Vanessa Hoener, Harold & Becky Hutson, Than Lundquist, Matthew McNeill, Jeffrey & Connie Mueller, Kevin & Robin Rivard, Chaplain Russ & Cherrie Scharf, Charles & Earlene Wolfers

Business donors: Janice Barnett, CPA; Bridge to Life Assembly; Cañon City Counseling & Psychotherapy, John Morlock, LCSW; Classic Furniture; Hoppen Advertising Specialties, Pete Hoppen; Let's Talk, Paul & Cindy Bowen

Foundations: The Abdoulah Family Foundation

Special thanks also go to: Florence United Methodist Women; Ted Tudor; The Old Screw; Caroline Turner, The Athena Group LLC; and the Ventline Responders

Ventline Sponsors: City of Cañon City; Colorado Health Foundation; Colorado Jail Association; Credit Union of Colorado; Doing HIS Time Prison Ministry; Fremont Community Non-Profit Center; King County Corrections Guild, WA; and Prison Health Services

From The Old Screw This Dying Thing

In Memory of Tim "Mac" McGill

To act like dying is no big thing
it's our final act, a very personal thing
and the truth is most of the time
we're scared, so very scared, of this dying
we try to keep up a good brave face
to all our loved ones and friends around us
when in reality we want to scream and curse
throw things and ask why and blame God
we know of God's promise and try to believe
we can't help worrying, we're not good enough
we remember things we did so long ago
we hope and pray God will be with us
let us go out without shame
give our loved ones comfort, secure in their belief
that we are now OK, that we can handle
this dying thing

Forgiving

(Continued from page 2)

Forgiving IS...

- Canceling the emotional, spiritual or material debt owed to us. *(Seeking restitution or other legal consequences may be in order in some situations, and can coexist with forgiveness.)*
- Letting go of hatred toward those who mistreated us.
- No longer demanding that whoever hurt us should be perpetually punished.
- No longer demanding that whoever hurt us should be hated by whoever loves us or cares about us.
- Ceasing to hope that bad things would happen to those who hurt us or to their loved ones.
- Ceasing to rejoice, openly or secretly, when bad things do happen to those who mistreated us.
- Letting go of fantasies of revenge or vengeful actions against those who mistreated us.
- Letting go of a "victim" identity by taking responsibility for our own reactions and choices.
- Seeing through the meanness of those who hurt us to their self-deception and their destructive values. They may think they hurt us, but in reality they hurt themselves more than anyone else.