

# 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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## A Plan for Balance, Harmony, and Well-Being

*This article describes the benefits of a new training course in the Colorado Dept. of Corrections for Corrections Professionals based on Stephen Covey's book Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Staff that has taken the course is very excited about it. Thank you, Jerry Gasko, Dan Matsche and John Davis, for championing the use of the Seven Habits in corrections settings.*

The **Seven Habits of Highly Effective Correctional Professionals** course is very beneficial to staff on many, many levels. It gives them not only the skill set that is necessary to become more effective, but also the mindset. It teaches not only what to do, but why it is important to do it. The wisdom and reasoning behind these habits is laid out in full detail throughout the course.

The principles that form the foundation of the seven habits are absolute truths that work powerfully to positively affect outcomes and relationships regardless of whether they are applied to offenders, fellow staff members, or family.

This program has been tailored and customized so that its focus is on fostering and nurturing the vision of becoming a culture of well-balanced, highly motivated, committed, happy and healthy correctional professionals.

By teaching the students to *be proactive*, this course will awaken many of the future leaders who presently sit amongst us, and enable them to realize their full potential both within our department and in their

private lives. Students are taught to seize every opportunity to guide them in their journey from dependence to independence, and ultimately to interdependence. By learning that their choices and not their circumstances will determine their futures, they learn to seek out opportunities for personal and professional growth. They learn that it is much easier and more effective to tackle small problems than to sit back and complain and then to have to deal with the same problems later on when they have become much larger. Our students learn that most problems don't repair themselves, and that the sooner they are dealt with and resolved the better the outcomes will be for everyone involved. They are taught that reactivity rarely leads to positive outcomes and that it is most often wise to pause momentarily before responding.

Our students are taught the importance of always *keeping the end in mind*. In a business like ours where emotions often run very high on both sides of the fence, it is critical that staff maintain control of themselves and remain focused on the "big picture" which ultimately is everyone's safety, and also to do whatever we can to

### IN MEMORIAM

**CO I Ryan Schelbe**  
Topeka Correctional Facility  
Topeka, KS  
4/23/09

**CO William Hesson**  
Cuyahoga Hills  
Juvenile Correctional Facility  
Ohio Dept. of Youth Services  
4/29/09  
Assault

**Sgt. Edwin Garcia**  
Cook County Jail  
Chicago, IL  
4/30/09

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<b>EARNED TRUST</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>PLAN FOR BALANCE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>MUSINGS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>MANY THANKS</b>	<b>4</b>

### 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**

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(Continued on page 3)

# Earned Trust—More Precious than Gold

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Solid trust among corrections workers is an endangered species, infrequently witnessed and easily threatened with extinction. That is why earning and keeping co-workers' trust is a major accomplishment and a priceless asset in corrections.

Surrounded by offenders, a population not known for honesty and integrity, staff end up leaning toward mistrust, the negative expectation that others may lie, manipulate, fake and exploit them any chance they get. Often, after a formerly respected employee has been walked to the gate (or worse), I've heard staff lament that they never know who among their coworkers is "clean" or "dirty." That does not inspire trust.

So, you might argue, why bother with trust? Why not stay holed up in our "mistrust bunker," minding our own business and keeping everyone, including coworkers, at arm's length? Doing that, you reason, could save staff much disappointment and heartache.

Yes and no. Caution is a good thing. A prejudice that no one is worthy of our trust or that trust is pointless are not. In fact, no correctional employee could show up to work without some degree of trust that coworkers would run to their aid if things went south.

Trusting one another acts both as relational glue and relational lubricant. Trust keeps people collaborating effectively. It helps us persevere and negotiate through difficulties and work through disagreements. Considering someone to be trustworthy motivates us to go the extra mile to help them. Trustworthy behavior increases good will and harmony.

Trust has a calming influence on people. It is a natural de-stressor, as it communicates a gut-level sense of security. If I know I can trust you—that you will not try to ridicule, exploit or hurt me, but that instead you care about my well-being—I can be transparent with you and receptive toward your feedback or interventions. Trust helps us lower our masks, be more honest and open, own our missteps, and receive correction. Trust is the basis for transactions, spoken and unspoken agreements, partnerships and alliances.

Some people (not many in corrections) trust everyone up front until they are let down. Others (many in corrections) trust just about no one, and will make you work hard to *maybe* earn a little of their trust. Yet others prefer to go on a case-by-case basis, observing each individual and weighing their degree of trustworthiness

in various settings.

Trust needs to be earned, maintained and deepened over time. What kinds of behaviors inspire trust?

Like an oak tree, wise, deserved trust grows over time.

We earn people's trust when we:

- Are teachable and keep our ego in check.
- Doggedly pursue integrity and honesty.
- Consistently demonstrate honorable conduct, behaving according to our highest values.
- Make ongoing, genuine efforts to keep bridging the gap between our "talk" and our "walk," our ideals and our actions.
- Treat all with fairness and a uniform standard.
- Treat all with respect, civility and consideration.
- Follow through on our commitments and promises consistently, even when doing so is costly to us.
- Take responsibility for our behavior, owning mistakes and making amends as needed.
- Do our homework ahead of time, ensuring that information we use to make decisions is accurate and based on reliable sources.
- Show competence in our performance.
- Demonstrate we genuinely and passionately care about the organization's mission and its people.
- Demonstrate a sincere interest in others' opinion.
- Make room for differing perspectives, examining the pluses and minuses of all viewpoints impartially.
- Demonstrate willingness to participate in conflict resolution constructively.
- Stand by our team, advocating for them and supporting their efforts.
- Keep other staff's personal disclosures confidential when they are unrelated to the institution's security.

Earned trust is both sacred and fragile. It must be handled with extreme care.

The motivation to continue gaining and maintaining others' trust stems from our valuing both our integrity and the greater good.

The fruit of acting in trustworthy ways is increased **success** and **safety**. Not surprisingly, there is also a priceless rise in **self-respect**. Our conscience commends us when we act according to our values.

No money can buy the satisfaction we enjoy when we live with dignity, consistently exhibiting dependability, fairness and truthfulness.

## A Plan for Balance, Harmony, and Well-Being

(Continued from page 1)

prepare the offenders for their reintegration back into society. In the *Seven Habits* course staff are taught to redirect the energy from these highly emotional situations into positive directions and to seek out *win-win* solutions whenever they are available. One of the main principles taught in the course is that leadership is **not** control. Students are taught that *win-win* thinking is far more effective than *win-lose* thinking. Listening to and understanding each other's perspective is the most critical aspect of conflict resolution!!

We teach our students to approach conflict resolution with their family members, fellow staff members, and offenders from the paradigm that most issues can be resolved without anyone losing. We teach that all parties involved need to be heard and understood before any agreeable solution can ever be reached. By approaching situations with this "*seek first to understand*" attitude, most people will be far less defensive and much more likely to communicate their true feelings. In this way the actual conflicts themselves can be quickly identified and resolved without the emotions surrounding them halting communication and eroding the trust in the relationships. By teaching them effective two-way communication skills and the value of trust, we prepare our students to become true leaders, not just supervisors or managers. As a result this course is creating a climate of true leadership and mentorship within our department.

One of the most valuable lessons taught in this course is the value of prioritization. By *putting first things first* and focusing on those things that are truly important and not on those which seem urgent, students are taught that they can avoid a lot of unnecessary stress in their lives. In our world with all of its modern technology and instant communication it is very easy to be overwhelmed by trying to multi-task and hyper-task to attempt to get everything done. By learning to eliminate or ignore those unimportant things that rob us of our precious time and energy, we can spend much more time focusing on the truly important things like tending

to our closest relationships and working on those projects and ideas that we are the most passionate about. This is one of the keys to happiness and well-being that is taught in our course.

Creative cooperation is a key focus of the course as well. The *synergy* process is defined, explained, and underscored. In our quest to not only build great individual leaders throughout our department, but to bring about great changes to the correctional culture itself, cooperation is strongly favored over competition. Effectiveness is based on maturity. One of the key traits of a mature person is their willingness to cooperate with others towards common goals. The **Seven Habits of Highly Effective Correctional Professionals** course hammers home the idea that through cooperative creativity each staff member regardless of their rank has the rare opportunity to actually create lasting change in their profession!! This, in our opinion, is the greatest promise of the course.

Self-renewal and reenergizing is emphasized in the course. Our students are taught the importance of tending to all aspects of their lives in order to maintain peace and balance. The high-stress environment that we often work in will eventually create burnout, fatigue, and breakdown if not continually addressed. We teach our students to be accountable to their bodies, minds, and spirits.

Of course it requires a *commitment of continuous effort* by our students to actually **live** the Seven Habits and to become truly effective at home and at work.

This is an incredibly powerful course that we believe will change many lives in and around our department for the better.

*By M. Rosen & H. Campbell, Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility, Colorado Dept. of Corrections.*

### Greening of the Correctional Oasis

If you currently receive the Correctional Oasis by regular mail, **please send us your email address** so we can send you our publication electronically.

# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

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### From the Old Screw

## Musings From DWCO's Spring Conference

On May 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, Desert Waters had its Spring Conference. Although small due to the economy, it was a great session and well represented by staff from all over the U.S.

One of the nice things during such events is that you get to talk to staff from different agencies and learn of their problems, progress and hopes.

I am sad to say that I heard about a couple of unpleasant things going on in some facilities, things I have written about in the past.

1. Some departments think they are more important than others. Get real, people! We all depend on each other and anyone may save the life of another staff or give back-up when needed. Staff who cannot see that we all wear the same uniform, no matter what the color, has a problem. Line staff is outnumbered all the time and when it hits the fan, everyone coming to your aid looks good. I don't remember anyone turning down help because a plumber or nurse or teacher showed up when times were bad.
2. Some experienced staff do not want to help new staff. I keep hoping this will change, but it hasn't yet. Some older staff think, "Why help? They won't last long." Well, if you aren't there for them, they won't, and you may end up losing good people. Yes, it gets old helping over and over just to see them leave, but the thing is, if you do your best to help them and they fail, you know it was not because you and other staff didn't try. We all know corrections is not for everyone, but wake up people! Female correctional staff are here to stay. You are a professional! Darn it, be one! Extend the hand of help. No one says you have to even like the person. Just ask, "Can I help you?" Or say "You might want to think of doing this in a different way," and explain how and why. Most new staff is scared or at least nervous. Your assistance may calm them down and help keep them.

Don't get me wrong. I heard some good things too. Upper staff in some agencies are taking more interest in what works both for their staff and for the inmates. New programs and methods are making for a safer and more productive environment for everyone. It helps when staff know they are not just another warm body and that management cares what they think. To those agencies that are working more with their staff, I salute you and what you are doing. Take care, The Old Screw