

# 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 9

Combined Federal Campaign #82466 ♦ Combined Colorado Campaign #3908

SEPT. 2008

## Teams by Charles Stoy

For several years now, teams have been all the rage. A TEAM can be very effective. However, like any other tool, it must be used correctly.

We want TEAMS to mean Together Everyone Achieves More, not to stand for Totally Erroneous Actions Mandated. The latter happens when, in the name of teamwork, people are asked to do things that are secondary or things that even create hindrances to the day-to-day practices of a unit.

So what is a TEAM? First of all, a TEAM needs to be distinguished from a work group.

A work group is a unit of people working on the same task. A secretarial pool, a maintenance unit, a security detail are examples of work groups. They are working towards a common assignment, often independently of one another, and not necessarily toward a particular finished endeavor.

A TEAM is a cohesive, interconnected group of individuals working together and depending on each other to complete a specific goal, product or process. TEAMS embody the adage, "Two heads are better than one." No one person has all the knowledge, skills or talents to accomplish all the tasks required. TEAMS work to take advantage of each individual's strengths and compensate for each other's weaknesses.

Think of some of the great basketball or football athletes. On their own, their skills would get them nowhere. Michael Jordan pointed out that, without the rest of the team, his accomplishments would have never happened. He could not play all the positions on the court. As talented as he is and was, he did not have all the requisite physical skills necessary to accomplish the task of winning NBA championships.

Members of TEAMS tend to look out for each other and work for each other's best interest. Those factors alone improve morale. It is no surprise then that TEAMS tend to out-perform work groups in terms of achievement.

So how does the concept of a TEAM impact the Officer on the tier at 2:00 AM?

If you're an Officer on the tier, being a member of a TEAM means that your job gets easier to do and your

work experience is more positive than if you belonged in a work group. As a result, when you get home, your level of tension may not be so high that the first thing you do is grab a can of beer. Instead, you may listen to your kids' reciting a litany of problems they encountered in their day and help them come up with useful solutions. Or it may be that you can give your spouse the caring ear they long for.

The Officer on the tier can respond to this, "That is all well and good, but I am only one person. How can I impact the others around me so that we change from a work group to a TEAM?" After all, you have been working with your fellow Officers for some time. There is a sergeant or lieutenant in charge already. Procedures are in place on how to do just about everything. And you are accomplishing some significant tasks as it is. Is there room for improvement, for change?

The question above cuts to the quick of the TEAM concept. It points us to the subject of TEAM leadership. A TEAM cannot exist without a leader. A leader has the challenging task of "herding a group of cats," steering them in the same direction. For the Officer who is not in charge of their group, it is important to know that they can still act as a TEAM leader in their arena of responsibility and influence by using the eight principles below.

### IN MEMORIAM

**Dale Bryant**

07/04/08

Rock County Jail, WI

### DWCO MISSION

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

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# The Process of Dialogue

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Dialogue (dī'ə lôg', -lāg')

1. a talking together; conversation
2. interchange and discussion of ideas, esp. when open and frank, as in seeking mutual understanding or harmony

*From Yourdictionary.com*

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I heard once that we have one mouth but two ears because we need to listen twice as much as we speak. The need for strategic listening is never greater than when we find ourselves in disagreement with others, whether in our professional or in our private dealings.

Being alive includes experiencing friction with others. Whether it is administration negotiating with unions, supervisors clashing with subordinates, parents battling teen children, or husbands butting heads with their wives, conflict happens.

In disagreements, our first urge is to try to overpower our opponents, to prevail in the argument and convince them that we are right. However, conflict resolution experts suggest that, when at an impasse with others, we need to dialogue with them if we want to enjoy possible satisfactory resolutions and to preserve relationships.

The goal of dialoguing is to try and find common ground with people with whom we disagree. That is why successful dialogue is exploratory in nature. It aims to help both parties identify and clarify complexities about their positions.

If arguing to win resembles a fierce game of tennis, dialoguing looks like deep-sea diving with our opponents in each other's territory with the goal of bringing discovered treasures to the surface.

Dialoguing is built upon respect of the other party, humility to accept that we don't have all the answers, self-control and patience with the process of discovery and discussion, and the desire to maintain

a working relationship with our opponents.

Effective dialoguing requires approaching each other with the goal to better understand each other's history, concerns, interests, context and foundational assumptions. Dialoguing also seeks to identify what is acceptable, valuable and meaningful to each party. This takes having a vested interest in long-term outcomes, not just brief victories.

Dialoguing presumes that all parties involved hold pieces of the puzzle, that they all have validity in their perspective.

Through dialoguing all parties have the opportunity to recognize the value of each others' stance, and to acknowledge that the other party's contributions can advance and enrich everyone's thinking. This takes humility and a realistic self-assessment.

While engaging in dialogue all parties are expected to present their positions, while at the same time maintaining the willingness to reevaluate them in light of additional evidence. This takes integrity, courage and flexibility.

Ultimately, dialogue conducted effectively can help all parties come up with creative new possibilities to address their disagreements.

For example, instead of verbally attacking someone over their doing something a certain way, dialoguing entails both parties presenting their positions. Topics to be covered include the reasons for one party's displeasure with the other party's method; the other party's reasons for doing things their way; issues that would be impacted by change or lack of change for both parties; and alternatives that exist for addressing both parties' agendas effectively.

Of course all this takes time and effort. Dialoguing is hard work. When we look at the toll of broken relationships and divided teams, however, it becomes apparent that investing in dialogue is well worth it. In fact, we can't afford not to dialogue!



## Teams

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So here are some ideas on how to herd your cats.

**1. Focus on the TEAM's goals.** What are you as a group trying to achieve? This can range from escorting inmates correctly and safely to everyone going home at the end of the shift alive. Talk with your fellow staff. Ask questions. Get your coworkers to start thinking about their roles and relationships to each other.

**2. Have clear roles for everyone and make sure everyone understands them.** Everyone has strengths. As a team member, you can play to them. Is one member a better talker? That person may be suitable for escorting high-risk offenders. Make that suggestion. Having an offender talk is a good way to minimize the chances of an assault. (But of course it still pays to know your offenders and to be prepared for the unexpected.)

**3. Make sure everyone communicates with each other.** This does not mean only spoken communication. Other forms work just as well. As much as you can, make certain everyone stays in touch, particularly regarding critical activities. Again, the old standby: Ask questions. By asking questions, you help stimulate people's thinking.

**4. Be a coach.** Support and acknowledge. A coach pushes from behind. Be positive and ask questions that help shed light on situations rather than asking questions that pin blame. When someone does a good job, tell them. When someone makes a mistake, while correcting them remember that we all make mistakes. And then talk about what went right.

**5. Develop people skills.** Learn about differing communication styles. Learn about and develop new problem-

solving skills, different ways to give and receive feedback, and how to handle conflict. For correctional officers, people skills are greatly beneficial.

**6. Build trust with your fellow officers.** Help them when they are having problems or when their work still needs to be done and yours is finished. Reciprocate when someone helps you. Help them accomplish their tasks on time, with competency and quality, and let them take the praise. Usually, this is returned in spades. Keep confidential information confidential. This means if you learn something very personal about a fellow officer, keep it to yourself. This can be a gray area. Things which may compromise the security of others need to be brought forward, but do it in a manner consistent with the nature of the information.

**7. Hold each other accountable.** If an Officer only places the cuffs on an offender without engaging the hasp, call them on it. By the same token, be respectful when doing so. They may have their reasons for it. Discuss those reasons and analyze them. Present the reasons why the hasp needs to be engaged. If after discussion the person continues the practice their way, other avenues must be taken to enforce the accurate implementation of the procedure.

**8. And, lastly, reward one another.** Buy each other a soda or some other "goodie." Praise one another. Nothing works better than recognition of a job well done, particularly from your peers.

**Correction:** In the August newsletter, in the article *Pulling Together*, it was erroneously stated that CO Jose Padilla was murdered by two inmates at USP Atwater. The correct name of the murdered Officer is Jose Rivera. Rest in peace, Jose.

## Forcing or Leading?

© Ted Tudor

Working with horses can help improve leadership skills. Think about a human manager trying to boss a 1200lb horse. LOL, they would be in trouble! Learning to lead horses teaches skills that can be transferred to leading people.

**So let's look at the basics of horse training.**

The older I get the more I realize that there is an easy way to work with horses and a hard way. Over time I've learned to prefer the easy way. That way is not only easier, but it is also safer and more efficient. With it you get much more work done. And the added bonus is that the next time you ask the horse to do something for you, it is eager to do it.

In fact, once the animal realizes you are a good leader, it will look at you when a problem arises and follow you, instead of running around panic-stricken. What a difference that makes! This can be a lifesaver when you really need to be able to depend on your horse.

So how do you train a horse? Here are three key steps.

1. When you want a horse to do something for you, stop and figure out how you can allow the horse to enjoy itself while doing what you want it to do. Or, at the bare minimum, do not make the chore a real drudgery.

2. Make the horse a little bit uncomfortable if it is not doing what you want it to do. Also give it a way out of

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# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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for the well-being of correctional  
staff and their families*

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## MANY THANKS!

**Individual donors:** Anonymous, TC & Joellen Brown, Arthur & Fredna Carter, Peter & Susan Hoppen, Harold & Becky Hutson, Lori King, Than Lundquist, Jeffrey & Connie Mueller, Judy Myers, Kevin & Robin Rivard, Russ & Cherrie Scharf

**Business donors:** Janice Barnett, CPA; Bridge to Life, Cañon City Counseling & Psychotherapy, John Morlock, LCSW; Classic Furniture; Fox Drug; Schuster's Printing

**Foundations:** The Abdoulah Family Fund

**Special thanks also go to:** Jim Beauchamp, Barbara Blackwell, Carla Cornella, Florence United Methodist Women, Greg & Anne Gard; Jim Martin, June Knight, Arlene Pennington, and the Ventline Responders

**Ventline Sponsors:** City of Cañon City; Colorado Jail Association; Credit Union of Colorado; Doing HIS Time Prison Ministry; Hoppen Advertising Specialties, Pete Hoppen; King County Corrections Guild, WA

## Forcing or Leading?

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the discomfort through its cooperating with you, its doing what you require. You accomplish that by applying pressure to different parts of the horse's body, depending on what you need the horse to do. For example, if you want the horse to turn in a certain direction, pull lightly on the bit with the reins in the direction you want it to go. If you want the horse to move forward, tap lightly on its rear end and continue tapping until it moves. The horse will quickly learn that, when you reach toward its rear end, it is time for it to move forward. The key is that when the horse makes the first move toward your intended task, you immediately release the pressure, that is, you stop the uncomfortable action. This is a crucial point. You can create serious problems with a horse if you do not back off fast when it responds to your action. What you want the horse to learn is that when it cooperates with you, it gets relief from something mildly unpleasant.

3. After the horse does its task, reward it. The reward does not have to be anything big. A kind word goes a long way. Horses learn the difference in your tone of voice very quickly.

Does the above sound easier than trying to force big horses into doing something they do not want to do?

These horse training principles work with humans also.

### Back to humans.

In the corrections environment good leadership is vital for the safety of all in the facility. And I do believe that all corrections staff are in effect leaders. They may not have a leadership title, but they are leading through managing offenders and while working with other staff.

So think about the above horse training principles when working people.

1. Come up with ways to make your staff's work experience interesting or enjoyable, perhaps through framing tasks as opportunities to develop new skills or through positive interactions with team members.
2. Let them experience negative feedback when they are in error. Make sure your feedback is the "lightest" necessary to get their attention. Increase the "pressure" if the person is not responding to you. When they do correct their behavior, acknowledge that quickly, and replace the negative feedback with commendations for their improvement.
3. And always, always, always reward your staff with a smile and words of thanks, recognition and appreciation.

I believe that applying these principles could make your life as a correctional leader a whole lot easier!

*Ted Tudor is a co-founder of DWCO, Board Chair ex-officio, and a dedicated and enthusiastic volunteer.*