

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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From CO Jane

Bucket of Rocks or Tool Box?

It saddens me that many correctional workers carry a bucket of rocks to work everyday and don't even realize that they are carrying needless weight.

You have heard the old saying, "Attitude is everything." Well, in this bucket I'm talking about people carry the rocks of negative attitudes.

I continue to hear over and over again about problems in corrections that are a direct result of the "bucket of rocks" people bring in with them. These rocks can kill careers, steal lives and destroy families. What are some of the rocks I am talking about? They are gossip, harassment, jealousy, anger, hate, back-biting, and too many more to mention.

What is wrong with this picture? Aren't we supposed to be supporting each other? Don't we all depend on others for support in emergencies? Yet when the crisis is over we go back to throwing our rocks.

I know this is not a perfect world. If it were there would be no need for corrections. However people have to begin to realize that they will either be a positive role model to inmates and staff or a negative one. Too many times we see the results of the "rock" that has been hurled at someone, with no consideration about how it will affect the other person. Most of us have failed to realized that in work and life in general "it's not about me."

We take great pride in that fact that we go into these facilities on a daily basis and protect the public. Our jobs are not easy. We have one strike against us though before we even go in. IT IS NEGATIVE IN THERE!!!! It is one thing when inmates are negative. We expect that. It is very discouraging when staff is more negative than the inmates. There is something

terribly wrong with this!

So we have a choice. Do we let the negative rub off on us or do we choose to release the positive into our workplace?

The question of course is how to change this negativity. How do we motivate ourselves and others to change, or better yet, to be transformed? (I heard it said that change is repeatable, but transformation is permanent.) What I want to see in corrections is permanent transformation in our attitude, not just change that doesn't stick.

Thankfully, in my career I had the opportunity to work with and for some very positive role models. They showed me the way to positive transformation. These people impacted the atmosphere so that it felt better just to be in the same room with them. They had nice things to say about co-workers, other staff and other departments. They set the standard wherever they went. They didn't sit around and talk negatively or complain about their plight for working in a prison. They took their job seriously, but were also able to laugh at themselves. They made going into this negative environment bearable. You liked being with them. They brought unity to their department.

What was their secret? I believe that it was that they realized that "it's not about me." And because of that they carried what I call their handy-dandy

IN MEMORIAM

John K. Brooks

6/12/09

Hector Zamora

7/16/09

Walter "Biff" Beilke

7/19/09

**Angel Santa Cruz
Andrea Plaza Santa Cruz**

7/24/09

Van A. Simmons

7/25/09

Carl Gardner

7/30/09

Earlene Wolfers

7/30/09

Sgt. Melanie Lee

8/2/09

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

STAYING SANE	2
ROCKS OR TOOL BOX	3
LONER	3
COMMUNITY PROTECTORS	4
MANY THANKS	4

DWCO MISSION

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

(Continued on page 3)

Staying S.A.N.E.

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A jail CO told me the other day that most people live in the “green light” zone, laid back and expecting no major changes or surprises. If something negative stirs, they go to “yellow.” If things get much worse, they hit “red.” He then added, “For us corrections folk, it’s different. ‘Yellow’ is where we live most of the time, expecting something ugly to come down. We’re on edge. So it takes next to nothing to put us in ‘red.’ I’ve almost forgotten what it’s like to live in the ‘green.’”

In corrections, living in the yellow zone is part of the hypervigilance that goes with the job. However, having yellow as your norm can get you in trouble. You may overreact—go red—over small things and look like a fool or worse when it’s all said and done. More often than not, the trigger is an annoyance, like having to wait, or an ego injury, like the perception of being insulted or disrespected.

Another downside to blowing up in “red” fashion is that you make things worse in your relationships, and then you either have to clean up the mess or lose people and privileges in your life. Going “red” also stresses your body. Over time this wears you down physically.

Instead of going off when feeling threatened, it’s much preferable to learn to put the brakes on angry outbursts and remain in control.

One way to do that is to learn how to stay **S.A.N.E.**

This is how **S.A.N.E.** works.

When we first sense that we are about to be overtaken by anger, we need to **Stop**. Staying stopped for at least six seconds and taking deep, slow breaths allows for the wave of fight-or-flight chemicals in our brain begin to die down so we can start to reason our way through our situation. Stopping keeps us from reacting blindly and doing or saying things we regret later. Instead of rehashing our angry thoughts, we set them aside long enough to be able to detach from whatever triggered our anger and think more objectively.

While staying stopped, we then **Assess** what we are telling ourselves about the situation and what we are urged to do. For example, we become aware that we think we are being humiliated, and that we have the urge to attack the other party. Becoming aware helps us make conscious choices about our response to the situation, instead of reacting in knee-jerk fashion.

We do that by reminding ourselves that we (**k**)**Now** we have a choice. A highly successful friend of mine likes to say, “The only thing you can control is your response.” We can either react in blind rage or we can choose to respond intelligently after having thought through options and their possible consequences.

Having reminded ourselves that we have a choice, we then proceed to **Establish** how we want to behave. Hopefully by that point we have cooled down enough to choose to respond in line with our highest values, such as courage, integrity and professionalism.

Once we apply the brakes on reacting in anger through S.A.N.E., we can ask ourselves questions, such as the following, to help us engage in effective problem-solving about our situation.

- What feels threatened here? Is it my or my loved ones’ physical safety, health, reputation, career, finances, relationships, independence or purpose?
- Is the threat real or could I be misreading the situation?
- How serious is the threat?
- Am I taking things too personally?
- Is this worth confronting or not?
- What additional information do I need to have before confronting?
- What is my part in this, if any, that I may need to take responsibility for?

If you determine that there has been a “trespass” by another person against you, you have several options. You may choose to confront the situation. If that’s the case, do your homework. Have your facts ready and do not blame or attack. (More on that in another article.) In other situations the stressor may be out of your control, such as when your supervisor is gone often due to family problems and you are carrying both your load and theirs. When that happens, opt for healthy ways to compensate for the aggravation, such as treating yourself frequently to “refueling” activities, like going for a motor-cycle ride, fishing or reading a great book.

THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE™

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youvent@desertwaters.com

Bucket of Rocks or Tool Box?

(Continued from page 1)

tool box, instead of a bucket of rocks.

In their tool box they kept some very important tools of the trade.

First of all, they carried their ID. They knew who they were, what they represented, and what their job was. They never tried to be something that they were not. They did not question what their assignment or purpose was behind the walls. They were secure in themselves and never had the need to put others down to feel superior.

Secondly, they carried keys on a key-ring, and used them effectively in the area to which they were assigned. These keys helped them do their jobs safely and efficiently. The keys reminded them of the responsibility they had for themselves and others, and so they operated with integrity. These workers were also door openers for other staff, helping them succeed and advance. They encouraged others and didn't keep a written record of what was done wrong. Rather, they were quick to note the good about their staff and co-workers.

Thirdly, they carried a radio. They were outstanding communicators. You knew what they expected of you and were encouraged by them to do your best. They

made you want to do a good job, because they were quick with praise and slow with criticism. They knew how to change an environment with the words they chose to use. They realized how important communicating was and never expected you to read their mind. They gave good direction and did not make anyone feel less than because they didn't understand something. To them there was no such thing as a stupid question.

Finally, they carried a flashlight. Their flashlight helped them see, really see. These people were outstanding at seeing a situation the way it was and bringing light into it when necessary. They never operated out of dark emotions like anger, hate, frustration, or jealousy. They also brought light and resolution into areas where there had been misunderstanding. They even offered to be your advocate if necessary when you had a problem. And they were great at helping you see the flip side of things.

These people never, never carried a bucket of rocks. **They understood that life is not about them, but about what they can do to make it better for everybody. They have realized that giving is much more rewarding than taking.**

Wouldn't corrections facilities be much better to work at if more staff went in carrying their tool box instead of a bucket of rocks?

From the Old Screw

Loner

It's funny, and sad, how a Correctional Officer can work for years and years among some of the worst killers and such and never worry. I have noticed over the years that a lot of staff only gets upset over loved ones and animals. Everything else doesn't mean anything and there are no feelings.

My wife of 31 years is sick and nothing else matters to me. Yes, I have cried and got angry with God and everything else, and nothing helps. Having been in control of my life all these years, it is very humbling to feel so helpless and useless. If you have never cried over a loved one or a little animal, then corrections did too good of a job on you. I'm 67 and don't care what someone thinks of me. We all have to have someone or something to love or hold onto. We know it will never be forever, but we are never ready to let go...never ready for the thought of being alone. We get angry at the least little thing and want to strike out, but at what? I was told it's alright to get angry with God, that He knows and

understands our hurt and struggle. But right now He's not at the top of my list. I will never deny Him, but I ain't too happy with Him right now. All I can tell Him is I'm glad He understands that I don't understand. Is what I'm saying wrong? Perhaps, but it helps to get it out. Am I alone in thinking like this? I think not. I have watched the pain and hurt of others over the years. Now it's my turn, and I don't like it one bit.

We are used to hiding our feelings and hurts. Most of us have friends who try to help, but we are so used to being private and independent people, that we try to handle it on our own. Guess what? We can't. My friends are helping me to get through this. If you don't have friends, write to me and I will be your friend as much as I can. No person should be alone. We are family. We are all one.

Take care, The Old Screw

You are welcome to email The Old Screw at desertwaters@desertwaters.com, subject OLD SCREW.

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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Check out Caterina's new blog page & contribute comments at http://www.corrections.com/caterina_tudor/.

Honoring Our Community Protectors

Join us at Desert Waters' fundraising event Saturday October 3, 2009 to honor Criminal Justice and Emergency Responder agencies and staff in Fremont County.

Schedule and Details

- **8:00am-10:00am**—River Walk, Cañon City: 5K Run/Walk. Run starts at 8:00am, walk at 9:00am. Start at 9th St., end at Ash. To be bused back to vehicles. Entry fee: Voluntary donation. T-shirt: \$12.00. Pre-registration required for t-shirts. Individuals and teams are invited to walk or run.
- **10:00am-10:30am**—Vineyard Equipping Center, 245 S. Reynolds, Cañon City: General public to visit agency tables to view exhibits, obtain information about agency and opportunities for employment or volunteering. Sponsor tables.
- **10:30am-11:00am**—Present the Colors in honor of officers fallen or injured in the line of duty.
- **11:00am-11:30am**—Release balloons in honor or in memory of criminal justice personnel. Retrieve the Colors.
- **11:30am-2:00pm**—Barbecue, visiting of agency tables, agency demonstrations.
- **2:00pm**—Additional balloon release.
- **1:00pm-3:00pm**—Volleyball competition among teams from various facilities and agencies.

Family members of agency personnel are invited to attend. Lunch hosted by The Vineyard Equipping Center.



RUN/WALK PRE-REGISTRATION FORM (INDIVIDUAL OR TEAM) TO MAIL IN

Registrant Name(s): _____

T-shirt size(s): _____ Agency Name: _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ FAX _____ Email _____

Payment: T-shirts (\$12 each) _____ Tax-deductible Donation _____ Total amount enclosed: _____

Please enclose check, payable to DWCO, P.O. Box 355, Florence CO 81226-0355.

Registration confirmation will be faxed or emailed to you.