

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF

DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH

A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

Combined Federal Campaign #82466 Combined Colorado Campaign #3908

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 9

September 2011

IN MEMORIAM

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July 31, 2011

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Two Paths to Corrections Fatigue—Part 3

© Gregory Morton

In our examination of Corrections Fatigue we have introduced two extreme staff profiles. Last month we discussed how Corrections Fatigue can happen to one of those two groups of staff, the Harry Callahan/Annie Oakley group. This month we do the same for the second profile.

CORRECTIONS FATIGUE AND MOTHER TERESA/ALBERT SCHWEITZER—WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. And so you take a job in corrections and tell people, "If I only help just one, it will all be worth it." Your friends answer back, "The world needs more people like you. If you can't do it, nobody can. You're a bigger person than I am." Compassion is your passion. You say, "I know that change is up to them, but if they've never had a real chance, what can you expect?" And, "In order to be successful, you have to know what success is even like first." "Everyone can change."

And that's what's so maddening. Because while you know that everyone can change, the offenders you work with act as if that's not true at all. If they just believed it as strongly as you did, they wouldn't live in a cage everyday. There wouldn't be a trail of victims behind them. They could see their families, have a happy life. And yet they act as if they don't care. So you work harder, put more effort into that famous compassion of yours. If you want it more, you'll convince them and they'll want it too. You just wish they worked harder too, so you didn't feel like you were the only one paddling the canoe.

Then the first inmate you sweated over comes back. And then the second one. They both have reasons, although when you dig down into the logic and facts, the reasons sound a little bit like excuses. And you feel like you've been conned.

Then the minor cases of being taken advantage of, which you absorbed as the price of doing business with this population – the back talk, the sloppy work, the laziness, the nuisance contraband, the absence from their assigned location – culminate in a major policy violation by you, which gets you noticed by the administration in all the wrong ways. And still you have to go back to your same job because by now you have economic pressures that complicate your philosophical belief system. Now you have to face a failure you never saw coming. You worry that that one incident will become a reputation. The negative behaviors you've put up with don't slacken out of consideration for the situation you're now in. If anything, they seem to have increased.

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Two Paths to Corrections Fatigue—Part 3 (continued from page 1)

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And then a few more come back. The excuses become transparent and repetitious. The negative feedback you get from your job doesn't stop. When someone points out that corrections people almost never see their successes, since successful released offenders simply become citizens and vanish from the system, you perk up slightly. You remember what your friends said when you started, "The world needs more people like you. If you can't do it, nobody can." You get more training which results in some added motivation, so you come back stronger than ever.

Until you get conned again. And then somebody steals your stapler, and someone else takes the works out of your phone when you're not looking. And the copy machine always runs out of paper when you absolutely need it. Your reputation follows you everywhere you go. When a new crop of idealistic employees cycles through, the ones you like shake their heads and leave, the ones you don't like stay. Manipulation is so common, you get good at it yourself. Your family complains, but you don't care since work takes all the caring you can muster. You get a new boss you have to train. The offenders all seem like they are getting younger. You get conned again. This time it doesn't surprise you even though it still hurts.

Negative event after negative event becomes like those infamous straws on that camel's back. Your compassion passion now strikes you as a personal vulnerability that somebody should have warned you about. You have a frustration at never having achieved what you originally set out to do. The world is not a better place. Yeah, you helped a few. But the few get swallowed up by the overwhelming many. Maybe helping just one is not really enough success to build a whole career on. The next time an idealistic employee cycle starts again, you just scoff. Welcome to the city dump. Did you bring your shovel to clean the streets after the parade has gone by? Always lock your stapler up and if you're going to use the copy machine, make sure you keep a ream of paper stashed in a secret place. If you don't do it, nobody's gonna do it for you.

Corrections Fatigue is the cumulative negative transformation of one's self or personality as a result of attempts to adapt to the demands of the corrections workplace.

For you, Mother Teresa and Albert Schweitzer, the ideals that brought you to this calling quickly become a vulnerability that gets taken advantage of over and over again, with the result that those beliefs have soured to such a degree that they are now a burden that has worn deeply into your soul.

Gregory Morton is a Staff Training Administrator, Oregon Dept. of Corrections (Retired) and a Trainer for DWCO.

For New Supervisors—Getting to Know You, Part 1

© Sgt Barry Evert

Often when you promote you are placed in an area you are unfamiliar with. Even more often, the people working for you are people you may not have worked with in the past. What you need to understand is that you do not need to know all the intricacies of a new area when you first start to be able to lead. Your knowledge of the basics of Corrections, and your ability to know right from wrong will be enough to lead. There will have to be an adjustment period though.

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For New Supervisors—Getting to Know You, Part 1 (Continued from page 2) Page 3

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When you first get assigned to a new area, start by letting people know who you are. Often this is best established by a staff meeting. If you have a daily roll call, consider this time to introduce yourself. Most employees will form an opinion of you in the first 2 minutes that you meet them, so this time is critical to establish yourself as a leader.

There are some basics guidelines you want to follow at this first meeting. During this first meeting you should be able to accomplish two things: allow the staff to get to know you, and get to know the staff. Almost every assignment I have ever had has come with challenges. It may be a morale problem, perhaps there is a lot of real or perceived backstabbing, or it may be safety issues. You will find this out quickly. The best way to go about this is to call everyone to the meeting, sit them down, away from distractions, and take charge of the meeting.

You will be able to identify quickly who your staff members are by watching them as you introduce yourself. Tell your staff your rank, and your first and last name. Using your first name is critical here. You will not be inviting staff members to use your first name by telling them what it is, you are simply giving them the feeling you have nothing to hide. It sounds like psychobabble, but trust me, it works. Tell the staff your experience and your specialties, your niche. For some of us this lies in tactics, for others it lies in communication. As you do this, scan the room and read the body language of your crew. If you are lucky, you will see a room of people paying attention, but chances are you will find one or two staff members who have already decided they do not care for you.

If you are able to read this on a person, go ahead and use this. When you finish your introduction, ask the staff members how the facility is running. Ask them what they feel the biggest problems are in the unit. Chances are there will be hesitation in the room. Make it a point to call on the officers you noticed that were not interested in your introduction. This often completely disarms them, and puts them in the spotlight. No matter what is said, listen carefully. Although amplified, their concerns will be the concerns of many on the facility. Make sure to thank them for their response, and elicit more responses from others by calling on them. If the officers seemingly have nothing to bring up, say something to the effect of "Wow, this will be fun, working on the perfect yard!" Listen for the response, chances are there will be some officers shaking their heads or even laughing. Restate your question one more time. "There has got to be something that we can improve on?" If there still is no response, believe me, you have a problem. Chances are though that this session will be full of commentary and suggestions.

After you have taken the concerns of the staff, make sure you tell them your door is always open. It is your job as a first line supervisor to communicate with the staff. Tell them this is not some cliché, but it is a reality, you are there for them.

This is the time to lay down a few expectations also. Make sure that this is done after you receive suggestions. Let the staff know that you will do everything you can to resolve their issues, but you need some help. Let your staff know now that you can only help them if certain basic expectations are met. Run through your expectations, but keep them basic. Address professionalism, courtesy to each other and safety as your main concerns.

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For New Supervisors—Getting to Know You, Part 1 (Continued from page 3) Page 4

Keep it short and sweet. Thank the officers for taking the time to listen and talk, and tell them you will be touring their areas in the next week.

Having established yourself as the new leader, take the time after the meeting to talk to some of the officers one on one. Do not turn anyone away from speaking to you. You should have some time set aside to have these conversations, but keep them under five minutes or so. Remind the staff member that you will be touring their area soon, and you will finish the conversation then.

Here comes the hard part: Unless there are major violations of procedure or safety guidelines, do not change anything yet. It is critical to implement the least number of changes possible during the first month of your assignment. If you come in and change everything at once, staff will resent you, even if you do it for their own good. I have seen this happen so many times. Well-meaning supervisors run in and begin changing everything in the unit. If there is one thing staff is resistant to it is change. But there is a way around this.



Repairing the Frustration that Comes with Integrity

© Joe Bouchard

One of my mentors who has since retired rendered some very wise words to me regarding integrity. I'm not sure if these words are his originally. Perhaps they are an old saying from one of his mentors. Nevertheless, they are inspiring.

***If you have integrity, nothing else matters.
If you do not have integrity, nothing else matters.***

At first, this seems like a play on words. However it makes so much sense. And it points to some very fundamental truths about human nature. There are some who will do what is expected of them—and even more—as a matter of course. On the other hand, there are some who do as little as possible, and even have no qualms about doing so. In the end, integrity (or lack thereof) is a very personal thing.

I'm certain that most of us fall somewhere in between the extremes on the integrity continuum. The bulk of us rest comfortably between absolute selflessness on the job and complete disregard for the mission statement, colleagues, and operations.

Even those of us who operate with a healthy integrity can have a string of bad days. For example, the considerate working titan can move along and perform well without interference from outside forces. If they hear of or see lazy antics of a colleague or supervisor, they merely plod ahead and continue to do the best job that they can. However, there comes a time where others seem to get away with too much while those with high personal integrity do not seem to be rewarded. This understandably brings disillusionment and frustration.

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Repairing the Frustration that Comes with Integrity (continued from page 4)

How do we pull ourselves out of a crisis in integrity? What are some of the ways that we can maintain great performance and refrain from obsessing on the poor performance of others? Here are some tips:

- Remember to focus on your work rather than the work of others. True, some inconsiderate or inept colleagues may push work your way. It is up to you to assess what parts of that you will do. In other words, that which is under your control is under your control.
- Don't borrow trouble. Obsessing about how much or how little someone else does will pull valuable time away from the job that you do. Your preoccupation with the work of others could lead to your diminished performance.
- This too shall pass. You'll find that the standard soap opera of your correctional facility will shift. There will be other stories, rumors, and foci.
- Vent in a healthy manner. Use a loved one or a friend and tell that person of your frustrations. Gauge the listener and do not unload too much. After all, there is a fine line between venting and complaining.
- Take on a new project. As you complete your assigned duties new endeavors may help ease your fretting about the work of others. These endeavors need not be large and complex in order to be vocationally satisfying. For example, you may search an additional area on each shift, as time permits.
- Don't let the monster of guilt consume you. If you find yourself preoccupied with the actions of others and then you realize that your performance has slipped, it is rather easy to overcompensate. This may mean that you overextend your energy. While meaning to do more, you may actually accomplish nothing but mediocrity. Pace yourself and do not let guilt overwhelm you.
- Stay grounded in reality. Some things you cannot change. There is nepotism, favorites, blindness, and simply too much to watch. Others may never know how hard you work or how little others work. Remind yourself of your merits, abilities and accomplishments.
- This relates to the prior point. Recognition from others is wonderful, but not necessary. True integrity involves a pride in doing a job well. Being acknowledged or rewarded is nice. However, that doesn't mean that it is expected or that it should happen all the time. In fact praise that is overdone gets diluted.
- Avoid self-righteousness. A superior attitude will awaken the monster of staff division. It is ironic that a person with high integrity can inadvertently introduce a vehicle for manipulation by offenders when their pride becomes overgrown.

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Repairing the Frustration that Comes with Integrity (continued from page 5)

Pride, comparison, accomplishments, and integrity all mix into a complex psychological concoction in our daily work lives. But, above all, integrity remains key. Without it, operations in all fields would be much less successful. Innovation would fall. Initiative would drop.

Remember:

If you have integrity, nothing else matters.

If you do not have integrity, nothing else matters.

(If you are reading this, Dave B, my mentor, I appreciate the inspiring words.)

Joe Bouchard is a Librarian at Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility, Michigan Department of Corrections.

Reader Input

A seasoned corrections employee and former cowboy told me he used a simple concept to train horses. When he was breaking a new horse to ride he had a section of field that was divided into two parts. One part was freshly plowed, the other was smooth. While riding, if the horse was doing what he wanted it to do he rode it on the smooth side of the field. If the horse began to buck or act up in some way, he would force it to the plowed field making the horse work harder until it became compliant, at which point he moved to the smooth part again. So, to summarize, the concept he came up with is this, "Make the right things easy and the wrong things hard!"

This is a great example of sound corrections, be it psychology services, education, or correctional services. We reward or honor inmates for doing the right thing and we hold them accountable when they do wrong.

Anonymous

New DWCO Trainers!

We are thrilled to announce that Greg Morton and Matthew von Hobe are now Certified Trainers to present our signature training *From Corrections Fatigue™ to Fulfillment*.

Greg retired from the Oregon DOC in 2009 after a 34-year corrections career. He served as the Staff Training Administrator until 2006. His concern for the professional and life skills of the corrections workforce has been his motivation throughout his career.

Matthew has worked for 11 years as the I.T. Systems Administrator for Federal Prison Industries at the Florence Correctional Complex. Matthew has served on DWCO's board for several years, and he is currently DWCO's Board Chair.

Welcome Greg! Welcome Matthew! Thank you for making your teaching gifts available to corrections staff across the country through Desert Waters.

ICREW 2011 Survey Upcoming Findings

By Caterina Spinaris Tudor

Corrections workers are exposed to assaults, violence, injury and death, but does this exposure increase their risk of suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, anxiety, stress, functioning impairments, and lower life satisfaction? And does it increase the incidence of sick leave and worker compensation days, chronic illnesses, doctor visits and substance use?

Our 2011 survey addressed those issues by obtaining data from 3,599 corrections workers nationwide.

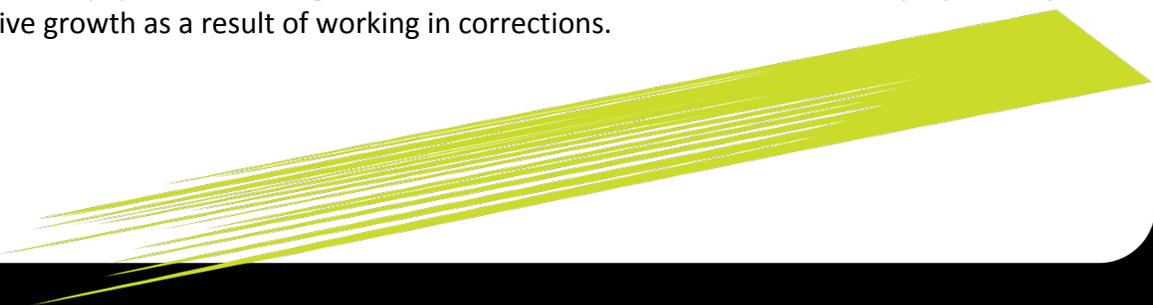
We presented the results of the study on August 5 at a session of the American Psychological Association's (APA) Division 18 (Psychologists in Public Service).

Originally we planned to submit the study for publication in an APA journal. But due to journal submission requirements (of exclusive release of material), that would have prevented us from presenting important information for several months. Given the health problems and functioning impairments identified in the survey, I and co-investigator psychologists Mike Denhof, Ph.D. and Julie Kellaway, Ph.D., opted to forego the journal publication in order to "get the word out" ASAP through various venues. As we are still conducting additional analyses of the data, we plan to provide a more detailed description of results in the October *Correctional Oasis* issue and later post an article on our website, www.desertwaters.com.

At this time I can say that our findings essentially replicated the results of the 2010 pilot (http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=666), showing high rates of PTSD symptoms that were related to amount of exposure to assaults, violence, injury and death at work. We also found that individuals who met criteria for PTSD scored significantly worse on a variety of additional measures of physical and psychological health and functioning.

This study was made possible thanks to the skill and generosity of Mike Denhof, Ph.D. and Julie Kellaway, Ph.D., who donated many, many hours to the project. The study was also assisted by monetary donations from individuals and organizations, particularly members of the American Correctional Officer Intelligence Network.

Studies conducted through ICREW, DWCO's research branch, help us continue to design trainings and other interventions to lessen and even prevent the impact of the uniquely stressful work environment corrections workers face. Tax-deductible contributions to cover the cost of our national 2011 survey and future studies can be sent to ICREW/DWCO, PO Box 355, Florence, CO, 81226, or online at http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=67. We want to equip corrections agencies and corrections staff in order that employees stay well and even enjoy positive growth as a result of working in corrections.



Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



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

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Special thanks also go to: Cathy Ber-
gquist, Joe Bouchard, Brian Dawe, Mike
Denhof, Barry Evert, Rae Forseth, An-
gela Kantola, Julie Kellaway, Greg Mor-
ton, Judy Myers, Jerry Nine, Arlene Pen-
nington, Katy Clark-Potpinko, Larry
Tucker, Mike Van Patten, Matthew von
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Quote of the Month

We ourselves feel that what
we are doing is just a drop in
the ocean. But the ocean
would be less because of
that missing drop.

~Mother Teresa

DWCO Mission

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