



For the health of correctional agencies, staff and families

From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™ Staff Stories—Administrators and Supervisors

1. When I came to work in corrections 25 years ago, I never imagined that the biggest threat to my safety in the community would be from my current or former employees. As I worked my way up the ranks to the level of manager, I have had to deal with threats from employees that were serious enough to have the sheriff contact me personally on more than one occasion. I am just trying to do the right thing and ensure that the employees conduct themselves in an ethical and legal manner and this is the thanks I get for it. When I talk to my supervisor or co-workers about it, they all understand, but there is really little they can do. The only real advice is that I should work with local law enforcement and carry a weapon everywhere I go. I find myself really questioning my career choice and actions. It would be easier to look the other way and not hold staff accountable. To make a real difference in my feeling safe, I would have to quit my job and move. I can't believe this is the job that I worked so hard to attain.
2. I always wanted to be the boss, no matter what job I was in. I looked at their jobs and thought it looked easy and it looked like a great place to be. Now, as the "boss," I just want some anonymity. I want to be able to get groceries without having to hear about work problems. By the way, no one ever stops me to discuss work successes. Very rarely do I hear about the successes or good things that happen – like a client making a huge positive change. I have actually hidden behind produce displays to avoid someone in the store. How did I get here, hiding behind the avocados? I feel like I need to live way up in the mountains so that after work I can crawl into a hole to get a moment's peace.
3. Being the Director, I feel, causes staff to mistrust me more than middle management. As middle management you are still viewed as an ally to some degree. Someone who understands the trenches, but is forced by upper management to do things. As the Director, you are the bad guy to line staff by the sheer definition of your title. They don't take time to learn who I am or what I am about—they see or hear the title and avoid me like the plague. New staff listen to the complaints of disgruntled staff rather than taking time to form their own opinions. I am an island. That is how I feel.
4. We went through layoffs in our department and I was the bearer of the news. It was awful. I had to sit with individual employees to tell them they no longer had a job, and it tore a piece of my soul out. I cried all night for several nights, because of course I couldn't show any emotion during the process. I know I have value, but I don't know what that value is anymore. I just want to retire and disappear.
5. Balance, hah! That is the new catch phrase in our department. They want our employees to disconnect and take care of themselves. But, they also want me to answer every stupid email at all hours of the day and night. I can't remember the last time I exercised or had a moment to myself. My body is revolting and I know one day I will be rolled out on a stretcher, not from an attack from without, but from within. I feel like I am a ticking time-bomb. The only question is will it be a stroke or a heart attack.



6. Though I don't have an "official boss," I am the one who answers to everyone—the public, the State, the Court, the County Commission, Legislatures, accountants, etc. I shield my staff from so much of the politics involved so as to not increase their stress. What I struggle with the most is their lack of reciprocated compassion, understanding and appreciation. I am always looking out for the best interest of the staff. I go to the ends of the earth to be understanding of their personal and professional life challenges, and to do whatever I can within my given boundaries to make them happy. It's never enough. There are no "thank you's" for the times I have gone out on a limb for them. Instead I am showered with constant complaints. They forget I too haven't had a raise, I fight every day for their best interest in caseload size, and I am forced to develop plans for the required changes issued by the State.
7. As a supervisor, I am lonely. I don't have any friends, because everyone I know works for the agency and I have to distance myself from them. This was a problem that I noticed after my first promotion, but since I promoted to captain, it has gotten worse. I can't be friends with people I have the most in common with—corrections staff—because of my position. I have to be careful with what I share on social media and who I can be "friends" with on Facebook because of the job.
8. Before my promotions, no one really cared about my perspective or tried to get the "inside" scope. Now I see every interaction as them trying to find out some secret that I have about the plans of the agency. The fact is, I don't have any secrets, not really. I feel "used" for information. I just want to be able to have a real conversation with someone without doubting their intent. I don't even try anymore. Family and friends also contact me to find out the latest gossip of an event just because they know where I work.
9. I am constantly bombarded with problems that need to be solved. My staff don't understand how draining it is to deal with nothing but problems from the second I walk through the door until well after they have left for the day (though I have a family too). Those "big bucks" don't equate to much when you look at the number of hours I put in. Not many people are there for me to bounce ideas off of, vent my frustrations to, or who understand the stresses that come with my position. Instead, it is expected I will just handle them because as the Director I have the answers to all life's problems. Friends and family also contact me for advice on how to handle problem situations. I never unplug. I can't disconnect, even when I try. During my son's wedding, they actually sent a staff member to the reception to ask me to call the facility, because I wasn't carrying my cellphone. I miss the old days, without electronics.

Content contributed by Susan Jones and Meredith Butler. Used with permission.

DWCO Mission

Advancing the well-being of correctional staff and their families,
and the health of correctional agencies, through data-driven, skill-based training