

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

BECAUSE ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS

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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Greetings,

After more than 23 years of serving as the founding Executive Director of Desert Waters Correctional Outreach (DWCO), I am deeply grateful to share that our Executive Board has identified the person who is exceptionally well prepared and qualified to lead the organization into its next chapter.

That person is Stephanie Rawlings, MSc, who currently serves as our Deputy Director and will assume the role of Executive Director on October 1, 2026.

Stephanie brings 12 years of experience working in corrections, along with extensive expertise in correctional staff wellness. She has successfully developed and implemented staff wellness programs for two state agencies in two different states, giving her both the practical experience and strategic perspective needed to lead DWCO into the future.

Even more important than her credentials is her heart. Stephanie genuinely cares about correctional professionals and other public safety workers and their families. She understands the extraordinary demands, sacrifices, and challenges of public safety work, and is deeply committed to improving the health, wellbeing, and quality of life of those who serve. She also recognizes the responsibility that comes with leading an organization dedicated to this mission and embraces that responsibility with humility, passion, and purpose.

*We're excited to announce
our new Executive Director,
Stephanie Rawlings, MSc!*



**Read About
Stephanie**

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

This leadership transition represents continuity rather than change. DWCO's mission and commitment to serving correctional and other public safety professionals, their families, and the agencies that employ them remain as strong as ever.

As for me, I will continue serving on the DWCO team as Founding Director. I am grateful that this transition will allow me to devote more time to research and the development of new materials. My primary focus will shift to program development, research, writing, and providing mentorship and consultation as DWCO continues to grow and expand its impact.

Meanwhile, Stephanie, together with our Chief Operating Officer, Justin Stevens, will continue leading DWCO on the front lines, partnering directly with correctional and other public safety agencies, and advancing our mission of promoting the wellness of correctional and other public safety professionals across the country and beyond.

I have every confidence that DWCO's future is in capable hands. It has been the privilege and the unexpected blessing of a lifetime to answer the calling to build this organization, and I look forward with great optimism to all that lies ahead for DWCO and the people we are honored to serve.

Caterina Spinaris

The Overlooked Contributor to Staff Wellness: The Quality of Staff-Incarcerated Individual Interactions

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At Desert Waters, we are laser-focused on improving staff wellness. Over the years, we have emphasized strengthening staff's social health—the quality of their interactions with coworkers and supervisors—as a key pathway to well-being.

However, another important contributor is often overlooked in U.S. corrections: the quality of staff's interactions with incarcerated individuals. This is a controversial topic. Concerns about fraternization and manipulation, along with entrenched “us versus them” cultures, often shut down discussion. Yet the quality of these interactions has a direct impact on staff wellness.

Poor-quality interactions create potentially preventable experiences that over time can damage staff's wellbeing in at least three ways—through:

1. *Conflict and the accompanying stress response, which increase physical and psychological strain and the risk of assault*
2. *Moral injury, due to witnessing or committing acts that violate deeply held values, leading to emotional distress, guilt, and shame, and additional stress responses*
3. *Loss of meaning and purpose, which erodes job satisfaction and ultimately wounds a person's spirituality*

All three contribute to Corrections Fatigue. This damage rarely stays contained. Like a contagion, negativity spreads among staff and incarcerated individuals, fueling more conflict, moral injury, and loss of meaning.

Correctional environments function as ecosystems—everything affects everyone.

What is an Ecosystem?

An ecosystem is a community of living and non-living elements interacting in ways that either sustain or disrupt balance.

A pond is a simple example. Fish, plants, and microorganisms depend on each other and on stable conditions. When harmful substances enter the water, the entire system is disrupted—triggering algae overgrowth, oxygen loss, and other changes that threaten all life within it.

Prisons and jails function in a similar way. Staff and incarcerated individuals share the same environment and are affected by the same conditions.

When abuse—such as humiliation, intimidation, threats, or retaliation—is introduced into this environment by either group, it poisons the climate and spreads. Those who are mistreated may overreact or displace their distress onto others. Without intervention, a domino effect follows. Staff may eventually carry this negativity home, affecting their families and communities.



Poor-Quality Interactions Defined

Poor-quality interactions include treating incarcerated individuals as “lowlives,” “trash,” or using other dehumanizing labels. These attitudes may show up as disrespect, demeaning comments, or even cruel and inhumane behavior.

Causing Avoidable Conflict

No one responds well to disrespect. Public humiliation, especially, leaves a lasting impact. When the opportunity arises, retaliation may follow—sometimes in the form of assault.

Respect can be difficult when safety feels threatened, particularly for staff who have experienced assault or abuse. Maslow’s hierarchy reminds us that safety comes first. Yet there is a paradox: respectful interactions can also increase safety.

We have heard many accounts of staff who avoided harm because they consistently treated incarcerated individuals with fairness and dignity. Professional, respectful interactions support safety, mental health, and moral well-being—and require emotional regulation and self-control. (See the September 2025 Correctional Oasis article, [“Do You Qualify with Your Emotions ?”](#))

Experiencing or Causing Moral Injury

Violations of humane treatment—toward incarcerated individuals or staff—can create deep internal conflict and moral injury. Staff may struggle with guilt, shame, or even suicidal thoughts after witnessing or participating in actions that violate their values. Moral injury often coexists with PTSD, anxiety, and depression.

As one retired Correctional Officer put it: “Every time I treated inmates in ways that robbed them of their dignity, something in me died.”

Loss of Meaning and Purpose

Most people want their work to matter. Pay alone is not enough. Without meaning, work feels empty.

Meaning comes from protecting others, encouraging them, and helping them improve—including incarcerated individuals. This requires recognizing their humanity and limitations, and remembering that we are not their judges. Treating others with contempt ultimately backfires.

Personally, it activates the body's stress response, affecting health, mood, and relationships. Professionally, it makes the work more difficult and increases the likelihood of conflict—including assault.

We reap what we sow.

Moving Forward

Professionalism, fairness, and respect are not signs of weakness—they are practical tools that support safety and wellness.

To support this approach, corrections systems need:

1. Working conditions that support emotional regulation
2. Training on professional, respectful interactions
3. Role modeling by experienced staff

This, in turn, requires strong leadership:

1. Policies that support staff wellness and adequate rest
2. Training in emotional intelligence
3. Opportunities for staff to decompress and recover

When staff wellness is a true organizational priority, it creates the foundation for safety, professionalism, and a healthier correctional environment. All stakeholders in corrections affect one another. No one is isolated from—or immune to—what happens within the system.

A Warden's Experiences with CF2F

By an Anonymous Warden (Retired)

The process of bringing the **From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment (CF2F)** class to our Department of Corrections actually developed over a period of almost two years. I will try to provide you with relevant information as I describe the process from my point of view.

I was the warden for [name removed] for 4 and-one-half years. During my time in the position, I realized that I had great staff, but I also realized that my employees were under a tremendous strain from the work in an administrative segregation environment. My conversations with other wardens led me to conclude that my employees were experiencing negative life events at a rate that surpassed the employees of other facilities. I had more employees that were involved in worker compensation incidents, more instances of staff needing to use FMLA, and more staff that reported criminal charges from their actions in the community (i.e., DUI, domestic violence, menacing, theft, etc.).

By the time I was appointed the warden there, I had worked for the Department of Corrections for over 20 years. That background also led me to believe that the staff at that facility were dealing with more issues of depression, anger, drug and alcohol struggles, stress issues, and were less satisfied with their work.

Due to the structure of the facility, most of the posts that had inmate contact were with high security inmates, so I couldn't "give them a break" with lower-custody inmates. Additionally, most employees did not want to transfer out of the facility for a variety of reasons, many times due to a change in shift and days off. An additional burden was put on our facilities when the facility's expansion was opened under a very tight timeline, and then major changes were being made in the Ad Seg environments.

I grew increasingly concerned about the welfare of my employees and began to look around for help. I found that Dr. Kevin Gilmartin and Dr. Caterina Spinaris Tudor were about the only people that were publishing any type of resources for law enforcement.

Gilmartin's work (2002) was aimed primarily at the street cop, but it did offer some good advice. The work of Caterina and the Desert Waters Correctional Outreach (DWCO) organization was developed specifically for corrections environments.

I had heard good things about the way corrections people were treated by DWCO, and I knew many people that believed that the resources that were being developed at Desert Waters were right on target. At about that same time, a "training for trainer's" course was being advertised in Florence for the "From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment" course. I was very involved in training in the DOC for the majority of my career, and I also knew that if such a class would help my employees, it had to be communicated that the management of the facilities totally supported it. As a result, I signed up one of my training staff and myself to take the class.

When I completed the training, I felt like I had discovered a tool to actually bring some type of relief to my employees, as well as the other employees in the DOC.

The next step I took was to present a mini-version of the class to the wardens and executive staff. After only a one-hour presentation, the decision was made to ask Caterina to present a four-hour class to all the managers and above. This presentation was set up and Caterina was able to present to a room of almost 100 DOC management employees. I was unsure what type of reaction she might get from this particular group, because I was worried that members of this group might not see the value or need for this type of training, but I was wrong.

The people in attendance seemed to take the information very seriously and to fully engage in the seriousness of the situation. As a result, a commitment was made to send additional trainers from each facility to the next several T for T classes.

After that “kick off” session, I began to present this class to employees. While the class was heavily attended by my employees, employees from other DOC facilities also attended. The reactions that I saw from employees attending the training ranged from relief to tears. I saw employees reach out to coworkers and supervisors to talk about what they were experiencing. I also saw employees reach out to medical/mental health providers for assistance. The number of employees that asked for contact information for the employee assistance program also increased. The most important result was that I saw employees sharing their stories. It was as if this training opportunity opened the dialogue and gave my employees permission to talk about “it.”

The most important result was that I saw employees sharing their stories. It was as if this training opportunity opened the dialogue and gave my employees permission to talk about “it.”

I retired from the Department of Corrections a few years later, so that I could concentrate upon finishing the requirements for my PhD. The research that I completed in that program was influenced by the CF2F course. I have conducted, and continue to conduct, research that looks at the correctional environment and the effect that it has upon a variety of circumstances and employees. I look back upon the 31 years that I worked in corrections and I am proud of many things, including helping to implement the CF2F program in DOC. My only regret is that it took me so long to realize the need for it.

CF2F is not a cure-all. I had employees for which it did not seem to offer any relief, but I credit it for giving “permission,” for employees from entry level to executive staff, to admit that the environment changed them and some of those changes were negative. Prior to this program, such a discussion seemed disloyal somehow.

I know that the program continues to flourish in my absence, and I still get feedback from employees that stop me at Walmart to thank me for helping them with CF2F. I don't know the impact it would have on your facilities, but I do know the impact it had on mine.



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After the CF2F T4T

By an Anonymous Corrections Employee

I just wanted to take a moment to genuinely thank you for what you do. This may sound corny, but you have given me back my life. I know it's not like flipping a switch. I didn't get this way overnight and I'm not going to be restored overnight either. I see now where the problems are and where I need to make changes. I am on my third marriage and over my nearly two-decades long career I have seen changes in myself. No wonder I have two previous divorces!! My doctor has asked me a few times if I'm depressed, but I'm not depressed or sad. When I get off work, I am just done. I'm exhausted and I'm tired. I want to go do things, but I just don't have the energy.

During the class I realized just how disengaged I have become from my family. At work, I am hard charging. If you want something done, I am your gal. I am overinvested and knees deep in work immersion. Now that my children are older, at home I am apathetic and uninterested. There is no more volleyball practice, football games, or track meets to rush off to.

I was thinking about my afternoon last Monday....I woke up around 1pm, and I am sitting on the couch listening (not listening really) to my husband talk about his day. At least that's what I think he's talking about. Honestly, I have no idea what he was saying. In my mind, I can actually remember thinking, "Please just stop talking."

He starts the BBQ and says, "Come outside and visit with me while I make dinner." Again, in my mind I am thinking, "PLEASE JUST STOP TALKING!" He has to darn near beg me to go outside. Begrudgingly, I go outside and listen while he talks. How fair is that for my family? Why should my job get the best parts of who I am?



I resolve to make changes! At the completion of the class, I picked up my husband and we went shopping and out to dinner. I even picked the restaurant without saying, "I don't know. Where do YOU want to go?" twenty times!! When I got off work on Sunday, I didn't touch the remote. My husband and I sat at the kitchen table and had a great conversation. (Notice I said "conversation.")

I'm not going to lie. It is tough. I haven't had a day off in almost six weeks, and last week I worked 75 hours. Shoot, it's only Tuesday and I have worked 24 of the past 48 hours. It never even occurred to me how much I work. It is just my norm, so when we discussed this in class I didn't think anything of it. To counter this, I am taking my son to breakfast this morning before school. Then I am going to get some much-needed rest for my own sanity, and when my husband gets home we are going to get pedicures together. (Ssshhh.... I'm not supposed to tell anyone that part!)

I am off to a good start making positive changes. I am grateful to be teaching this course to my partners. Definitely for them, but selfishly more for myself. It will be a constant reminder to help keep me on the right track. I figure after teaching this over and over, it will become second nature!! :)

The Invisible Crisis: 7 Action Items Every Corrections Leader Must Implement

By Lt. Robert Bramblet

Though focused on Florida's jails, this article addresses challenges that are universal—making the solutions applicable to correctional facilities nationwide.

Imagine working 12-hour shifts, four to five days in a row, often without a meal break, your only relief the brief, high-stress interaction of a shift change. Now imagine doing this while being outnumbered by the facility's population by a ratio of 50 to 1, with the constant, low-level hum of tension threatening to erupt into violence at any moment. This isn't an occasional bad week; for many detention deputies in Florida's county jails, this grueling reality is the daily norm, driving many to quit after just a year, leaving their badges behind for any job that offers better pay, fewer hours, and safer working conditions.

Across the state, the men and women tasked with managing the safety and security of local detention facilities—the county jails and short-term holding centers—are facing a critical, yet largely invisible, crisis of morale. While attention often focuses on state and federal prisons, local corrections agencies are struggling with pervasive staff burnout and a debilitating lack of retention. This problem transcends typical workplace stress; it's a systemic failure to adequately support the officers who represent the backbone of the criminal justice system, managing volatile populations in often overcrowded and under-resourced environments.

The issues are complex, intertwined and long-standing, but corrections leaders begin responding with decisive, structural action. Below are seven major action items leaders can begin implementing now to stabilize morale, rebuild trust and strengthen agency operations.

Action Item 1

Develop A Comprehensive Plan to Overcome Severe Understaffing.

The single most destructive factor eroding morale is the chronic and worsening understaffing epidemic. When a detention center operates at 70 percent capacity or less, the burden of maintaining security falls onto fewer shoulders. High turnover means that existing staff, often the most dedicated and experienced, must cover the void. This constant state of exhaustion, or burnout, prevents officers from maintaining a healthy work-life balance, turning their lives into an endless cycle of work and recovery. Furthermore, the relentless pace minimizes time for essential training and de-escalation practices, increasing the risk of accidents and confrontations.

Leaders must treat staffing stabilization as a central strategic priority, addressing recruitment, retention and scheduling alongside compensation. Without enough personnel, every other challenge in this article worsens.

Action Item 2

Implement Robust Mental Health Support and Trauma-Response Systems.

Working in a correctional facility requires a constant state of hypervigilance, a psychological posture necessary to manage inherent security risks. Officers face daily exposure to potentially traumatic events: inmate fights, suicide attempts, medical emergencies, and exposure to blood and human waste. This chronic exposure exacts a severe psychological toll. Studies comparing the mental health of corrections officers to other high-risk professions have found alarmingly high rates of PTSD, anxiety and depression — levels often likened to those experienced by combat veterans. Correctional officers also report higher rates of other mental health conditions, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder and substance use disorders.

The lack of robust, easily accessible mental health resources compounds this issue, forcing officers to endure their suffering in silence. Leaders must prioritize confidential mental health services, peer support teams, crisis debriefing processes and a culture that removes stigma around seeking help.

Action Item 3**Address Deteriorating Facility Conditions That Undermine Safety and Morale.**

Beyond the human element, the physical environment of many detention facilities contributes directly to the crisis. Many local jails across Florida rely on aging infrastructure, often lacking the modern maintenance and climate control systems necessary for humane operations. Leaky ceilings, non-functioning locks and inadequate ventilation create a difficult and depressing workspace. The psychological impact of working for prolonged periods in a harsh, windowless environment—a space designed solely for security and durability, not human wellness—cannot be overstated.

Leaders must advocate aggressively for capital investment, facility upgrades and repairs. Even incremental improvements can meaningfully improve daily working conditions and show officers that their environment—and by extension, they themselves—matter.

Action Item 4**Advocate for Compensation That Aligns With Risk and Responsibility.**

While recent efforts have been made to increase pay, the baseline remains too low to compete with private-sector jobs that offer comparable wages with far less physical and emotional danger. This compensation gap feeds a deep-seated perception of being undervalued. Officers frequently feel like second-class members of the public safety community, often receiving less respect and institutional support compared to sworn officers who work outside the facility walls.

Leaders must treat pay equity as a public safety necessity. Without competitive salaries, Florida's jails will continue losing experienced officers at unsustainable rates, deepening understaffing and compounding burnout.

Action Item 5**Rebuild Trust by Eliminating Toxic Leadership Practices and Increasing Transparency.**

A critical driver of organizational demoralization is the perceived lack of effective, trustworthy leadership. Many officers report experiencing “toxic leadership,” characterized by micromanagement, inconsistent enforcement of rules and a failure to advocate for frontline staff. This lack of faith is often reinforced by the perception of an unfair promotional system, colloquially known as the “Good Ol’ Boy network,” where advancement appears based on personal relationships rather than merit.

When personnel decisions—promotions, specialized assignments, discipline—seem arbitrary or political, the incentive for high-quality work evaporates. Leaders must implement transparent promotion processes, consistent policy enforcement and real supervisor accountability. Middle management training should be mandatory, not optional.

Action Item 6**Strengthen Training and Prepare Staff for Modern Correctional Realities.**

While initial training covers essential security protocols, many agencies fail to provide sufficient ongoing education, particularly for managing increasingly prevalent special populations. Detention centers have become the de facto largest psychiatric facilities in many counties, yet officers often lack specialized training for managing inmates with severe mental illness or complex substance abuse disorders. This deficit not only increases the risk of confrontation but also leaves officers feeling unprepared and frustrated.

High turnover brings a constant stream of new, inexperienced officers who are often integrated too quickly into demanding roles. The resulting burden on veteran staff is dangerous and unsustainable. Leaders must redesign training calendars to include mental health, crisis response, de-escalation, communication and supervision of high-needs populations.

Action Item 7**Actively Counter the Stigma and Isolation That Damage Officers' Professional Identity.**

The professional identity of a corrections officer is profoundly affected by external stigma and overwhelmingly negative public perception. When the media covers corrections, it is usually in the context of inmate grievances, excessive force incidents or facility failures. Rarely does the public see the daily challenges, the constant vigilance and the public service inherent in the work.

This negative portrayal chips away at officers' sense of pride and self-worth, making it difficult for them to articulate the value of their work to family and friends. When society fails to acknowledge their role, officers retreat into isolation—a pattern that worsens burnout and accelerates departures from the profession. Leaders must create communication strategies that educate the public, highlight success stories and honor the profession.

The True Cost of Inaction

The devastating effects of the morale crisis extend far beyond the job, penetrating the personal lives and long-term health of officers. Chronic stress, hypervigilance and shift work contribute to increased rates of heart disease, diabetes and gastrointestinal problems. Corrections is a profession with dramatically higher prevalence of substance abuse, divorce and suicide compared to the general population.

Operationally, low morale translates directly into facility instability. Exhausted, demoralized officers make more mistakes. Security checks get missed. Reactions slow. Assaults, disturbances and riots become more likely. Turnover rises. Litigation increases. Recruitment costs skyrocket.

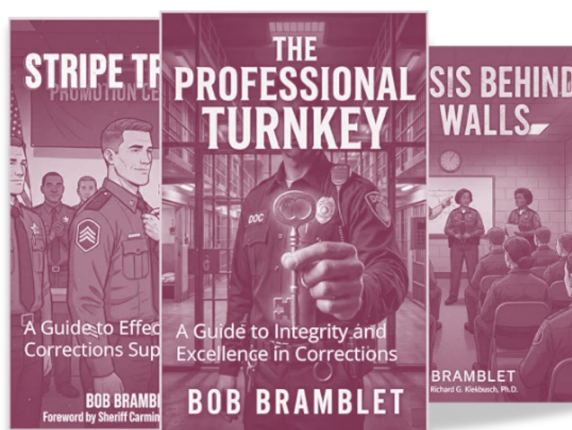
The Path Forward

Florida's local corrections agencies must prioritize aggressive and innovative strategies—not as a human resources initiative, but as a matter of public safety and organizational survival. Compensation, wellness, training, leadership reform and facility investment must move from “aspirations” to “requirements.”

The morale crisis is undeniably complex, rooted in operational, psychological and organizational failures. But leaders are not powerless. By addressing these seven action items with urgency and commitment, agencies can begin stabilizing their workforce, protecting their officers and ensuring the safety of the communities they serve.

About the Author

[Robert Bramblet](#) is a Lieutenant with the Lee County Sheriff's Office in Florida with over 25 years of experience in law enforcement and corrections. Lt. Bramblet is the author of the three-book series, **“Corrections Leadership,”** which includes *The Professional Turnkey*, *Stripe Trauma*, and *The Crisis Behind the Walls*.





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When Looking Up Means Looking Away: Leadership Starts with the Person in Front of You

By Stephanie Rawlings, MSc

A corrections colleague and I were recently discussing a normal workplace behavior that we both find annoying—and if we are honest, one we have probably both been conditioned to do ourselves at times. It is especially prevalent in military-style hierarchical structures and in politically influenced agencies like government.

I know I've kept you in suspense long enough.

What is it?

At its core, it's **disrespect**.

The specific behavior we were talking about is this: a higher-ranking employee is engaged in conversation with a subordinate, and the moment someone above them texts, emails, calls, or walks into the room, they abruptly interrupt. They turn away, answer, or leave. They mentally check out.

The conversation that was happening right in front of them instantly loses priority. And often, they may not recall much of what was being discussed. At its heart, this behavior devalues the person standing there.

When Distraction Becomes Toxic

Here's where this pattern can become especially damaging. I once worked with a very high-ranking executive administrator who would stop by my office (I happened to be on her regular "flight path") and give directives while distracted, phone in hand, mind on the meeting she was heading to, already half-engaged in her next conversation.

Days later, she would return frustrated that I had followed through on what she had explicitly and orally directed. She didn't remember giving the directive.

I let it happen twice. After that, everything went in writing. That is when she became even more upset — because now accountability existed. Now the direction had a record, and the responsibility couldn't be walked back.

The situation spiraled, but the lesson was clear: this supervisor did not know how to be present with the people in front of her. Her mind was always on what was happening above her. She was constantly looking up.

“What’s the Point?”

That same day, my colleague shared a similar experience. He was in the middle of a decision-point discussion with his supervisor when the supervisor’s phone rang. It was someone higher up. He answered and walked away.

He never came back. This wasn’t the first time it had happened. My colleague admitted that he found himself thinking, “What’s the point?” Clearly, the issue wasn’t a priority.

But here’s the truth: if that supervisor had stayed for just a few minutes and listened, I believe it would have become a priority. Instead, there is now a serious issue festering within his ranks and a middle manager who feels checked out and incredibly devalued. As a leader, that is not the tone you want in corrections.

So How Does This Happen?

I have asked myself this question often over the years. I learned the answer quickly when I became that middle manager—and later, an executive-level director.

Behaviors come from somewhere. They are manifestations of culture, emotion, experiences, and most often—fear.

The leadership behavior I am describing here is driven almost exclusively from the top down. A culture of constant demand for immediate attention can create a “kings and peasants” environment in a workforce because it silently communicates to lower-ranking staff that whatever they are saying is always less important than what the “higher ups” might need—even if the call interrupting them is social, routine, or something that could absolutely wait.

I want to pause and exempt true emergencies from this discussion. That is not what we are talking about. What I am referring to is the repeated, muscle-memory reaction to cut people off because a higher title has appeared on a screen, walked into a room, or inserted themselves—not into the situation—but into the mind of the person they outrank.

Over time, a conditioned agency-wide response develops: when that name appears, you drop everything. You give full attention upward. To prioritize the person in front of you becomes almost unthinkable.

The Message It Sends

One of the biggest issues we hear at DWCO surrounding morale and turnover can be summed up under a few common statements:

- “I don’t feel heard.”
- “I’m just a number.”
- “They wouldn’t notice if I didn’t show up anymore.”
- “I’m just a week in the PTO log.”

As leaders, we have to stop acting confused when this is the feedback. When people are repeatedly cut off, talked over, or treated as secondary to whatever might be happening above, they internalize a message: I don’t matter here. And in corrections, when people stop feeling like they matter, they stop engaging.

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“If you build it, more will stay.”

Remaining Present: Five Things Supervisors Can Do

Breaking this pattern does not require a major overhaul. It requires awareness, intention, and small, consistent shifts in behavior.

Here are five ways supervisors can begin staying present and avoid the habit of always looking up:

- 1. Finish the conversation you started.**

Unless there is a true emergency, let calls go to voicemail. Finish the thought. Close the discussion. Even a minute or two of focused attention signals respect.

- 2. Communicate boundaries upward.**

It is okay to return a call with, "I was with one of my staff—I'll follow up now." This models professionalism and reinforces that your team matters.

- 3. Be mindful of nonverbal dismissal.**

Glancing at your phone, turning your body, or half-listening sends a message. Presence means eye contact, stillness, and focus.

- 4. Capture directives in real time.**

If you are giving direction on the move, slow down long enough to ensure clarity. If needed, follow up in writing. Accountability protects everyone.

- 5. Ask yourself a simple question...**

"If I were in their position, how would this feel?"

That moment of reflection can interrupt the automatic reaction to prioritize rank over relationship.

A Note for Those at the Top

For those reading this who sit at the top of the chain of command, your influence on this pattern cannot be overstated. If we truly believe—and say—that our staff are our most valuable resource, then our daily behaviors have to reflect that value.

Communicate to your middle managers that alignment looks like giving people permission to finish what they are doing before shifting attention upward. Model it for them.

Small changes in how you reach out can make a big difference. A text that says, “When you finish what you’re in the middle of, can you email me the details of X?” reinforces respect and trust. Compare that to “Call me,” which may be faster to type but creates an immediate sense of urgency, interruption, and sometimes anxiety or fear.

This is a top-down issue, and it has to be fixed from the top down. When executives demonstrate patience, presence, and intentional communication, middle managers begin to mirror those behaviors. Over time, the culture shifts from one that reflexively drops everything for rank to one that balances responsiveness with respect for the person right in front of them.

Leadership Is Where Your Attention Lives

In corrections, hierarchy will always exist. It serves a purpose. But respect must exist alongside it.

Where your attention goes communicates what—and who—matters. When leaders consistently look up, the people below feel unseen. When leaders stay present, even briefly, people feel valued. And feeling valued is one of the most powerful retention tools we have.

Quote

OF THE MONTH

“We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know.”

Carl Rogers



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Mission

Improving the wellbeing of corrections and other public safety professionals through training, consulting, and other essential resources to foster resilience, mental health, and overall wellness in these challenging professions.

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