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Corrections Today

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THE 27TH ANNUAL WREATH LAYING CEREMONY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN

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Beyond Security; Creating Safer Prisons

Security is a means and not the end

BY JOHN A. SHUFORD

Today's prison culture is focused on custody, control and care of inmates, and thus, the focus is often put on security and the inmates. This singular focus has created some serious problems for prison staff, resulting in high employee turnover, physical and psychological problems. What is the solution to this problem we have created? Security is an important part of the answer, but there is much more to the answer than just security.

Security is a necessary condition, but it does not guarantee the safety of staff, and that should be our primary focus. During my 24 years of providing Team-building Attitude Conflict Transformation (TACT)[1] trainings, staff members frequently comment about not feeling physically or psychologically safe. This is evident when prison staff members talk about coming to work and feeling their stress level dramatically increase. Security alone does not ensure either physical or psychological safety; it is a means to an end, not the end itself.

Security is like money. People often say if they had more money they would be happy. Yet, when asked if money guarantees happiness, they say it does not. If it did, then everyone with enough money to pay their bills and save for the future would be happy, and that is simply not the case. However, happiness primarily comes from connection with others and engaging in meaningful and rewarding activities. When people become obsessed with making money, they often sacrifice friends, family and their own happiness in the process. It is the same with security. If we become obsessed with it, we sacrifice psychological safety and also, to some extent, physical safety. A lack of psychological safety leads to system breakdown, procedures not being followed and high turnover resulting in working short staffed, which adds to the already high level of stress.

Security is necessary, but if it is our only focus, it creates the "us vs. them" environment we are currently experiencing. This "us vs. them" condition certainly exists between staff and inmates, but more significantly, it exists among staff, between staff and supervisors, and between staff and administration. This results in low morale, high turnover, short staffed, shortened life expectancy [20 years][2] and high rates of depression, PTSD, divorce, substance abuse and suicide.[3] All of these are an indication of a lack of psychological safety. This produces an "us vs. them" environment, which will never ensure safety and negatively impacts empathy, a necessary skill for effective teamwork, healthy relationships and effective supervision.[4] Staff members have consistently reported to me that they leave correctional services because of negative relationships with other staff, poor supervision and not feeling supported by administration. Herein lies the key to transforming the culture in our prisons and reversing this negative impact on staff. In order for there to be safety in prisons, there must be a combination of security, staff empowerment and inmates engaged cooperatively. →

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Empowering staff

Staff members may feel disempowered because of a lack of support/cooperation from other staff (making them feel vulnerable to inmates), poor supervision that demeans or belittles them and the feeling that administration fears inmates more than it cares about staff. Empowering staff can be accomplished by developing connections among staff and between departments, teaching staff effective interpersonal skills and attitude skills and developing policies that validate the input of all staff in decision-making.[5] In addition, teaching supervisors effective leadership skills will have a direct and positive impact on staff. For example, teaching supervisors that their job is not so much to be in charge as it is to support and motivate those staff members that are in their charge.[6] An example of this is a comment by a CO from the Philadelphia Prison System:

> *"I came to work here three or four years ago. My supervisor came up through the ranks. He acted like he was above his subordinates, always pushing us down, that we had nothing to say to him. It was his way or the highway. At meetings we couldn't get a word in edgewise and when we did, he didn't listen. Something happened, though, and he changed. He mellowed out, listened more, and became a better supervisor. He didn't seem to be power tripping any more. Things were working much better in our unit. He stopped micro-managing. We are all doing better work now since his change. And he seems to be much happier himself. I can go to him and speak to him more easily. He has a more open door policy. I didn't know what had happened, what had made the change. I knew he had taken TACT training, but now that I've taken it myself, I see why he has changed. Thanks to this course, we are all doing much better."*[7]

TACT Training for Staff

An example of empowered staff is the intake unit of the Philadelphia Prison System that received TACT training. The staff reduced documented use of force by 94 percent, from five or six incidents per month to four or five incidents in two years. During the same two years, documented use of force decreased in the system as a whole and inter-departmental cooperation improved.[8] The New Jersey Training Academy was so dysfunctional that there was a plan to transfer all but the director and deputy director and bring in all new staff, but the TACT training resolved their differences and improved cooperation. This resulted in no one being transferred and an improvement to their instruction techniques.[9]

The Alternatives to Violence project

Inmate cooperation and engagement can be achieved by improving staff interpersonal skills and offering programming that inmates feel will prepare them for re-entry. Education and vocational skills training have proven to be valuable. Another valuable resource is the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP),[10] which has shown to be very effective at transforming attitudes, reducing anger and greatly improving behavior.[11] There are 1000 volunteer AVP workshops done annually in 33 states and an equal amount in 50 countries. There have been over 20,000 AVP workshops done in the US in the past 43 years. Stan Taylor, the former Commissioner of the Delaware Department of Correction, gave the following example of the impact of AVP:

AVP Workshops for Inmates

> *"I'd like to take this opportunity to express my support for and admiration of the Alternatives to Violence Program. As a Warden of a State Prison in Delaware, I saw the AVP facilitate a dramatic reduction in the number of assaults between inmates in what had been a difficult maximum security unit.*

As the program continued to run and 'graduate' more and more inmates, the overall climate improved to a point where the inmates were actually seeking out ways to positively affect their living environment. As the Chief of Prisons for Delaware, I've seen similar results in each of the prisons that have implemented Alternatives to Violence Programs. There have never been any security breaches and the staff and inmate population alike respect the AVP volunteers. I'd highly recommend the Alternatives to Violence Program to any correctional manager and especially to those experiencing a high level of inmate on inmate conflict."[12]

Inmate cooperation and engagement can be achieved by improving staff interpersonal skills and offering programming that inmates feel will prepare them for re-entry

At Everglades Correctional Institution in Florida, where about half of the inmates have gone through the AVP program, the level of violence and stress is significantly less than at other similar facilities.

A Captain and Warden were talking about the recent 'Use of Force' report and noted that ECI had 1-3 use of force incidents per month and other level 6 facilities had 3 or more incidents PER DAY. The Captain said he loves working at ECI. 'You can walk out onto the compound and an inmate may approach you to discuss an issue he is having, but that is all. At other level 6 facilities you enter the compound and must continuously be watching your back and in all directions in case of sudden attack, which is much more stressful. Officers at ECI talk to the inmates, more instead of getting up in their face."[13]

In "Preventing Violence," Dr. James Gilligan, former Chief Psychiatrist for the Massachusetts Department of Correction, wrote that there were three conditions for violent behavior: shame, which is a necessary, but insufficient condition; lack of empathy; and lack of knowledge of alternative behaviors. AVP reduces shame, builds empathy and teaches positive pro-social behaviors.[14]

"It made me take a look at how I relate to other people, that I was doing it on a threat to threat basis, and the fact that that is not necessary. We can stand with each other and experience each other without wondering what the other is going to do, what the threat is, being on the defensive. What I like about AVP is that I look at others differently and I look at myself differently. I look in the mirror and I actually like what I see. I like what I've become and what I've become inside."
AVP Delaware Inmate Facilitator

"What these men did was to respond to an invitation to be authentic, to be vulnerable and to be trusting. Who they discovered themselves becoming as they took on these risks blew them away. What I actually was seeing was that the people these men experienced themselves becoming was really there all along ... just hidden. There was no becoming a better person ... there was discovering the person one really is when one sets the intention to let go of whatever interferes with becoming that person ... that which holds us back. ..."
Excellent Eric, AVP/Colorado Facilitator.[15]

There are many examples of how AVP has been very effective in prisons with serious gang problems. One example is Jason Guinn, who was released

in 2017 after 27 years and 27 days in California prisons, where he spent his first 17 years as an active gang member and "Shotcaller." He reluctantly took an AVP workshop in 2008 and says that:

> *"AVP saved my life. I can honestly say that there have been so many guys (gang members or not) embracing positive change as a result of AVP being made available in the California prison system that the pebble-in-the-pond ripple effect has become a tidal wave. Once the tools and skills learned in AVP workshops are put into practice you can see the whole tone and culture of the yard change for the better."*[16]

As Mark Saunders, warden of Southeastern Correctional Institution in Ohio stated in *Corrections Today*,

> *"Of equal importance in institutional settings is the realistic effect that programs, or lack thereof, have on security. In prisons, it is well recognized that good programs indicate good security, good security results in good order and good order provides the environment for good programs."*[17]

Focus on Staff Retention

Implementing change

From a management perspective, staff retention needs to be the focus. Understanding the reasons staff are leaving correctional service and implementing policies and programs that meet their psychological and safety needs will be a more effective response than simply pouring more money into the system, although that is also important. Businesses, hospitals and the military now realize they are in the people business and are focusing on meeting the needs of their staff and not just on the services they provide, and corrections needs to follow suit. The areas we need to focus our energies and attention

are: empowered and connected staff, good supervision, quality orientation and ongoing training and becoming a goal focused organization, i.e., moving from decreasing negative events to achieving positive outcomes for both staff and inmates.

Finally, to be focused only on security is like being stuck in among the trees when it would be better to rise above the trees to see the forest. As Albert Einstein once told us, "Problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them." An age-old story (with some modification) makes this point:

A wise man was walking alone in the forest when he heard a lot of commotion. He was curious, so walked toward the noise to investigate. What he came upon was a crowd frantically pulling babies out of the river. They screamed at him to help save the babies. They talked about improving security by building platforms and dykes to ensure no babies escaped their grasp. The wise man acknowledged them, but kept walking on. They were furious at how heartless the wise man was. He continued on his journey until he came upon a bridge. Upon walking across the bridge, the elevation gave him a completely different perspective and he saw up the river the reason the babies were falling in. He proceeded to the problem area and helped those people solve the problem. No more babies fell into the river.

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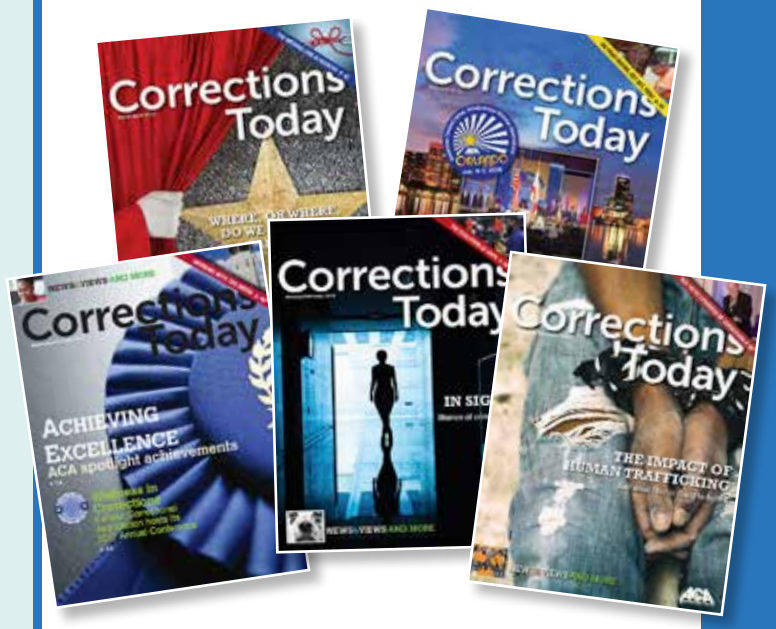

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ACA ENDNOTES

BEYOND SECURITY; CREATING SAFER PRISONS

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[1] TACT is a program of Collaborative Resolution Services, Inc. Contact info@teamcrs.org.

[2] F. Cheeks and M.D.S. Miller, "Corrections Today" October 1982, Pages 72-76, 78. Although attempts have been made to determine the original source of the 59 year life expectancy of correctional staff, none have been successful. The current life expectancy in the US is 78.86 years (http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/usa/life-expectancy).

[3] Spinaris, C., & Denhof, M. (2013). Depression, PTSD, and comorbidity in United States corrections professionals: Prevalence and impact on health and functioning. Retrieved from nicic.gov/depression-ptsd-and-comorbidity-unitedstates-corrections-professionals-prevalenceand-impact-health.

[4] Segel, Elixabeth A., et al. Assessing Empathy, Columbia University Press, 2017.

[5] Attitude Skills are: self-awareness, empathy, personal responsibility (initiative, integrity and interconnectedness with others), and emotional management. Interpersonal Skills are: listening, assertiveness, problem solving and prevention/conflict transformation skills.

[6] This concept comes from "Turn the Ship Around" by David Marquet (Portfolio/Penguin 2015). A worthwhile book for all supervisors and administrators about a submarine captain who in the space of one year transformed the crew of the Santa Fe from the worst performing crew in the submarine fleet to the best.

[7] Participant evaluation from the TACT training with the Philadelphia Prison System.

[8] 3/1/02 meeting with Deputy Commissioner Press Grooms, Captain Edmonds and Training Academy Director Judy Rushall of the Philadelphia Prison System.

[9] Comments by Captain Jim Lutz of the New Jersey Training Academy at the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel's 2004 Annual Meeting where TACT received the 2004 Commercial Program award. At the awards ceremony, Terry Kingman, President of IACTP and Training Academy Director of the Massachusetts Department of Correction stated that TACT should be part of every state's staff training program.

[10] AVP USA's website is www.avpusa.org and AVP International's website is http://avp.international To locate an AVP state group http://www.avpusa.net/avpcontacts/LocalOrglist.asp.

[11] Research on AVP can be seen at https://avp.international/literature/.

[12] 1/7/94 memo from Stan Taylor, Commissioner Delaware Department of Correction.

[13] 8/29/14 email from Dr. Dawn Addy, Director Research Institute for Social and Economic Policy, Center for Labor Research and Studies, Florida International University.

[14] James Gilligan, MD "Preventing Violence" Thames and Hudson, 2001.

[15] Excellent Eric (pseudonym) 2/10/15. Email.

[16] Jason Guinn 6/12/17. Email.

[17] Mark Saunders, "The Evolution of Correctional Programs," *Corrections Today* December 2006.

UNLOCKING COLLABORATION

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[1] *Kehoe Correctional Consulting, LLC*, charlesjkehoe.com/.

[2] *Safer Foundation*, www.saferfoundation.org/.

[3] *Artists in Christian Testimony Intl*, actinternational.org/.

[4] *Cellblock Creations*, cellblockcreations.org/index.html.

[5] *Andre Norman*, www.andrenorman.com/.

UN-CUFF THE UNHEALTHY BEHAVIORS

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[1] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2016). "The Eight Dimensions of Wellness". Retrieved from https://www.samhsa.gov/wellness-initiative/eight-dimensions-wellness.

[2] "National Jail Exchange", (2015). Retrieved from NCIC.gov.

[3] Stack, S. and Tsoudis, O. (1997). "Suicide Risk Among Correctional Officers: A Logistic Regression Analysis." Archives of Suicide Research.

[4] ERC HR Insights. (2013). "Eight Ways to Create a Culture of Wellness". Retrieved from https://www.yourerc.com/blog/post/8-Ways-to-Create-a-Culture-of-Wellness.aspx.

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