



The Correctional Oasis

December 2019, Volume 16, Issue 12

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Wishing you all LOVE, JOY and PEACE during the holiday season.

Merry Christmas!  
Happy Hanukkah!  
Happy Kwanzaa!

DWCO 16 Years—2003-2019

To contact us, go to [http://desertwaters.com/?page\\_id=744](http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=744) or call 719-784-4727.

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, Inc., helps correctional agencies counter Corrections Fatigue in their staff by cultivating a healthier workplace climate and a more engaged workforce through targeted skill-based training and research.

Six Mistakes Correctional Agencies Can Make When Addressing Staff Wellness  
2019 © Caterina Spinaris

The subject of correctional staff wellness is getting addressed increasingly frequently by correctional administrators, by unions, by line staff, and even by their family members through grassroots efforts.

As this area is uncharted waters for most correctional leaders, any one of the following six mistakes might be made by administrators when broaching this subject.

1. Thinking that correctional staff wellness is an unnecessary luxury which their agency does not have to implement. This could not be further from the truth. Research has consistently shown that corrections work has a serious and at times even dramatically negative impact on staff's physical and psychological health. And this negative impact on staff's health in turn affects staff's work engagement, performance (including excessive uses of force and other

policy violations), attendance, and retention. Moreover, negative effects of work stressors on staff's work life tend to go home with them, affecting their personal life. And staff's struggles in their home life feed back into work life, again affecting work engagement, performance, attendance, and perhaps even retention. Ignoring the subject of staff wellness is like ignoring a serious bleed. Given the irrefutable evidence of the damaging effects of correctional occupational stressors, not actively promoting staff wellness will result in correctional agencies being perceived as being deliberately indifferent to their employees' well-being as it relates to work-related health impairments or even suicide. And of course that renders agencies liable.

2. Not using a participatory approach of engaging staff of all disciplines, job types and ranks when exploring which wellness programs and resources to adopt. A correctional agency might opt to implement a staff wellness program or offer wellness resources based on the opinions of a few decision makers. As a result, the wellness programs or resources that get adopted may not necessarily be perceived or experienced by line staff as being relevant or helpful. The use of a participatory approach eliminates some of that "disconnect." A participatory approach involves asking staff across the agency to offer their ideas about perceived and identified needs and possible solutions regarding the fostering of staff wellness in their agency. Dialoguing about these subjects with staff of all ranks and job types, and seeking staff input regarding wellness program approaches is in itself wellness-promoting and bridge-building. A participatory approach communicates respect of those invited to contribute their suggestions, empowers those asked to offer ideas, and builds connections among various stakeholders in corrections agencies. The end result is increased trust and increased unity among the various groups of stakeholders. This is a significant achievement, because corrections agencies are typically characterized by the presence of division, psychological walls and mistrust among various staff subgroups.
3. Not engaging labor unions in agency efforts to design and implement staff wellness programs or offer staff wellness resources. Any staff wellness programming must be perceived by the population for which it is intended (corrections employees) as supported by *all* leadership—both administrative and labor. Such bilateral support of wellness efforts can only help to increase the likelihood of buy-in from the ranks. It also communicates the message that staff wellness is such a mission-critical topic, that stakeholders who may not see eye to eye about other subjects nevertheless come together to pursue and support it. This type of collaboration by people of diverse perspectives also shows humility. A collective approach acknowledges that no one group or individual has all the answers, and that multi-group input is far more likely to hit the mark than efforts by a single group or entity.
4. Thinking that staff wellness can be addressed by using a "one size fits all" approach. A staff wellness resource or program may be a good fit for some employees, but not for others. Yes, in the beginning of staff wellness efforts, approaches with the broadest reach will most likely be adopted to address the most commonly occurring staff concerns. Over time however, such approaches must be complemented with research-driven customized approaches which address various stakeholders' interests and challenges. For example, interventions suitable for institution staff may not be applicable to the concerns of probation or parole community-based staff, and that is why concerns of both these groups should be addressed separately. What material may be the best fit for non-custody employees may not be the best-suited approach to address needs of custody staff. Along the same lines, what may be the best fit for female employees may not be the best-suited approach to address needs of male staff. Higher security level institutions may require a greater emphasis of programming and resources that focus on traumatic exposure than lower security level institutions. And at different phases of staff wellness programming, different materials and approaches will be called for, just as college courses are offered at different levels, such as 101, 201, 301, etc., progressively increasing knowledge about a subject. As staff wellness efforts evolve, materials must be developed that are customized to provide tools and resources to these various subgroups of employees. Including informed social scientists in the selection of staff wellness efforts can help in the development of needed materials. One size does not fit all.
5. Thinking that it is enough to offer one program or one resource once or for only a short time period. Learning to cope with significant challenges usually does not happen overnight or after one training opportunity. As the stressors impinging on correctional staff are relentless and ongoing, so must be the skills-based training, opportunities for training practice, and reminders that are provided to staff. Complex problems require complex, multi-faceted

solutions. Offering one program or one resource only once or for a short time is akin to expecting a person to maintain a healthy weight after being shown how to eat healthy meals and portions, and then being left to their own devices regarding their eating habits. New and healthier habits and workplace culture changes require at least one essential ingredient: repetition, repetition, repetition of the message and its practice, in every way possible. That is why the mindset of decision makers regarding staff wellness programming must be that the pursuit of staff wellness is an ongoing marathon, not a once in a lifetime sprint.

6. Implementing staff wellness approaches or resources that are not based on research evidence. Decision makers may select a staff wellness program or resource to implement because they have heard something positive about it, or because they like it, or because it is affordable—but without having any research or theoretical basis for it. Including informed social scientists in the selection of staff wellness efforts can help eliminate this concern. Additionally, staff wellness efforts should be evaluated for their effectiveness on an ongoing basis, and then improved upon based on the evaluation results. Using methods that have a research foundation can help agencies determine how to adjust these approaches based on evaluation outcomes as they continue to build their staff wellness initiatives.

These are some mistakes that corrections agencies may make in the process of exploring options about staff wellness programming and resources. Carefully examining these pitfalls before launching any such activities, and also reviewing and evaluating current wellness efforts on a regular basis, can help decision makers reduce the likelihood of these mistakes or avoid them altogether.

To discuss these matters further, contact us [HERE](#) for a free consultation with Desert Waters.  
[http://desertwaters.com/?page\\_id=3888](http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=3888)

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Feedback about True Grit  
By Instructor Candidates

Besides CF2F\*, this is one of the most needed classes. It teaches us how to counteract the negative effects that our careers bring. It can improve our home life and extend our life expectancy. – JM, Lieutenant

(\*CF2F is Desert Waters' award winning course "From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™.")

Excellent course, excellent material and never been more relevant! – EB, Lieutenant

I think the course will be very well received by the staff in the institution. All the material is relevant to everything we do. I am very grateful for everything you are doing for us. – PD, Correctional Sergeant

This course has already made me a better person. I can't wait to teach this class to our staff and make a difference in someone's life. – AL, Sergeant

Thank you for facilitating this training opportunity. The subject is amazing and comes at a critical time in this department's state. I believe it is much needed information with the potential to change and save lives. – AG, Correctional Sergeant

This course really helped me evaluate myself and gave me the tools to help myself and my family. I hope to apply these tools at home and with my co-workers. – IL, Correctional Officer

Big Holiday Specials! Desert Waters' Books Bundles  
[http://desertwaters.com/?page\\_id=12209](http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=12209)

Bundle 1: "Staying Well: Strategies for Corrections Staff," 3rd Ed., and "When Home Becomes a Housing Unit" \$10.99, shipping included (regular price \$13.48 plus shipping)

Bundle 2: "Staying Well: Strategies for Corrections Staff," 3rd Ed., "More on Staying Well: More Strategies for Corrections Staff," and "When Home Becomes a Housing Unit" \$14.99, shipping included (regular price \$19.97 plus shipping)

Bundle 3: "Staying Well: Strategies for Corrections Staff," 3rd Ed., "More on Staying Well: More Strategies for Corrections Staff," "Passing It Along: Wisdom from Corrections Staff," Vol. 1 and Vol. 2, and "When Home Becomes a Housing Unit" \$24.95, shipping included (regular price \$30.95 plus shipping)

Bundle 4: Correctional Officer Brotherhood Challenge Coin, "Staying Well: Strategies for Corrections Staff," 3rd Ed., "More on Staying Well: More Strategies for Corrections Staff," "Passing It Along: Wisdom from Corrections Staff," Vol. 1 and Vol. 2, and "When Home Becomes a Housing Unit" \$35.95, shipping included (regular price \$47.95 plus shipping)

My Wish  
2019 © William Young

Tis the season for people to post pictures on social media professing their appreciation for those professions that have to work on the holidays. These memes will mention Police Officers and Firefighters and Deputies and Dispatchers and Nurses and Military personnel. And although I acknowledge and deeply appreciate these people and their service and their sacrifice, these memes upset me.

They upset me because these memes leave out the hundreds of thousands of hard-working Correctional Officers that put their lives on the line every shift, every day, without proper recognition or respect.

Where's our meme?!!

I want someone to recognize the insanely dangerous job that we do as Correctional Officers. I want someone out there to post a picture on their Facebook feed thanking us for the impossible and thankless job that we do. I want someone to acknowledge that my children will be sitting around a table eating turkey and yams and lumpy homemade mashed potatoes without their father. I want someone to post a picture of my dining room table, of my wife serving the family, alone. I want a picture of my family praying beside my empty chair.

I want that family member of mine that just posted those beautiful words of support and encouragement for my little brother (Police officer) and for my cousins (both Firefighters) to add my name to that list. I could use some support. I could use some encouragement.

But instead, I scroll and I scowl and I am saddened by the lack understanding, by the absence of appreciation.

Look, we work nights too. We work the weekends too. We work the holidays, and we miss birthdays and anniversaries and high school musicals too. Where's our shower of sympathy? Where is our meme?

Well, where is it?

I wish they knew how incredibly crazy and damaging our profession is. I wish someone would tell them that the average life span of a correctional officer is twenty years shorter than that of a "normal person." I wish someone would share the statistics related to divorce, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and suicide with them.

I wish I could clip my keys to their belt and give them a radio with a dying battery that has been chirping for forty-five minutes and tell them to go see what those seven inmates are doing in room four. I wish I could have them stand next to me while my daughter clings to my neck as I kiss her goodnight. I want them to see her cry. I want them to hear her beg me to stay home. I want them to listen as I try to explain to her why I spend more time at work with the criminals than I do at home.

I want them to know what it's like to hear a fellow officer scream for help over the radio. I wish they could relate to that sense of urgency, that panic, as we run towards that officer calling for help.

Yep, I wish they knew.

But, our service, our sacrifice is sequestered. In other words, we're out of sight, out of mind, isolated and insignificant in their eyes.

I wish they knew that all of the negativity and trauma that we have been exposed to is slowly chipping away at us, killing the person that we were before we started wearing the uniform.

I wish they would acknowledge that we wear the uniform.

I wish that they could feel our disappointment, our disillusionment, when we are repeatedly reminded that what we do on a daily basis is meaningless to the majority of the population.

I wish they knew what it feels like to feel nothing, to feel empty and alone.

I wish they knew that while they're out shopping shoulder to shoulder with other shoppers in the mall, fighting over some discount item for some relative that they haven't seen in seven months, we'll be searching our housing unit, we'll be weaponless looking for a weapon.

Look, I don't think that they exclude us from their well-wishes on purpose, with intent or malice. I just think that they are blissfully unaware of the work that correctional officers do.

So, maybe we should tell them. Maybe when I get to my cousin's house, when I arrive (I should get off on time because NOBODY is sick on the holidays), maybe while I'm sitting there waiting for them to take everything back out of the refrigerator so I can enjoy the lukewarm leftovers, I can tell them about my day. Maybe I could tell them that when they were cutting their holiday ham, I was cutting an inmate down that decided to attempt suicide because he missed his family. Maybe I could tell them about the inmate that wanted to fight staff at eight o'clock in the morning over a candy bar. Maybe, while I'm blowing on my first forkful of green bean casserole, I can tell them that I cried on the way to work this morning because I'm tired of not being there for my family, because I'm tired of missing out on life.

Or, maybe I could tell them about the pride that I feel when I put on my uniform. Maybe I should tell them that I feel sorry for them because they'll never know what it's like to be part of this brotherhood, this family of dedicated professionals, of warriors.

Maybe I should just smile and eat my lukewarm green bean casserole and say a silent prayer for those brave men and women who made it possible for me to go home safe to my family.

Maybe I'll just share some words of encouragement and support, and hope that my love and appreciation are enough to sustain my fellow officers.

Let's do that.

My fellow brothers and sisters, you are more than JUST CORRECTIONS. You are important public servants that perform an incredibly dangerous and thankless job, selflessly serving your respective communities with professionalism, dignity, and honor. Hold your head high and be proud of yourself and your profession.

Now please pass the sweet potato pie.

Let There Be Hope—A Chaplain's Perspective  
By Jeff Rude

As we all know, or at least should know, working in the Corrections Profession for any amount of time takes its toll on all of us. Many have sat back and denied the effects, many have accepted the effects, and others are still not sure. I am here today to express some thoughts on how we can change the effects this career choice has had, or is having, on us. And, to let us all know there is Hope.

First, I want to let you know I have worked for a Department of Corrections for over 24 years in a variety of positions. I worked in custody for 19 years, with 7 of those as a sergeant. I spent a year as the Grievance Coordinator listening to offender complaints and "swimming in the swamp of negativity." And now for the past 4+ years I have been a Case Manager. I have seen and experienced my share of traumatic events. I have also experienced symptoms of Fatigue, Depression, Stress, Anger, Frustration, and the list goes on.

I am sure you are wondering about the byline being "A Chaplain's Perspective," especially since I never said I held the position of Chaplain. Well, to make a very long story short, I will tell you where the byline comes from. At 20 years into my career, I came upon Desert Waters' Correctional Oasis, and began to read it each month. I quickly realized there were issues/concerns within my department and I wanted to help. You see, I grew up in a family that was not perfect, but was God-centered. I always had the drive to "help" others when and where I could. In 2014 our state brought DWCO Master Instructor Greg Morton to teach the Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment T4T and I was fortunate enough to be able to attend. I became a certified instructor for CF2F and taught many classes for our Department.

Around the same time, I applied for and was chosen to be a part of our Critical Incident Stress Management Team. I attended the training academy for this and learned more skills to "help". About 2 years later I became a Certified Chaplain through the National Police Fire Chaplain's Academy, learning even more skills to "help." I continued to learn more and more skills to "help," and that was all well and good. But the underlying issue still remained: why was I not improving? What was it that I wasn't dealing with?

Let's dive into the fray. For years I denied the effects of this career. I denied the changes that were happening to me and in me. I denied how I was treating my family, my friends, and myself. Sounds like a lot of denial right? Well, it was. It took me almost 24 years to decide to get some help, to finally accept what was happening in me. So I called the Employee Assistance Program hotline and garnered a referral to see a Mental Health Provider. I showed up early and, I have to tell you, I was extremely nervous. The man I met with was terrific. He took the time to listen and explore my state of being. To top it all off, he was a man of faith, and that made a huge difference for me. I believed in my heart that I could trust this man, and I knew he would tell me the truth, whether I wanted to hear it or not.

Then it happened. The diagnosis. I didn't want it. Heck, I even denied it, though deep down I knew he was probably right; after all he is the professional. As the words came out of his mouth I sat there in denial saying to myself, "Nope.

He's wrong; I don't have that." I then was given a list of symptoms for said diagnosis and as I looked them over, I found two of them I didn't meet, but there were about twelve to fifteen that I did. I finally had to admit and accept "the diagnosis;" I have PTSD.

As I sat back and thought about my career and all the things I had been through, I began to realize my misconception. I had believed there had to be an "event" so severe it would cause PTSD. I thought it had to be a shooting or a death or being in a war zone. Then it hit me: we work in a war zone everyday of our careers.

We encounter people who threaten us, assault us, and fight with us. We read story after story of the heinous crimes they have committed. We interview them about their crimes, so we can better understand what programming they may need in an effort to "rehabilitate" them.

I came to realize, through the help of a few Mental Health Professionals, that PTSD is not necessarily the result of one "event;" rather it can be also caused by prolonged "exposure" to these stressors. All the fights, assaults, threats, and reading or hearing or listening to them tell us how they did what they did and why. This might be the leading cause of PTSD in those who work in the Corrections field.

You see, our biggest enemy is denial. The biggest reason people like you and me go undiagnosed and do not get help is denial. The power of PTSD is in the "unknown," because what we don't know can cause severe and possibly irreparable damage. It is the fear and stigma attached to "Mental Health" that keeps us from seeking the help we need. It is the unfounded fear that our brothers and sisters will think poorly of us and think us weak. It is this fear that I am attempting to overcome in the hope you will overcome it as well.

I am a Chaplain. I also have PTSD. But neither of these two things define me. I am who I am because of my God. The way I see it is that He has allowed me to go through these things (fights, assaults, threats, etc.) to mold me into the man I am. Remember, it is not just experiencing these things first hand that causes us harm. Indirect exposure—hearing about them and reading about them—can cause just as much harm.

I am a man who is designed and destined to help others. I can see that now more clearly than ever because I finally learned that to help others, I must first take care of myself. If I don't take care of myself then I am no good to anyone else. As the flight attendant always says, "First put on your oxygen mask before you attempt to help others." If you are not taking care of yourself, you will quickly become useless to those you are attempting to help.

There are many programs out there designed to teach us the skills needed to take care of ourselves. Take one. There are many videos out there on self-care. (YouTube is a good source). Watch one. Heck, take more than one and watch more than one. Take as many classes, watch as many videos, and read as many books as you need to find the way to "YOUR" wellbeing.

For me, my God is the source of my wellbeing. I still need to practice the other skills I have learned through classes I have taken, videos I have watched, and books I have read. But I must tell you, all the skills in the world will not have lasting effects until you find that one thing that is your rock, your source of wellbeing, peace and hope. Find yours.

My final encouragement for you today is this: make the time to care for yourself, and find your rock, your source of wellbeing. For only then can you think to care for your family and friends the way you want, the way you need, the way you should.

Blessings to each and every one of you, and may divine light shine upon you.

With love,  
Jeff  
A Chaplain

## SATF Memorial Wall

By CO Ron Mason

We had a memorial dedication on October 29, 2019, a wall listing all the peace officers at my prison that died before they should have. The names on this wall, I knew them all. The cause of the loss of life is to some degree irrelevant. The fact of the matter is that this wall honors partners taken from us before they could enjoy the fruits of their labor. They are missed by all of us left behind.

As I walked away from the service, this is what was on my mind.

TO MY PARTNER {UNDELIVERED}

I am so sorry that I never told you these thoughts that run through my mind as I am captured in my own mind. I am forever grateful for the partner you have been to me. I refer to you as my friend when I tell stories of our work adventures and misadventures. Our stories that I tell always captivate family. As I tell the tales, in the back of my mind, I am eternally grateful to have you by my side. Through thick and thin, we have each other's back. I am eternally grateful to know this to be true.

I share with you the joys, triumphs in my life and in my family's life and the hard times, and you exchange yours with me. We celebrate and commiserate about our lives together. We are partners.

The news that you are gone hits me like a sledgehammer to the face, like a ton of bricks. What did I miss? I listened to you with all interest and care and love. The love that partners have for one another. What did I miss?

Yesterday you told me how excited you were that your child made it to finals next weekend, and the romantic dinner you had reserved for you and your wife next Friday. Even got a babysitter lined up.

And now you are gone. You were taken too soon. Be it from a vehicle accident after working too many hours, trying to escape the pain in your brain, a lost battle with a medical condition, or a simple accident at home. Or you chose to leave this world when you got tired. I hope that you can find peace from the torment that you felt that you had to escape. I had no clue that you had other demons in your mind ruling this life of yours. You did so well keeping them hidden. If only you knew that we were here, ready to help if needed. Ready to be a sounding board to solve problems or come up with strategies to attack the difficulties you saw ahead of you.

My partner and friend, I wish I could have been a better partner and friend to you. I wish that you would have known how much I valued you and how important you have been in my life.

Now that you are gone from this life, we are left with the hurt. We have to work through our grief and the loss of you.

Know that you were loved in this world and that you will always be missed.

That last embrace will always be remembered and longed for.

### Desert Waters' Quilt Fundraiser

When you donate \$75 or more to Desert Waters or buy Desert Waters' products of \$75 or more, your name will be entered in a drawing to win this one-of-a-kind 5/2" x 60" denim handmade reversible lap quilt with pockets.

The drawing will take place on the 15th of January 2020 at Desert Waters' offices.

The lap quilt has been washed and dried to start the ragging process. After the first couple of washes, you will get lots of loose threads. This is part of the ragging process. The more you wash it, the more it will get the rag look.

### What the Brain Does During Deep Sleep

Findings of a recent study suggest a mechanism that may explain one reason why sleep is so vital to our brain health and functioning.

Researchers found that during deep sleep (slow wave sleep), blood flow to the brain is reduced, allowing “waves” of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) to pulse into the brain from the spine. As CSF flows back out of the brain, it takes with it debris (metabolic waste products) that has accumulated between cells, essentially flushing waste out. (Slow wave sleep occurs between episodes of Rapid Eye Movement sleep.)

Prior studies using animal models found that these “waves” of CSF occurred more rapidly during wakefulness than during sleep. These animal studies also observed that the waste that is flushed out from between brain cells by CSF includes proteins such as beta amyloid, which one of the proteins found to accumulate between brain cells in Alzheimer’s Dementia. Such debris interferes with transmission of signals between brain cells.

These studies indicate that sleep is essential for keeping the brain operating in an environment clear of the metabolic waste products which accumulate between brain cells.

That is, in order to have a “clear head” and to be able to think clearly, among other things, we need to get sufficient amounts of sleep, including slow wave sleep. That is not a negotiable proposition. It is a biological necessity.

<sup>1</sup>Fultz, N.E., Bonmassar, G., et al. (2019). Coupled electrophysiological, hemodynamic, and cerebrospinal fluid oscillations in human sleep. *Science*, 366, 628-631. <https://bit.ly/2pRAbZR>.

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, Inc., is a non-profit corporation which helps correctional agencies counter Corrections Fatigue in their staff by cultivating a healthier workplace climate and a more engaged workforce through targeted skill-based training and research.

Thank you for blessing the work of Desert Waters with your contributions!  
And a special THANKS to all article contributors in this issue.

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#### Quote of the Month

“The more present we are to the now, the more grateful we are for what is, the more we tap into joy.”  
~ Kosuke Koyama

IN MEMORIAM

CO1 Gary Duckett  
EOW 19 Nov 2019  
State Correctional Institution, PADOCC

Sgt. Cely Alvarez  
EOW 22 Nov 2019  
Kern Valley State Prison, CDCR

CO Brian N. Cox  
EOW 22 Nov 2019  
FCI Greenville, FBOP

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#### DWCO Mission

To promote the occupational, personal and family well-being of the corrections workforce through the provision of evidence-informed resources, solutions, and support.

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