

19
YEARS

HELPING CORRECTIONAL AGENCIES BECOME WORKPLACES OF CHOICE!

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A Desert Waters Publication

MARCH 2022

From The Director's Desk

Sleep...Who Needs It?

Reach Out

I Am Not Okay

In Memoriam

Quote Of The Month



Volume:19

Issue:3



A non-profit for the health of correctional agencies, staff and families

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Building Our Resilience Muscles

John Homer Miller said, "Circumstances and situations do color life, but you have been given the mind to choose what the color shall be." If I had one recommendation for us all, it'd be **to hold onto a hopeful outlook no matter what the circumstances**. By that I mean to deliberately and courageously choose to look for positives in challenges, routinely viewing problems as opportunities, and trusting that positive outcomes will emerge from difficulties as we keep choosing life and doing the right thing.

The choice of a positive perspective boosts our resilience and mood by reducing tension, anxiety, anger, and discouragement—all components of what we call, for lack of a better term, stress. Optimism infuses us with energy and hope. The question of course is, do we *truly* have the power to choose how we interpret circumstances and how we respond? Or do our situations control us, dictating to us how to think and feel?

I believe that we all have the power of choice, just as we are born with certain muscles. But opting for an optimistic mindset in the midst of trials does not come automatically. For many of us, our original default setting is negative. **A habitually positive, nugget-seeking attitude must be developed.**

Like any muscle, for enduring positivity to become stronger, it must be exercised. And that happens only by doing repetitions against the resistance of adversity. So, challenges offer us the way to build inner strength, shaping our character for the better. Each repetition counts.

The more often we intentionally choose to find silver linings in clouds, and the more lemonade we make from lemons we've been handed, the easier it gets to trust that there are important lessons and even blessings hidden in packages that adversity delivers on our doorstep.

Instead of losing heart, well-founded trust helps us choose to focus on something positive, loving and bigger than our situation, and strengthens our resolve to hang on for the ride. As we hold on, we declare that life can emerge from death just as surely as spring comes after winter. This attitude choice can save us much grief, hurt, and waste of energy.

Richard Bach wrote, "What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly." Let's not miss opportunities for positive growth and positive transformation.

Let's keep working out in the gym of life, lifting the weights of difficulties, to continue the character building and overcoming so we can keep becoming the best we can be at every season of our lives.

And remember that, after working out at the resilience gym, you need to go home and make the time to REST and SLEEP. Muscles that are exercised need to be allowed rest in order to repair and build on themselves. Being positive in the face of adversity can be hard work that required that we replenish ourselves, so we do not lose heart and so we do not run out of "juice." Muscle contraction must be followed by muscle relaxation.

Caterina Spinaris



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SLEEP..WHO NEEDS IT?

THE COMPLEXITIES OF EXCESSIVE MANDATORY OVERTIME AND SLEEP DEPRIVATION

BY GREGORY MORTON

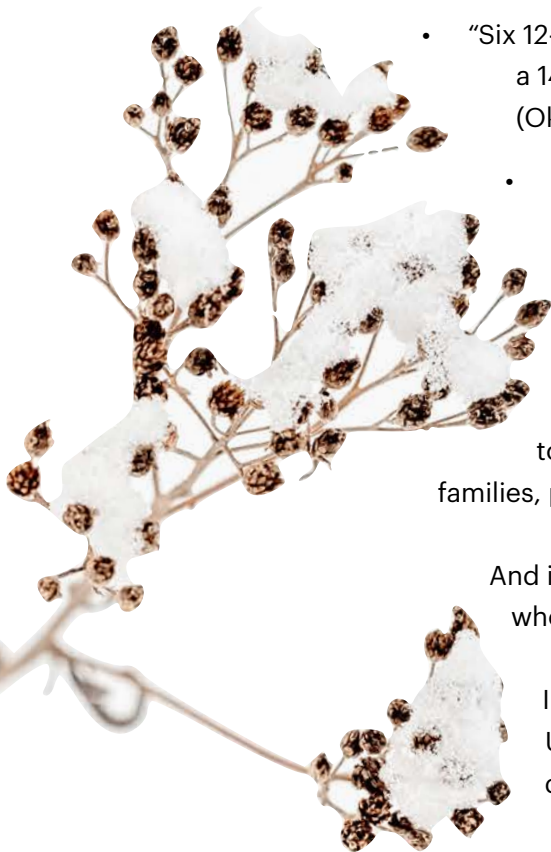
News articles that address chronic sleep deprivation and excessive mandatory overtime for correctional employees are now common:

- “I would start my shift on Sunday night,” . . . “I would be too tired to commute home, so I would sleep in the jail in a former jail cell, in an inmate bunk. I would get up, eat out of a vending machine, do my next 16-hour shift and then I wouldn’t go home until Friday morning.” (Washington, 2021).
- When [she] could not face another 16-hour workday at the Philadelphia Department of Prisons, she started paying a coworker \$20 per shift to take her mandatory overtime assignments. (Pennsylvania, 2021).
- A typical work week sees officers working 84 hours over seven days; mandatory overtime can see staff working an additional 36 hours a week. “That’s at a minimum,” officers [are] going home exhausted saying, “We can’t risk our lives anymore.” (Alaska, 2020).
- “Six 12-hour shifts with a day off equals 72 hours or more being worked in a 144-hour period. That is still extremely unsafe for these officers.” (Oklahoma, 2019).
- Corrections officer in rear-end crash that killed Cumberland girl told police he fell asleep. . . . In the four weekly pay periods [prior to the accident], the lowest number of hours [he] worked was 94; the highest was 110. (Maine, 2019).

Is it too simplistic to say that everything about excessive mandatory overtime is miserable, complicated, and difficult? Is it too obvious to say that chronic sleep deprivation damages careers, families, physical and mental health, and even agency missions?

And is it too melodramatic to agree with the Philadelphia city official who recently stated, “There’s a real humanitarian disaster going on”?

In 2016, lawyer and public health professional Clark J. Lee of the University of Maryland addressed the humanitarian question directly in an article entitled, “Sleep: A human rights issue.” That



article preceded the current mandatory overtime crisis in America's prisons and jails but it laid out an argument that is relevant to us all. In doing so he quoted documents from the United Nations and the World Health Organization: The "**right to** a standard of living adequate for the **health and well-being** of [oneself]" (U. N., Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25, 1948), and "[t]he enjoyment of the highest attainable **standard of health is one of the fundamental rights** of every human being" (Constitution of the World Health Organization, 1946).

He also used a civil rights case in the western United States that addressed homelessness in which the federal government argued that "**because sleeping is a 'universal and unavoidable consequence of being human', it is 'necessary for human survival.'**"

We would take that argument further by saying that the same applies to the public servants who work in America's prisons and jails. But we would also acknowledge that asserting chronic sleep deprivation due to excessive mandatory overtime to be a human rights violation might seem to be an overstatement. So we ask, what do you call a persistent, chronic violation of a human biological necessity? If not bad enough now, how bad do things have to get before it does become a human rights violation? And when does the gradually boiling water have to get so hot that the frog should have jumped out long ago?

The physical consequences of lack of sleep are increasingly well known. It affects our central nervous system, impacting how our bodies send, handle, and remember information, and reducing our reaction times to those equivalent to driving while intoxicated. It affects our immune system, the mechanism that fights off bacteria and viruses. It affects our respiratory and digestive systems. It lowers our bodies' tolerance for glucose, which if overlapped with poor eating and/or drinking habits, can contribute to diabetes. It affects our cardiovascular system, both to our blood pressure and our ability to repair damage to blood vessels. The repair of other cells and tissues are impacted as well, largely due to the depletion of growth hormones. Alzheimer's risk increases through plaque accumulation.

The emotional consequences are apparent in our everyday lives. This includes moodiness, shortness of temper, reduced problem-solving ability, increased anxiety and depression, and increased suicidal thinking. These impact our off duty lives as well as our teamwork while on duty. In the latter case, unprofessional decision making can follow, thereby creating a safety liability for both offenders and staff.

Further, asking a corrections professional to engage in Motivational Interviewing or implement his or her Role Model, Reinforce, and Redirect offender interactions skills in a challenging one-on-one situation when all we really want to do is put our head down and sleep, is death by a thousand cuts to the agency's public mission each and every shift. The

extent that that outcome results in moral injury to an employee's sense of professionalism will vary. And whether any of these concerns rise to the level of a staff, inmate, or even public safety rights violation is something to be decided by a court of law sometime in the future. But any of us can write those rights violation scripts with ease. All it takes is the playing out of the physical and emotional consequences listed above to their tragic endings.

Even more likely perhaps is a rights violation based on the employer abridging labor laws regarding cumulative working hours, as indicated in the stories at the top of the page. We all know that mandatory doubles are commonplace these days.

One of the occurrences that has raised this topic to a higher degree of urgency has been being informed of a large facility where mandatory triples were happening; and a unionized facility at that. It made us wonder how hot the boiling water of chronic sleep deprivation is in smaller to moderate sized jurisdictions without union representation.

We realize how risky it is to even mention this topic. Correctional facilities can't close and send students home for virtual services like schools can. Correctional facilities can't triage offenders like some medical facilities may be required to do. Facilities must stay open, must feed, clothe, and shelter offenders. Facilities must provide medical and mental health care. Facilities must keep safe those confined during the period of their sentences. These services are not optional. Not offering them creates problems for which solutions are mandatory.

Solutions need those responsible to take action. If action is insufficient, blaming frequently follows. It is not our intention to blame anyone for the current state of affairs. The problem is too multi-dimensional for blaming to be a useful strategy. In fact, if anything our intention would be to charge all parties involved to focus on their individual duties, look around, and make sure you are rowing the boat in the same direction as your partners.

If you are a line employee, don't call in, thereby making a colleague work a mandatory, unless you truly can't work.

If you are a formal or informal leader at the work site, contribute to a culture that reduces emotional or physical fatigue so as to increase retention.

"...because sleeping is a 'universal and unavoidable consequence of being human', it is 'necessary for human survival.'"

If you are a newer employee, one hired to help us fight through the thicket of difficulties we currently face, work to achieve meaning, not just money.

If you are responsible for recruitment in any form, work as if people's lives depended on it.

In all cases, remind each other that the duties you perform are important, profound, and socially consequential. It is not a little thing what we do and therefore, requires us to be at our best to succeed. Rested, refreshed, and restored.

But while we are doing that, we need to recognize the biggest picture of all – as members of a governmental structure we operate under the color of law. Laws are developed to clarify the rights of the populace.

When our actions impinge on the human rights of others, whether offenders for safety or treatment, employees for safety and scheduling, or the public for safety and agency accountability, we need to take a deep breath and call a boiling pot of water exactly what it is. Especially if we are sitting in it.

Gregory Morton started his career at the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) as an academic counselor in the mid-1970s, and then served as OSP's Staff Training Coordinator for eleven years. He was the department's Staff Training/Professional Development Administrator, and Labor Relations Administrator until retirement in 2009. He has been a Master Instructor in Desert Waters courses since 2013. He holds a Master's degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, concentrating on the consequences of work-related trauma and chronic stress, and the rapidly expanding field of human neuroscience. Concern for the health and skills of the corrections workforce has been his motivation throughout.





"Correctional Family
Wellness™"

ONLINE INSTRUCTOR
TRAINING & INDEPENDENT
STUDY

2022 Online Instructor Training Dates

- > March 21-23
- > Nov 14-16

Times

- > 9am–3pm MT (8-2 PT, 10-4 CT, 11-5 ET)
Breaks included

**30-hour
Instructor Training
with certification**

Fee: \$1,095

ABOUT THIS COURSE

Desert Waters' proprietary course "Correctional Family Wellness™" (CFW) presents information to adult family members about how corrections work experiences can impact family life, and provides suggestions for dealing with scenarios commonly experienced by correctional families. This highly interactive course is designed to be offered to adult family members of seasoned correctional employees (jail, prison, probation or parole) as a 4-hour course, and also to adult family members of new staff as a 2-hour course. It is also offered to correctional employees as a 30-hour Instructor Training with certification (18 hours online and 10 hours independent study, followed by two 1-hour telephonic coaching sessions with DWCO's coaches). Independent study includes the books "Staying Well" and "When Home Becomes a Housing Unit."



TARGET AUDIENCE

Adult family members of new correctional staff and adult family members of seasoned correctional employees (jail, prison, probation or parole) of all disciplines and job roles

COURSE TOPICS

- Corrections Work Realities
- When Work Comes Home
- What Might My Loved One Face at Work?
- Organizational Ways to Counter the Challenges
- Help for the Family
- The Basics of Self-care
- Managing Your Emotions
- Family Scenarios

REACH OUT AND SOMEONE WILL REACH BACK

BY BRYAN HUGHES, LIEUTENANT

When we ask someone how they are doing or if they are all right, do we really want the truth or are we just speaking in generalities and out of habit?

We are so conditioned to ask a question that we think we already know the answer to. Ask yourself, "What if?" What if you ask someone if they are all right and they say "No?" Now what? Where do we go from here? We need to be open and ready to hear an honest response, but more importantly we need to be prepared HOW to respond to a response of, "No, I'm not all right."

But the thing about correctional staff is that we lie. We lie a lot. Even to ourselves. Before we can expect others to know that something is wrong, we must be honest with them when they ask. Most importantly, we must be honest with ourselves. Some of us are not okay. Some of us are in crisis.

I know the hardest thing for us to do is ask for help, but why? Is it ego, pride, embarrassment, feeling inadequate? I would say, "Yes!" to all of these and more. If I am in a dangerous situation and I use my radio to call for assistance, staff will come running from places we didn't even know staff were. That's one amazing thing about us. Even if we have our differences, when that call for assistance comes, we come running as fast as we can. We don't hesitate to get on that radio or activate our personal alarm if our lives are in danger, but when it comes to our mental health, we freeze, even though our mental health is a life and death situation. I know for a fact that staff suicides in the Michigan Department of Corrections are at epidemic levels. I can only guess other states are dealing with the same issue.

So why don't we call for help when it's our mental health? Is it because weak people need help? People that have lost control need help? Incompetent people need help? Ignorant people need help?

The fact is that couldn't be farther from the truth. It takes real strength to ask for help. It takes someone that doesn't want to lose control to ask for help. It takes competence to realize that you are in crisis and need help. And it's not ignorance, but knowledge to know you need help, accepting the fact you need help and seeking that help.

Asking for help can be one of the scariest things you ever do, but it can save your life, your marriage, your relationship with your children and family, and your relationships with your friends. It can also be a testimony for someone else that needs the courage to step up and ask for help. You asking for help may save someone else's life. The life you save may even be that of a family member.

This career affects us in so many ways. Ways that we don't even realize until years later. If you are feeling the effects of this job, so is your family. You may protest, "I leave work at work. I don't take work home with me." You absolutely do take this job home with you! That's just another lie we tell ourselves.

I THOUGHT I was that guy that was an expert at leaving work at work and home at home. I never took the job home with me. I never went home after a hard day and told "war stories." I wanted to protect my wife and children from the evil world I know. Instead of protecting them, I was isolating them.

I THOUGHT I left work at work UNTIL:

- I realized my oldest son won't sit in a restaurant unless his back is facing a wall so he can see all the people and all the doors
- my oldest daughter started to isolate herself from family and friends like her dad was so good at
- my youngest daughter was using profanity worse than me and was fighting every weekend or getting kicked out of school
- I realized my youngest son has a sense of humor that is so sick and twisted, it's bothersome.

It is okay to
not be okay!

- my wife, my confidant and best friend in the entire world told me, “I don’t even like talking to you. I never know who you are going to be. Everything I say and do makes you mad. I can’t seem to do anything right for you.”
- I realized and accepted that I was unhappy with myself, that I was miserable.
- I admitted I was depressed, that my anxiety was out of control, that I was paranoid and angry.

I have isolated myself from family and friends. Rarely are we invited out with friends anymore because I always found a reason not to go. Even though I really wanted to go. My nightmares became more violent and more frequent. I trusted no one, and I mean NO ONE. I have become unsympathetic to others, because if I can deal with all the tragedy I have experienced in my life, why should I feel bad for you? No one can relate to or care about what I’ve been through.

I’m paranoid because I see the world as such an ugly, violent and cruel place. I continuously worry about my loved ones’ safety. Is the world this evil place I picture it to be? Or is MY world, OUR world, OUR reality an evil place? I carry my handgun anytime I leave the house. I know people that carry their gun even while they are in their own homes.

It is okay to not be okay! Read that again. Now read that again. It is okay to not be okay. The anger, depression, anxiety, etc., are normal feelings. The important thing is that we don’t stay there. We feel what we feel. We acknowledge it and move on.

If we can’t, then it is imperative that we ask for help. We must drop the pride and ego and ask for help. Help is out there. We feel alone, but we aren’t. We must start somewhere with changing our culture of the macho image. We must stop suffering in silence.

There are so many resources available to us. If you can relate to anything I have said, change starts with us. Please don’t be a statistic. Please don’t put your loved ones through the trauma of losing you. **Reach out and someone will reach back.**

I have been doing this job for 24 years. I am glad I have learned that I really don’t leave work at work. I acknowledge it. I accept it and now is the time to correct it!





From Corrections
Fatigue to Fulfillment™

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING

Online Training &
Independent Study



2022 Online Instructor Training Dates

- > Training 1: April 12-15 & April 18-20
- > Training 2: Oct 11-14 & Oct 17-19

Times

- > Times Online: 9am–1pm MT (8am PT, 10am CT, 11am ET)
- > Independent Study: 12 hours
- > Phone Coaching: Two one-hour individual sessions following the online training

Staff called the course:

- *incredibly valuable*
- *eye-opening*
- *career-saving*
- *relationship-saving*
- *life-saving*

7-day (42-hour) Online Training & Independent Study

- Science-based explanation of the psychological dynamics behind the negativity of the corrections workplace, and its manifold costly consequences to corrections agencies, staff, and their families
- Science-informed strategies to increase staff well-being and to improve the organizational climate and culture
- Based on research in psychological trauma, resilience, and Positive Psychology
- CF2F certification offers corrections personnel the ability to teach the valuable CF2F principles to staff at their agency
- Independent study includes the books “Staying Well” and “More on Staying Well” by Caterina Spinaris

Upon Successful Completion of Certification Requirements Instructor Candidates Will Receive:

- Certificate of Completion for 42 Contact Hours
- Three-year certification and license* as Instructors** or Co-instructors** to offer the 1-day CF2F course to their agency staff***
- Electronic copies of CF2F course materials
- CF2F updates during their three-year certification

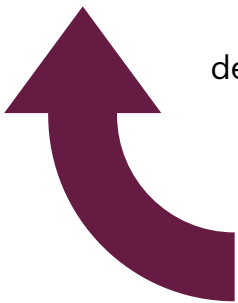
Fee: \$1,495.00 per Instructor Candidate.



ONE VOICE UNITED - I Am Not Okay



A gut-wrenching testimony, a veteran officer shares the deadly impact of working in corrections and what it cost his family.



[Click here to watch the video.](#)

IN MEMORIAM

Albert "Chub" Wheat, Correctional Officer,
Montana Department of Corrections

Bradley Pettie, Captain,
Colorado Department of Corrections

Christopher Scarberry, Western Regional Jail,
Cabell County, West Virginia

Helen Mae Smith, Correctional Officer,
North Carolina Department of Public Safety

Quote of the Month

"We don't believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true."

-- Dallas Willard

MEET THE CORRECTIONAL OASIS TEAM



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DWCO Mission

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

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Your gifts are tax-deductible.

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.



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