

20
YEARS

HELPING CORRECTIONAL AGENCIES BUILD A MORE ENGAGED WORKFORCE

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A Desert Waters Publication

APRIL 2023

From The Director's Desk

Running the Race and Raising the Flag:
An Analogy for Desert Waters

Own Your Baggage

Research Bench: Job Design And
Intrinsic Motivation Pt.3



Volume: 20

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

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

It's a very rare occasion that we know that our goal has been met in a correctional staff member's life.

We pursue our mission of loving corrections staff, and we put our "stuff" out there, but most of the time we do not know what impact it has on the lives of those we serve.

That's why it's so meaningful when we do receive feedback, letting us know we've realized our goal, at least in some small way.

In January 2023 we received a letter in the mail, written by a retired Correctional Officer. This is what the letter said:

Dear Desert Waters:

In December of 2022 I retired from the Oregon Department of Corrections after an almost 31-year career. I am writing you to Thank you so very much for the work you do. I would read your great newsletter each month at work, then print it off to read it again at home. I have placed a copy of the last newsletter I received in a tote of items from my career for my family to read someday. It is that important.

Your newsletter has been a tremendous source of inspiration, comfort and education for me, and I just had to write you to thank you for your service to the corrections community. You do a tremendous work and service to us and I am very grateful. Please, keep up your great work and please accept my sincere gratitude and appreciation for your work.

Sincerely yours,
Steve Borst, Retired Officer.

As you read this month's Correctional Oasis, you'll find an article comparing our efforts to "run alongside of you" to keep you in the race with what "bus drivers" do in South Africa's Comrades' annual ultramarathon. And as you read even further, you'll find another article on the topic of generativity - in short, what it means to leverage our experience to mentor and encourage others for their long-term success. The letter from Steve Borst that is printed here could not be a more beautiful example of both.

We trust you'll be encouraged as you read this month's issue. Not only that, we trust you'll make the time to also "run alongside" a fellow colleague, or even a justice-involved person, leveraging your own experience for their encouragement and long-term success.

Caterina Spinaris



2023 Online Training Schedule

- **3rd Wed of the month, Mar-Dec** – The Supportive Correctional Supervisor™
- **May 2-5 & 8-10** – Improving the Well-being of Corrections Professionals: Understanding, Acknowledging, and Overcoming Traumatic Stress™
- **Jun 5-9** – Towards Corrections Fulfillment: For New Staff™
- **Jul 10-14** – Correctional Family Wellness™ (For Families™ & Staff™)
- **Sep 11-15 & 18-19** – From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™
- **Oct 23-27 & 30-31** – True Grit: Building Resilience in Corrections Professionals™
- **Nov 6-10** – Towards Corrections Fulfillment: For New Staff™
- **Nov 27-30 & Dec 1** – Correctional Family Wellness™ (For Families™ & Staff™)
- **Dec 5-8 & 11-13** – Improving the Well-being of Corrections Professionals: Understanding, Acknowledging, and Overcoming Traumatic Stress™

Select a course above
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RUNNING THE RACE AND RAISING THE FLAG: AN ANALOGY FOR DESERT WATERS

BY DARIA MAYOTTE, MA

The Comrades is an ultramarathon which takes place yearly in South Africa. This 56-mile race (two times that of the Boston Marathon) has a typical participation level of approximately 15,000 people. Having started in 1921, there is a fascinating history attached to it, steeped in apartheid. Today, the very existence of the Comrades is a symbol of triumph and victory, as it's inclusive of all races, nationalities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

There are the select few that participate with the ambition of winning. Others are in it to beat their own personal record. Thousands of others desire simply to complete the race. And it is for this last group that there are special arrangements in place to be sure that happens – because, you as you can imagine, running 56 miles all at once – regardless of your speed – is an absolute feat all in itself!

The Comrades includes a number of individuals known as the “pacers,” affectionately called the “bus drivers.” But by no means do these “bus drivers” actually drive busses. Rather, they are the individuals who carry flags, having committed to run at very precise paces throughout the race in order to finish in a predetermined amount of time.

The Comrades must be completed in a maximum of 12 hours. At that point, the race is over; the finish line is blocked, and you cannot pass.

Currently, there is a particular “bus driver” who has committed to run 13-minute miles. All. Day. Long. At this rate, she is guaranteed to cross the finish line just before 12 hours. Those that run alongside this “bus driver” are called her “bus.” They can be assured that if they simply keep pace with this particular “bus driver,” they will finish the race, albeit just in the nick of time. This “bus driver” starts with a handful of those who are part of the “bus” alongside of her. Midway through the race, she will have gained a small crowd of +/- 50 running with her. Towards the end of the race, there’s a tidal wave of runners keeping pace with this “bus driver,” hanging on just to finish the race.

What does all this have to do with Desert Waters?

It would be an apt analogy to say that we at Desert Waters are in a sense a “bus driver” for the field of corrections – and not only that, but we are training other “bus drivers” alongside of us.

How is that so?

There are multiple thousands of corrections staff members running very long and strenuous race as they move through their careers in corrections. It is often the case that the longer the race, the harder it gets. These men and women working behind bars might not have originally planned for this “ultramarathon,” but they do need to know someone is running alongside of them to help them keep the pace and finish the race.

I personally believe that, by God’s grace, we at Desert Waters “raise the flag” in a variety of ways – through the courses we teach, the curricula we develop, the conversations we have with those in the trenches, the publications we put out monthly through the *Correctional Oasis*, among other avenues. Many corrections staff members across the nation and world have taken note of that flag and have been encouraged to stay in the race, knowing someone is running by their side.

A large portion of what we do involves training instructors to teach our various curricula at their own facilities. We’ve done that twice this past February. Our Master Instructors facilitated a 5-day in-person From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™ (CF2F) Instructor Training class in Ohio for 12 participants, and also a 7-half-day CF2F online Instructor Training for 10 participants. In essence, we now have an additional 22 “bus drivers” who are nearly ready to be set loose. Following their additional two hours of one-on-one coaching, these 22 new Instructors will “set the pace” for those in their facilities who need to know someone is running alongside them. They will teach CF2F to their colleagues, encouraging them with the knowledge that: (1) others are also struggling, (2) there’s hope, (3) we’re in this with you, and (4) we can all finish this race, if we stick together.

Here are a couple of comments from each of the two classes that took place this month:

“This course has left me with a sense of urgency to get this rolling in my facility and in my overall organization.”

“This instructor training really helped me learn how to be the best version of myself, and I can't wait to share my knowledge and help my facility become better.”

These are some of Desert Waters’ “bus drivers.” These are the men and women who will raise the flags and set the pace such that corrections staff can finish the race. Thank you for rallying alongside of them (and us), and cheering from the sidelines.





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OWN YOUR BAGGAGE

BY JULIE TAFT, LCSW

I am a social worker in a maximum-security prison. In high school, a teacher told me I should go to school to become a social worker. And I quickly told her that she was crazy, and that social work was definitely not a career I was considering. And then, in my mid-twenties, I ended up becoming a social worker. And if you would have asked me 15 years ago if I would ever work in a prison, let alone a maximum-security prison, I would have said that prison would never be a setting I would work in. And here I am. I am a social worker in a maximum-security prison. A place and a career I never seemed to aspire for.

Would I change this? The answer depends on the day. Some days I can see the silver lining in all of this, and I would say “no,” that I can see all the professional and personal growth I have experienced from this job. Other days I would say “yes,” I would change it in a heartbeat. Because what I am seeing those days are the not-so-great changes that I can see in myself since taking on this career.

Working in the prison setting is not an easy path to go down, and it is not for everyone. I cannot say I came into this position with an I’m-going-to-change-the-world type of attitude. If I am being honest, I was tired of dealing with my last job, and the pay being double what I was making at that job was a huge draw for me. But I definitely thought I was bulletproof. I had been a therapist for several years prior to working here. I thought I knew myself. I thought I would know when my brain was getting ugly, and I would know how to care for it when it did. I could protect myself from the side effects I was always told about that came from working in the prison.

At that time, I had friends that had either dated or married corrections officers. Actually, I met my now-husband through one of those friends that married an officer. I told myself when I started working at the prison that I would not date an officer. Well, right before I started working there, I started dating my husband, who is an officer. So, for the first couple years, I kept an eye out, looking for red flags of how this setting had changed him, the ugly side effects of working in the correctional setting that I always heard about. There had to be something there, nobody gets out of this setting without them, right?

And then one night we went to the movies in a small little nearby town. And when we left, I thought I had lost my wallet, but figured out it was in my pocket and made a comment like, “Thank goodness it’s in my pocket; it has everything that is worth anything in it.” I then immediately became aware that there were two people walking behind us. So, as my husband was going on about how much he liked the movie, all I could think in my head was that I was going to get mugged. All these scenarios started flowing, and I kept telling myself, “I hope they don’t stab me for it.” Finally, my nerves were shot, and my brain said to me, “If they are going to mug you, at least turn and face them.” So, I whipped around to stare down my soon-to-be attackers, only to find two little old men walking to the car next to ours. They looked at me like I was crazy.

And in that moment, I knew they were right. What “normal” person thinks like this? And I realized that I had spent so much time looking at my husband to see how this place was affecting him, that I had totally forgotten to check with myself to see how *I* was being affected. And that was because I came in believing I was bulletproof, and that I would be able to tell. But I had missed it.

After this incident, I realized that I was dealing with a whole different beast than I had ever dealt with. This place had an insidious effect on me that I never expected. Gradually and sneakily, my view of the world had changed. It wasn't an immediate change. It happened over time without me noticing. And I have always wondered what would have happened if that moment after the movie had never happened. Where would I be right now if I did not catch what was happening to me, and decide to own my baggage?

Ever since that point, I have made it my mission to figure out how to save myself from the effects that I feel from this place. And I thank the universe that I realized fairly early on that I needed to make this a priority. Because I walk by miserable people on a daily basis. I interact with people that define themselves by the negativity that they deal with every day. I stand next to people that I wonder what is going on in their head and hoping that they are not thinking that death is better than where they are standing right now. I see all of this happening around me. And I can feel it oozing off others. And I start to feel it ooze onto me. Misery loves company, right? And it is so tempting and, almost easy, to fall into it, to commiserate with how much it sucks, to bash everything happening in the world. But when it oozes onto me, and when I start to absorb it, life becomes dark. And I'm stuck in it. So, I put up a stop sign in my brain. And I stop the ooze from oozing any further. And I tell myself, “You do not have to be miserable because you work in a prison.”

I think most of us can feel the ooze I'm talking about. Where all the negativity around us makes us feel miserable. And buried. But I think we can save ourselves and the people in our lives from this. Where do we start? We accept our baggage. We see and accept that this place is affecting our world. Is it usually pretty? Absolutely not. That is why it's so hard to accept. But in order to head towards a healthier and happier life, we need to own it. I need to accept that I have horrible hypervigilance now. That I am acutely aware of everything around me, sometimes a little jumpy, and not trusting of others' intentions. I have to own that when I drive past a sign out front of a cute little country house that says, “Free grapes out back – you pick,” and my response in my head is, “Yeah right, I am not falling into your murder/kidnapping trap,” that this thought is not normal. Prior to working in the prison, I would have thought that those people were just being nice by sharing their grapes with their small community. I have realized I cannot change or work on these thoughts without realizing and accepting when prison thinking has snuck into my everyday life. I need to own that and try to figure out how I'm going to minimize these effects.

In my quest to keep myself healthy while working in a maximum-security prison, I have also talked to other people about how this place has affected them. People who don't let their kids sit on Santa's lap around the holidays, because they wonder if Santa will molest their child. People who have a hard time paying for things in the store with cash, because then people know they have cash on them and could mug them. Other people

say their kids get a kick out of popping out of nowhere and making them jump; they weren't always that jumpy. I have noticed that I can't sit with my back to the door, I need to be aware of everyone coming into the room I'm in. Others have stated that they feel they are sometimes too hard on their kids; they always need to be in control of their setting at work, and they have a hard time letting go of having to have control of everything in their personal life. These examples are just a touch of what I have heard in my time of training and talking to others on how this setting has altered our world views.

The way people deal with working in this setting and the baggage that comes from it can vary greatly. But can anything be done without knowing that our views of the world have changed? If you do not own your baggage, how do you figure out how to carry it better? I challenge you to look within yourself and start owning those times when the prison thinking has snuck into your everyday thinking. When you look at the world through the glasses you were handed when you walked through the gates. When you have thought of something that you stuffed down, and don't want to tell anyone else, because you know it was not a "normal" reaction to a situation.

It's owning those moments that will help you figure out how to better carry the baggage we all carry from working in the correctional setting.





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The vision of the CF2F course is to assist in **promoting the wellbeing of your most valuable asset**, your **STAFF**, as individuals and as teams, thus improving your agency's **culture**, and increasing the probability of **enhancing retention, recruitment**, and successful **fulfillment** of your agency's mission.

This vision comes to life over time through the persistent pursuit of successful integration of CF2F in your agency. It's as simple as **A, B, C**, while also requiring careful planning and follow-up.

Content Considerations: CF2F Specifics

A

- Provide information
- Encourage application
- Champion transformation

Strategic Planning: Sustainability Matters

B

- Solicit shareholder collaboration
- Determine direct delivery vs. instructor-led delivery
- Provide appropriate resources
- Track attendance and evaluations
- Plan for refresher trainings
- Plan for instructor support

Implementation Methods: Practical Approaches

C

- Plan the logistics
- Class numbers and composition
- Locations, dates, physical conditions
- Instructor selection and training process
- Deliver content with fidelity
- Prepare to respond to participants' emotional needs
- Protect participants' psychological safety

"In my 17 years in corrections, never has something impacted me the way this training has. I feel cleansed from the madness corrections brings into our lives. From this day forward, I will make changes within myself and make a difference in someone else's life. Thank you!" ~ J.V., CO



For more details on this process [click here](#).

RESEARCH BENCH: JOB DESIGN AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION, PART 3

BY GREG MORTON, MS

As we continue to examine the possibility that intrinsically motivational tasks can be designed into the work of a correctional professional, one possibility is to consider concepts that have been shown through research to build intrinsic motivation into other jobs. Realizing that the specialized correctional environment might require new solutions, and also create a new set of unique issues to deal with, we will explore some aspects of those very complex issues.

Think back to your initial correctional job interview. Based on the belief that all correctional employees are leaders in one way or another, what answer would you have given to this question, **“How important is it to you to do work that improves the future lives of the people you lead?”** Perhaps followed by, **“How would you apply that to this job?”**

This consideration for the future of others is known academically as **“generativity”** and has been shown through research to relate positively to job satisfaction and work engagement, and to increases in both autonomy and task significance when applied in the workplace.¹

Generativity in the workplace is typically thought of as the desire of more seasoned workers to pass on knowledge based on experience to their newer colleagues. It is also defined as the actions of professionals that enable them to care for themselves or their dependents in meaningful ways in the future, much as a dentist advises you on long-term dental health. Or a vocational instructor prepares an apprentice for a successful career. Generativity shapes your professional present-day behavior as you consider actions that need to be taken and decisions that need to be made by others (in this case, the offender population) in the future if they are to improve their lot.

Don't get me wrong. I recognize from decades of effort how challenging that is for us with our population. But I also want to point out that if your agency has a mission statement that in any way refers to reduced criminal behavior in the future, generativity is exactly what is called for from the corrections workforce.

And if research shows it to apply to job satisfaction in other professions, wouldn't it be useful to apply it to ourselves?

The answer is, yes, and is captured with such real-life clarity in a recent article,² it might as well be a CO's diary. The authors mince no words on the hurdles that the corrections culture places in front of an employee's drive to “care” for the future of justice-involved persons. But even so, with multiple true-life examples, in this article you will find evidence of the generative value of professionally appropriate, boundary-suitable efforts to improve the future lives of the justice-involved population. In this article, you will

find generativity described as a Mission Critical correctional outcome, produced by correctional frontline staff in their everyday careers.

In other words, it happens. It does. We have all done it. And we feel better about ourselves and our profession as a result. We just feel the need somehow to have to hide it. Much to our detriment personally, and to the detriment of our overall professional reputation. In what ways might our profession change if generativity were to become a focal point rather than a shameful secret, or something we may almost feel like we have to justify or make excuses for when we engage in it?

SO WHAT:

Consider the question at the top of the article and apply it to an interview for your current assignment, **“How important is it to do work that improves the future lives of the people you lead?”** And follow it with the second question, **“How would you apply that to this job?”** Would your current answers be different from your initial ones? Have negative experiences changed your overall view of the corrections profession?

Because we have an overabundance of long-term negative feedback in the profession, our answers to these questions tend to become increasingly pessimistic as our careers continue. Recidivism is conspicuous, successful community re-entry is invisible. Yet, that is where the humanity in correctional generativity finds full expression.

We may tell ourselves that “offenders are human beings too,” but we often confine that opinion to the present, ignoring their futures, perhaps because we do not really expect them to turn their lives around for the better as time goes on.

*“Key to turning around this fatalistic outlook is to find ways for officers to learn more widely and purposively of prisoners who do succeed on release and who, at least in part, **put their success down to the actions and/or words of particular prison staff.** That would, at a very basic but important level, give the generative dimensions of officer work a recognizable face.”² (pp. 73-74).*

When prisoner success can be attributed, at least in part, to actions and/or words of prison staff, staff’s job satisfaction, and sense of meaning and justifiable pride in the job flourish, all of which we know impact staff’s wellbeing positively.

One of the reasons that our work cultures block the motivational value of healthy generativity is that our personal safety is on the line. In a sense we undermine our own professional motivation as an unintended outcome of the need to keep ourselves safe. In sum, we tell ourselves that the corrections profession is a daily battle between hypervigilance and humanity. One or the other. Either/or. (And this inevitably leads to an “us against them” mentality, shifting staff’s focus away from helping others to their own survival.)

Professional vigilance is of course an important correctional skill, until its fatigued cousin, chronic hypervigilance shows up, that is. At that point, fear for our safety has become an occupational and measurable source of demotivation and dissatisfaction. No amount of hypervigilance will ever become a source of job satisfaction. This is partly because we begin to see neutral events as threats, and partly because it is limited to a “one-safe-shift-at-a-time” occupational outcome. It narrows our professional vision and minimizes our overall professional reputation. On the other hand, correctional generativity sees the possibility of a successful and positive future for the greater community.

When describing correctional generativity, either/or becomes replaced by vigilance **and** humanity in balance. *“Approaching prisoners as people with the potential to do good things rather than as ‘offenders’ tied*

permanently to their past wrongs appeared key to the emergence of generative interactions.” ... “Significantly, the most effective examples of care tended not to occur as part of any institutional program but rather in the course of informal and spontaneous interactions over time.”² (p. 66).

Please note, we do not advocate a reduction in professional boundaries or the sharing of personal information with each other. That is not generativity. **Generative interactions are about their lives, not ours.** The generative outcome belongs to the offender. Assisting in the facilitation of their generative process belongs to us.

The initial paper referenced at the beginning of this article describes professional generativity in two ways: (a) generative **motive** (the **“inner desire”** to positively impact the future of others), and (b) generative **behavior** (**“actions”** that positively impact someone’s future)² (p.4). Your generative motive is captured in your answers to the interview questions we have posed above. Your professionally boundary-based, generative behavior is the follow through.

References

¹Doerwald, F., Zacher, H., Scheibe, S., & van Yperen, N. W. (2021). Generativity at work: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 125, 103521. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346625100_Generativity_at_Work_A_Meta-Analysis

²Halsey, M., Deegan, S. In Search of Generativity in Prison Officer Work: Balancing Care and Control in Custodial Settings. (2017). *Prison Journal*, 97, 52-78. DOI:10.1177/0032885516679380

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.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“The surf that distresses the ordinary swimmer produces in the surf-rider the super-joy of going clean through it.”

Oswald Chambers

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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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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DESERT WATERS
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