The Correctional Trainer Winter 2006

Correctional Officer Training & Professional Development

By
Dr. Emran Wasim Khan, ***Professor of Law Enforcement & Justice Administration at Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois***

It is probably not surprising that the evolution of a Correctional Officer bears resemblance to a winding path in its evolvement as a profession. A Correctional Officer's (COs) required everyday performance can only tell so much! Such requirement is supposed to usually parallel what corrections and the larger society expects corrections and COs to be; nothing, however, is "routine" in conducting the business of corrections!

This article examines the ideal: responsibilities of a CO, corollary tasks –its development, and how the criticality of training can do much to resolve the sustainability and continued development of a CO as a professional.

Development of CO Tasks

Griffin (1993) writes that early in prison history the CO was known as a "watchman" (Shearer, 1971, p. 139). He further quotes, "One or more of them shall patrol the yard carefully examining every portion of it in the course of their rounds; see that all is safe and upon any emergency apprise the night overseers" (Prison Discipline Society, 1972, p. 85). "Keeper" was another name given to the early CO. The "keeper" was literally the "keeper of the keys," which was considered an important task.

According to Griffin (1993), during the late 1800s, a military posture was taken and a guard was called a "subordinate" officer. Subordinate officers, he further writes, were encouraged to deal with a refractory prisoner by "breaking the man's spirit by punishment" (Prison Association, Report of Executive Committee, 1869, p.123).

Hewitt (1982/1983) wrote that "It is literally a face-to-face job. Corrections Officers get to know their charges immediately. They have to. Any change in an inmate's behavior can signal trouble" (p.233). Hewitt quotes an officer who says that "At the academy (Correction Officers Training Academy) they teach you basic security, drug abuse, the legal aspect of the job, weapons, crowd control, but only the basics" ... … "the rest you have to learn by experience" (p.233).

Responsibilities of a CO

The California Board of Corrections (1987), in its Corrections Officer Validation Report and Technical Adequacy Report grouped CO task items into task categories by linking job tasks to worker characteristics and described the same in the report's Table 3.2 as follows:

(1) Booking, Receiving, and Releasing
(2) Escorting, Transporting
(3) Record Keeping, Report Writing
(4) Supervising Non-inmate Movement, Visitors
(5) Searching and Securing
(6) Supervising Inmates
(7) Communicating
(8) [Performing] Physically Demanding Tasks
(9)[Carrying Out] Miscellaneous Tasks
(10) Supervising Other Detention Facility Personnel

In the process of attempting to describe a COs job, a DACUM (NAC, 1989) was conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections in conjunction with consultants and researchers from the Oklahoma State University. The results of the study list the following job duties:

- Maintain Security (41% of total work time)
- Supervise Daily Inmate Activities (26 % of total work time)
- Maintain Written Documentation (16%)
- Follow Emergency Procedures (06 %)
- Complete Other Duties As Assigned (11 %)
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The researchers explain in specific detail as to what tasks actually are performed under each of the above categories. Work requirements and skills are also outlined with the above. The findings of the study elaborate the job duties in order of criticality and importance.

Griffin (1993) sums up by stating that many elements of the effective officer of the past exist in the present: Today's officer must still be a watchman, a keeper, a supervisor, an officer; but today's CO must balance Goffman's (1961, pp.74-83) concept of "people work" with Merton's (1961, pp. 9-57) description of the "bureaucrat".

According to Bryans (1995), "Some of the new work" requires, "comprehensive training for prison officers to equip them with the necessary skills". In an analysis of COs' task (in a "Boot Camp") and their training needs, Camp (1991) wrote that, "Officers should be well trained in the application of military-type discipline, as well as in the use of interpersonal management skills. In addition, special training in dealing with physical security and inmate group management appears essential" (p.171).

Farkas (1995) asserts that prior to 1956 the role of guard was clearly defined; maintaining security and internal order (Carroll, 1974). Indeed, the term "guard" suggests a custodial identity and function Farkas (1995) further attests. She writes that the change of the title to "correctional officer" reflects the introduction of the rehabilitative philosophy to the field of corrections. According to Territo, Halstead, and Bromley (2004, p.478), correctional officers are:

> Responsible for maintaining security with a correctional facility, also responsible for the custody, control, care, job training, work performance, and physical restraints, when necessary, of inmates in the facility. Performs a variety of duties, including the following: supervise inmate meals, visits, recreational programs, and other congregate activities; escort inmates within and outside the facility; verify identification of and number of inmates in designated areas; and demonstrate proficiency in use of firearms. Minimum qualifications are as follows: age 19, U.S. citizen, high school diploma or its equivalent, must pass a basic recruit training course.

COs often must, Petersen (1995) writes, "play psychiatrist, nurse and cop. Some inmates are furious, some are in tears and others are still high on drugs". Sandhu (1972) wrote that the COs work closest to the prisoner, and spend more time with them than any other official. "There are new demands on them to add to their already heavy custodial duties. They must develop some understanding of the prisoner, talk to him, offer him consolation and counsel" (Sandhu, 1972, p. 26).

According to Stohr and Zupan (1992), COs "occupy a unique position in the organizational structure of a jail or any other correctional institution. They serve as both the primary vehicle for control of inmates as well as the primary vehicle for provision of inmate services" (p. 76). They believe that in the jails of the 1990s and beyond, "the role of the correctional officer as service provider is likely to be solidify, rather than dissipate, making the ability of this street-level bureaucrat to accurately identify the needs of clients indispensable and of greater primacy" (p. 89).

Outcome of CO Training

Training is critical in sustaining a professional work force, writes Bales (1997, p.x). He maintains that COs who are thoroughly trained in technical, interpersonal, and helping skills can handle more responsibilities and emergencies calmly. They are more likely to respond quickly and efficiently to urgent situations. Bales (1997, pp. x-xi) further contends that training that includes emergency drills, combined with experience, will help staff react appropriately to the many types of problems and issues they will confront in their day-to-day duties.

The California Board of Corrections (1987) in its Technical Adequacy Report, (Section 2, p. 5), outlines that "a systematic description of job performance is the foundation upon which effective training programs are designed and developed. It is also the basis for making key decisions regarding training content and methods".

The California Board of Corrections (1987) report on Standards and Training for Corrections Program, carried out by Personnel Decisions Incorporated, clustered 105 individual Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA)'s of CO into groups representing common characteristics and elaborated the same as follows in the reports "Table 3.1". The report pointed to twenty-four (24) CO Worker Characteristics as:

- Facility Specific Knowledge

- Knowledge of the Legal System
- Psychological Training
- Street Knowledge
- First Aid
- Using Firearms
- Operating Communications Equipment
- Oral Communication
- Reading
- Written Communication
- Quantitative Skill
- Observation Acuity
- Driving
- Self-defense/Physical Restraints of Others
- Social Skills
- Motivation/Dependability
- Stress Tolerance
- Dominance/Self-esteem
- Non-autonomy
- Flexibility.
- Tolerance of Negative Aspects of the Job
- Searching
- Vision and Hearing Abilities
- Physical Abilities

Training is vital and a basis for continued growth of the correctional workforce as a profession. If such knowledge of the needed characteristics of a CO is well thought out and the implementation of such a dynamic process is appropriately planned for general development and/or individual enhancement (Wicks, 1980), thoroughly trained COs promise professionalization and can augur assurances of appropriate and improved delivery of services in performing correctional duties.

Professionalism through Training

"Training is not icing on the cake, a privilege for C.O.'s. It is a right that the C.O. as a professional should have" (Wicks, 1980, p.47). As observed by Gill (1958, p.8) the 1870 American Prison Association's Declaration of Principles, reiterates:

> Special training, as well as, high qualities of head and heart is required to make a good prison or reformatory officer. Then only will the administration of public punishment become scientific, uniform, and successful, when it is raised to the dignity of a profession and men are specially trained for other pursuits.

According to Coetzee (1997), the correctional official requires the knowledge of the correctional services system, departmental policy, job content, academic knowledge and knowledge of the prisoner as a person. Apart from knowledge, Coetzee (1997) suggests that it is also important that the correctional official have communication skills, self

knowledge, teamwork skills, skills in dealing with conflict, coping with stress, educational skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills that will enable a CO to act professionally. Snarr (1996) points out that the "amount of actual or perceived administrative support along with the formal training of the officer also affects the individual's perception of the job" (p.183).

Since it is the attitude, in particular, of a professional official that distinguishes him from others, it is important to look into this matter thoroughly. As outlined by Coetzee (1997), this behavior relates to an ethical basis. "An ethical basis indicates what is the highest, the most important and the most noble. It is something that can correspond to values, norms and standards." In other words, it indicates what is right or wrong. The value and norms that the correctional official must strive for to be regarded as professional are also derived from what is regarded as correct, adequate, humane and therefore, worth striving for. It also determines the correctional official's attitude to work, which is also known as work ethics.

According to Phillips (1991), "the purpose of training and development is to maintain and improve effectiveness and efficiency of individuals within the organization" (p.59). J. V. Fornataro (1965) emphasized the need to have respect for correctional employees' abilities to contribute and a willingness to take part in training and education, "even when it challenges some previously sacred principles" (p.7). Phillips (1991) further attests that such efforts can have sustained effect if it influences the dealings and performances of line managers so as to serve better both the self-interest of employees (personal return, both intangible and intangible) and the needs of the organization whether it is a return on investment, and/or accomplishment of short and long term vision/mission. In the words of Fornatara (1965. p.7):

> Education engages people with ideas, and ideas have the power to affect behavior in turn. It is precisely because ideas are contagious and dynamic in quality that they make persistent inroads upon previously existing institutional values and arrangements. The training content may stimulate ways of perceiving the offender which causes the officer to question both his private behavior and the corporate institutional behavior, in view of the declared purposes of the institution. It may be a short step from this position to lack of sympathy with some of the things he and his colleagues are expected to do.

Besides enhanced knowledge, standards and high ethics, professionalism is achieved through training (National Platform on Corrections Committee, 1983). It also ensures that correctional professionals, especially COs, will be ready to respond to the challenges of managing overcrowded correctional facilities while ensuring safety for themselves, the offenders and the citizens.

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