

SURVIVING IN CORRECTIONS

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A GUIDE FOR
CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS

By

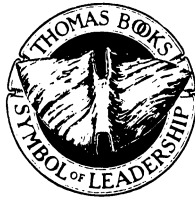
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This book is dedicated to Correctional Officer Earl DeMarse. Throughout his many years as a correctional officer he was known by both staff and inmates as an honest, fair, and quiet man who performed his job with excellence. The memory of Officer DeMarse has been the overriding inspiration in writing this book. His tremendous contribution and work in corrections is humbly recognized through our dedication of this book to him.

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PREFACE

This book has been written to provide students with an understanding of the dynamics and problems that correctional workers face in the unique world within correctional institutions. The material presented is a blend of general concepts, specific information, and guidance for correctional staff. This blend will give the student a practical view of the dynamics of interpersonal relations between inmates and staff and the pressures correctional workers face in performing their duties. It will be valuable to the student who plans to enter the corrections profession or who is interested in understanding some basic facts of life in prisons and jails.

INTRODUCTION

Professionals or inmates who enter a correctional setting for the first time, particularly a typical prison or jail, experience a sudden sense of isolation from the rest of the world. Fear for one's personal safety accompanied by an irrepressible curiosity causes the newcomer to be easily identified and labelled by seasoned members of the correctional setting as a *new fish*. The feelings of fear, isolation, and curiosity strike one simultaneously with such power and suddenness that it is often referred to as *culture shock*. The shock is not reserved for novices to the field of corrections. Inmates who are moved from one system to another often feel an acute sense of insecurity and fear in the new setting until they meet old friends or make new ones and adapt to the social system of the new environment. This book will prepare would-be correctional practitioners for their roles, whether they are currently preparing in a college, a university, or an agency training program. Our contribution toward this goal is to mitigate the impact of the forthcoming cultural shock by providing the student or trainee with some basic understanding of the correctional environment, the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships between the members of the community within the correctional setting, and how to respond to the pressures and problems that are faced daily by the correctional staff.

What is it about a correctional setting that accounts for the shock experienced by the beginning professional? There are several factors that work together to comprise the basis of this shock and that create an environment unique to the correctional facility. In fact, one could argue that correctional institutions are, by design, abnormal settings whose primary purpose is to punish offenders by depriving them of a normal existence for a period of time. There are several aspects of the environment that are strikingly

abnormal, with perhaps the most astonishing reality being that the conditions there are ultimately accepted by the members of the institutional community as normal.

The first thing one is struck by upon entering most correctional institutions is the noise level. It can be compared to a football stadium during game time. Like the football stadium, a mass of humanity is packed into a confined area that is constructed with concrete and steel, thus, normal conversation is exaggerated and echoed off of the stone structure, amplifying into at least a modest wave of incoherent shouting. The novice is then struck by the fact that all of those labelled as dangerous by society are moving about with relative freedom. Some may be close enough to come in physical contact with and will likely be staring inquisitively at the newcomer. While being overcome by the noise and within close proximity to the inmates who are freely moving about, a lonely guard or two will be noticed who may be nonchalantly filling out paper work or chatting easily with an inmate. It quickly occurs to the novice that he/she is at the mercy of the *dangerous* people who are staring at him/her. An inner feeling of panic comes over almost all of those entering for the first time.

Nevertheless, the inner feeling of panic subsides after a period of time, in spite of the *cat calls* and obscenities hurled by several inmates, and one becomes accustomed to the noise levels and being surrounded by people. Moreover, there are further encounters to be faced by new staff members. The novice will have to prove him/herself to fellow staff members, as well as inmates. While these co-workers will give formal welcomes to the new entrants, they will show little trust in him/her until they feel the novice understands and will observe the unwritten rules, such as keeping peace with inmates through compromises and judicious, rather than strict, application of institutional rules and regulations. Inmates will want to understand and be able to predict the behavior of the inexperienced employee in order to avoid conflicts with that person. The current staff may not make the trainee feel that he/she is a functioning part of the organization until he/she begins to behave in ways that are acceptable and to exhibit proper attitudes. Some inmates will create situations requiring a response on the part of the beginner in an effort to understand his/her

reaction patterns under pressure. It is not unusual for a new staff member to be put in contrived situations by the inmates in order to provide amusement at the expense of the novice. The inmates, in turn, may gain peer recognition, as well as something to boast about.

During the initial phases of his/her training, the novice will experience confusing signals from the prison staff. Some of the organization's written policies and procedures will be followed faithfully, while particular policies and procedures will be totally ignored by veteran employees. Some experienced personnel will attempt to undermine formal training, leaving the trainee with doubt about how to conduct him/herself in the performance of duties and in his/her personal interactions with more experienced colleagues.

However, the novice will begin to overcome the anomie that is created by the myriad of new and often contradictory stimuli and will begin to find a set of responses and behaviors that will help him/her deal with the institutional pressures. We will give the student or correctional trainee a substantial head start on developing a repertoire of skills with which to deal with problems that he/she will face in the correctional institutional setting, by giving the student or trainee an understanding of the problems and pressures that will be faced, why those problems and pressures exist, and how to deal with those pressures in a positive and professional manner.

This book consists of nine chapters. The first chapter provides a general framework of the diversity of behaviors encountered in a correctional setting. Chapter 2 discusses the attitudes and behaviors that inmates typically display and discusses some of the dynamics that formulate patterns of inmate behaviors. The third chapter presents a straightforward discussion of the fundamentals of inmate supervision that correctional workers must understand in order to perform their work effectively. Chapters 4 and 5 cover the unique aspects of working with inmates, such as dealing with inmates who suffer from emotional problems, are suicidal, play psychological games, and become involved in homosexual activity. Chapter 6 addresses our responsibilities in interacting with members of other ethnic groups and of the opposite sex, whether they

are inmates or co-workers. Chapter 7 goes over the legal aspects of correctional work and describes the rules, which have been created by litigation, that correctional workers must follow when supervising inmates. The eighth chapter traces the sources of stress that correctional workers will be subjected to in the prison or jail setting and discusses the steps a correctional worker can take to cope with organizational stress. The final chapter provides some direction and insights to help the reader understand what attitudes and behaviors must be a part of the correctional worker before he/she will be considered a professional.

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SURVIVING IN CORRECTIONS

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIORAL DIFFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

Modern day corrections requires the staff to be as knowledgeable as possible regarding the understanding of different behaviors they see in the correctional setting. Ultimately, the staff must react to other's behavior in a manner that reflects the goals of the jail or prison they are working in. Before adequate supervision can be accomplished, the staff must view situations and behaviors in an objective and fair manner. The safety and security of any institution today is directly reflected by the line staff's ability to understand and communicate effectively with other staff and the inmate population under their care and custody.

Before discussing behavior specific to inmates housed in jails and prisons, it is important that the basic principles that make up individual personality development and functioning be understood by the correctional staff. This understanding will help the correctional staff develop a realistic and more objective attitude and demeanor when actually performing their role in dealing with both staff and inmates. In addition to the basis of personality development, this chapter will also briefly discuss motivation of human behavior to further understanding of why people behave the way they do. The goal of this chapter is not to study the intricacies of human behavior and all its ramifications as detailed in psychology texts. This chapter will clarify some very basic issues regarding human behavior in order to provide a fundamental understanding for the correctional staff. It then progresses to specifics regarding inmate behaviors and staffs' behaviors and suggested ways of working with people in corrections.

SOURCES OF PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES

Every person possesses a unique pattern of traits that characterize them as individuals. This pattern of traits is called *personality*—it is personality that differentiates all of us and makes us separate individuals. There are two basic sources of personality: heredity and environment (Brill, 1973). Opinions vary regarding the relative importance of each; however, both play an important role in making each one of us a unique and different person. It is obvious that some life behavior is determined by genetic endowment, while other aspects are influenced by environmental circumstances.

At conception each new individual receives a *genetic endowment* from his/her parents that immediately starts to influence personality development. Such characteristics as gender, race, size, physical abilities and limitations are determined before birth through genes passed on from the natural mother and father. Heredity is an important factor in providing the basics for development and in determining how a person reacts to his/her environment. Even with dramatic strides taken towards lessening gender labels on roles, gender still has a tremendous impact on how an individual will act and feel throughout his/her lifetime. We also inherit our size and physical stature; this may affect our self-image which, in turn, may affect our behavior. Moreover, we differ in physical abilities, appearance, and attributes, all of which will limit or direct our social role choices or responses to stimulus from our environment. As with other genetic endowments, ethnic or racial composition influences life choices and behaviors.

The other critical factor in looking at personality is environmental influences throughout life (Dubos, 1968). It is crucial for the correctional staff to be aware of the tremendous influence that environment plays in the shaping of the individual. A person's personality development throughout his/her life is continuously shaped by environmental factors. Many experts in the field of psychology believe that these factors are the most critical in the establishment of values, ways of behavior, and the formation of assumptions we develop about ourselves and the world.

Three of these factors manifest themselves readily in the behav-

ior of inmates and staff. The first factor is the geographic area where the person is born or resides. For example, an individual living in a rural area, who has had little difficulty during his/her lifetime attaining adequate housing and food, will think, feel, and act differently than someone raised in an urban ghetto. Likewise, someone born and raised in the Deep South may have certain values and beliefs ingrained in him/her that may not exist in someone from the Northern part of the country. The second major category of environmental factors that affect personality development is sociocultural factors. These consist of culture and the type of society to which the person is indoctrinated (Barclay, 1971). Language, customs, food, and dress are all examples of sociocultural factors that influence behavior. The influence of dress and appearance can be seen easily among different societies in the world, for example. The third category is subgroups. Subgroups include family, peers, social class, occupational groups, religious groups, and even prison groups. For example, correctional officers often establish informal groups both on and off the job, wherein much of their behavior is based upon the norms established by the group. Inmates do the same thing and the influence of subgroups on any type of behavior or beliefs in the correctional setting should not be underestimated. The development of any human being is a constant and ongoing process. Important in determining how this process evolves are the ever present environmental factors. These critical factors of personality development must be recognized by staff before any real understanding of peers and inmates can be accomplished.

Another approach to understanding individuals and their differences is the concept of *frame of reference*. This means a person's values, beliefs, ways of behaving, and attitudes about everything and anything. It is the essential integrating core of personality. Each person's frame of reference is different from another's, and behavior can be much more easily understood and dealt with if this concept remains in the minds of the correctional staff. The staff does not have to condone any beliefs or behaviors exhibited by prisoners and, quite the reverse, may impose sanctions on certain behaviors inside the institution. A realization, however, that this behavior is influenced by a frame of reference that is

completely different from that of a staff person's can offer better ways of handling situations and maintaining his/her sense of stability while working in jails and prisons.

As outlined in Figure 1, there are three basic types of assumptions a person makes throughout his/her life that are a direct result of frame of reference. These assumptions determine behavior and are a direct result of an individual's genetic and environmental factors. These types of assumptions are reality, value, and possibility. Reality assumptions are based on the individual's beliefs, views, and values. This becomes that person's perception of the world around him/her. It relates to a person's belief as to what kind of person he/she is, as well as other people. In general, reality assumptions are perceptions of the nature of life and the world that a person lives in. Value assumptions are one's view as to the way things should be. It is with value assumptions that we determine what is right and wrong. Possibility assumptions are perceptions of how everything in life can be. It entails the possibility for change and how the opportunity for personal growth is perceived. Again, all three types of assumptions are developed individually and constitute the individual's frame of reference.

Even though every person's frame of reference is unique and different, it is practical, for our purposes, to briefly categorize two groups of people and compare frames of references. The comparison between inmates and correctional staff is useful to clarify why staff and inmates often think and behave differently. One of the key characteristics of reality assumptions is the nature of the world the person lives in. Perceptions of reality will differ dramatically between staff and inmates. The staff's perception of the nature of the world is colored by the prison or jail environment, but only for forty hours a week. The inmates' perceptions are influenced by twenty-four hours a day of prison bars, rules, regulations, constant noise from other inmates, fear of physical or sexual assault, as well as deprivation of material and psychological well-being that incarceration imposes. The environmental influence of jail or prison naturally causes reality assumptions about life and the world to change. For inmates, these assumptions turn into negative, shallow, and pessimistic views of reality. The varying exposure to these environmental factors alone has the potential to cause tremendous