

MCA TODAY

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News from the Michigan Corrections Association Summer 2009

Welcome to MCA Today's Integrity Issue

Integrity is often considered a difficult, lofty concept. Really, it can be defined in simple terms: doing the right thing, telling the truth, being dependable and professional, etc. Integrity occur in a variety of examples. Sometimes we need to look a little bit beneath the surface to benefit from the lesson.

I have a friend who was recently called to be a juror. This was not a case of zipping down to the local court for a quick session of jury selection. The call came from the federal Court, seventy miles distant.

The usual excuses for being excused came quickly to my friend's mind. She had kids who had to walk home from school. Her pre-school class would have to be cancelled without a substitute, thus making a hardship for the parents of her students. The distance was an overwhelming obstacle.

As the interviews went on, she saw that others had driven further. Her inner voice told her that her reasons for being excused were really selfish. Integrity spoke to her and she performed her civic duty with dignity and no further complaint.



Integrity is a necessary component for those who work in the criminal justice system. The public, offenders, and other staff depend on our honesty and professional actions. Without it, others lose faith in the system. And while our system might not be totally perfect, our individual acts of integrity bring the real closer to the ideal.

Inside this issue are living examples of integrity. Please check out the page that honors MDOC officers of the year. Also, the theme of this issue is explored by two different authors.

MCA TODAY would benefit through submission of articles from different areas of our association. New perspectives are welcome. Please add to the strength of MCA by sending news and articles to Joe Bouchard at bouchard@up.net.

Joe Bouchard, Editor
MCA TODAY



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News from the Michigan Corrections Association

HOUTZ RECOGNIZED AS 2009 OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Lakeland Correctional Facility's Donna Houtz has been selected as the Michigan Department of Corrections 2009 Corrections Officer of the Year. Officers were submitted for consideration by their respective facility.

Houtz started her career with the department in 1990 at Central Complex in Jackson. She transferred to the Adrian correctional facilities where she was promoted to the position of Resident Unit Officer (RUO). As an RUO, Houtz trained important programs like "Thinking for a Change," Substance Abuse, Collaborative Case Management, and Leadership. She was invited to participate in the mentoring program for new employees as well.

In 2002, Officer Houtz transferred to Lakeland Correctional Facility in Coldwater. As an RUO at Lakeland, her attention to detail, dedication, and professionalism is appreciated by staff and prisoners.

In 2005, she came to the aid of a prisoner who needed CPR.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FOUR FINALISTS

The four remaining finalists deserve recognition. Their accomplishments both personally and professionally are impressive. They represent the MDOC with class and distinction.

Officer Kirk DeWitt has been employed with the Michigan Department of Corrections for over 20

years, starting at Riverside Correctional Facility in 1988. During his career, DeWitt has also worked at G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility in Jackson, and Mid-Michigan and St. Louis correctional facilities, both in St. Louis, MI.

Officer Howard Freeman has 22 years with the Michigan Department of Corrections, starting at G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility in Jackson in 1987. He also worked at the Downtown Detroit Corrections Center and for the past ten years., worked at Macomb Correctional Facility in New Haven, MI.

Corrections Security Representative Charles Levens works in the Field Operations Administration (FOA) as a member of the



From Left: Donna Houtz, Howard Freeman, Charles Levens, Kirk DeWitt, and Philip Thomas.

Outstate Region Absconder Recovery Unit (ARU). He started his career with the Michigan Department of Corrections at Standish Maximum Correctional Facility as a corrections officer. He promoted to Resident Unit Officer and

Sergeant before transferring to St. Louis and then Pine River correctional facilities. He then worked at the Buena Vista Corrections Center and in 2004 moved into the position he currently holds with the ARU.

Officer Philip Thomas started with the Michigan Department of Corrections in 1996 at Huron Valley Men's Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti. Now called Huron Valley Complex - Men, Thomas worked there as a corrections officer or acting sergeant until his recent transfer to Woodland Center Correctional Facility in June 2009.

CONFERENCE ALERT!!

We will hold our winter conference at the Michigan State Police Academy in Lansing, MI on January 22, 2010. The one-day conference will include nationally recognized presenter and Los Angeles County Sheriff John Williams discussing inmate communications, gang identification, and contraband detection. Mark your calendars!!



INTEGRITY PIE

BY JOE BOUCHARD

There are many one-word definitions that come to mind when one considers the concept of integrity. Among them are; principle, character, soundness, ethical, and honesty.

Recently, I was relating a tale of doing the right thing. This must have come off as a bit self-righteous to one of the listeners. With an impish twinkle in her eye, she replied, "Why don't you just eat a huge slice of integrity pie?"

Perhaps this was a comment that illustrated my *just desserts*. I realize that integrity should be delivered humbly and with no traces of pride. As a flawed human being (a work in progress), I pondered the importance of integrity unencumbered by ego. Then I ate a slice of humble pie.

Professional integrity means working in a predictable, uniform way. This is crucial since we work in a potentially dangerous environment.

Those that perform the challenging job of managing offenders in an institutional setting find comfort in anticipated events. Integrity builds this soundness.

There are other benefits to work settings in which professional integrity is valued and practiced. Our work ethic is fulfilled. Our stakeholders demand integrity in its civil employees. This also opens the door for uniformity toward prisoners and toward colleagues.

Through integrity, we are role model to

new employees. And we serve as positive examples to our peers.

Staff depends on colleagues with integrity. Trust is such an important issue for those that work inside.

It is difficult to rebuild trust in this setting once it has been broken, and once broken, it erodes quickly. Integrity buttresses trust.

Allegations of staff misconduct or corruption are easier to dismiss for those have consistently demonstrated professional morality. It means never having to remember a cover-up story. There is no need for any fabrications. The only story told is the truth.

Perhaps the most important aspect of integrity is that it inspires safety. Uniformity, fairness, and predictability are products of professional integrity. All of those support the concept of a safer facility.

But, it is not all sweetly idealistic on the road of integrity. Human nature is not always receptive to high work ethics and honesty. There are some of the problems that come from this concept.

Integrity draws criticism from jealous colleagues. Those threatened by the high work ethic of others may reward distinguished standards with gossip or sabotage. They prefer to make themselves look better by bringing others down.

Also, those with integrity may be the tar-

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gets of a scheming offender. By embarrassing a paragon of uprightness, some prisoners can gain instant institutional respect.

Integrity has pitfalls, but it is worth it. By adhering to the mission statement, taking things in stride, and looking at the larger picture, many will maintain their foundation of fairness. The benefits will outweigh the difficulties encountered in search of professional integrity.

About the Author – MCA Board Member Joe Bouchard is a Librarian at Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility within the Michigan Department of Corrections. He is also a member of the Board of Experts for *The Corrections Professional* and an instructor of Corrections and Psychology for Gogebic Community College. Bouchard, *MCA Today's* Editor, also serves as the Editor of *The Correctional Trainer*. You can reach him at (906) 353-7070 ext 1321.

GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE



It is no secret that corrections staff place their lives on the line every day. Everyone in the profession - officers, support staff, programs professionals and administrative personnel - work in a potentially dangerous place. These are the few who are equipped to face peril on a daily basis and keep staff, offenders and the public safer.

In another sense, there is a group of corrections professionals who literally become a life enhancing part of the public. In a very real way, they give their life essence to those who need to maintain and prolong health and life. These are the staff who donate blood.

According to the American Red Cross website:

- ◆ Blood is needed for emergencies and for people who have cancer, blood disorders, sickle cell, anemia and other illnesses. Some people need regular blood transfusions to live.

- ◆ For nearly 5 million people who receive blood transfusions every year, your donation can make the difference between life and death. In fact, you may help save up to three lives with just one donation.

Truly, little gifts can bring great rewards. But do not be dissuaded from giving with the thought that one donation will not matter. It is the notion that though we may give a figurative drop in the bucket, it all adds up. And corrections staff who donate blood are heroes – one pint at a time.

You can learn more about donating blood by visiting www.redcross.org.





CRACKS IN THE WALL

By
Lt. Gary F. Cornelius (retired)

One of the things that we learn working with inmates is the advice to follow. You know the informal rules that are said to us-do not bring anything for an inmate, never trust an inmate, etc. Each correctional officer (CO) -whether working in a jail, prison or juvenile detention facility adheres to his or her own version of the "code."

In the text *Corrections: A Comprehensive View, Second Edition*, author Ira Silverman recounts research first conducted by M.A. Farkas in 1997 at two mid western state prisons. Ms. Farkas identified eight norms that correctional officers identified as being the most critical to follow in staying both safe and effective on the job.

These norms-or what can be called "The Correctional Officers' Code" can be viewed as the bricks in the wall that figuratively keep us safe in the institution. These bricks serve as a guide. The problem is that when confronted with this wall, the inmates look for cracks-either the ones that they can make or the ones that they can exploit. How well the wall is built is how well the officer follows the code. Like in most rules of life there are exceptions-and I will clarify them.

Here are these "bricks". With each, I will discuss how offenders may work to put a crack in them.

- ♦ Always aid another officer: True-we should go to the aid of fellow officers in real, potential or perceived danger. This danger could be verbal-such as an inmate arguing with an officer, physical, such as in a CO trying to restrain an inmate or defending himself or herself, or danger where the CO may be bending the rules-such as letting an inmate into an unauthorized area or getting by without a search. While inmates know that just about every CO will aid another CO, the inmate will look for officers who bend the rules-and befriend them. Such ploys may be-"please let me go up to that cellblock to say hi to my cousin", or "the other officer already searched me". If the CO is weak and non assertive, the inmate wins.
- ♦ Don't get too friendly with inmates: Through the plays in their "street savvy" playbook, inmates will definitely work to have this brick removed. As we know, inmates want to be your friend and will persuade you to forget that they are lawbreakers. They generally live in a world morally different than yours. They do this by "buttering you up" and using schemes ranging from lies to sexual flirtation-and we have all heard of COs falling into *that* trap. **DO NOT DISCUSS YOUR PERSONAL LIFE WITH INMATES. PERIOD.**

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- ◆ Keep your cool and do not abuse your authority: Inmate like entertainment. One way is to “push your buttons”, get you “riled up” and *Bingo!!!* Some inmates would *love* to see an officer losing his temper or acting out physically-like in an excessive force situation. This is especially true concerning officers who are unpopular and not well liked-maybe because they are professional and do their jobs. It would be a good story to tell in the lawsuit or grievance-or to their families, attorneys and the media.
- ◆ Back your fellow COs and do not back stab: Inmates want you to “back stab”. Staff entertainment where they hear officers talking about who screwed up, who is dating who, who is fooling around, who got reprimanded, etc. is the best channel on the “inmate entertainment network”. If the inmates can divide and conquer the staff by helping to spread rumors, start gossip in an effort to have a targeted officer isolated from the guidance of the staff, then they will find persuading that officer to befriend them much easier.
- ◆ Now we must discuss clarification. Does this mean if you see an officer bending the rules, allowing minor infractions or worse-sexually joking or maybe “fooling around” with an inmate you should keep quiet? *NO!* Tell your supervisor what you suspect or have observed so it can be checked out and corrected. If a fellow officer is allowing him or herself to be manipulated or is engaging in sexual misconduct, that officer is not watching your back, they are being selfish.
- ◆ Cover your behind-do not admit mistakes: Inmates who want to control staff like secrets-they will tell you that “it [whatever it is-rule bending, bringing in drugs, sex] is OK-it’s our secret”. As supervisors will tell you-it is better to tell the truth than to lie and cover up lies with lies. Things will go better for you in life if you admit your mistakes, especially before Internal Affairs has to conduct a lengthy investigation.
- ◆ Carry your own weight: Each officer should take ownership for his or her duties, posts and areas of responsibility. No one likes “carrying someone else’s water”. However, inmates want to be seen as helpful, friendly and indispensable. They want you to think that you cannot get the job done without them. They will fool you into thinking that when they run errands for you, etc. that your job will be so much easier.
- ◆ Defer to the wisdom and experience of veteran COs: The inmates do not want you listening to more knowledgeable officers-especially if those officers are telling you where you are making mistakes. For example, an officer with many years experience tells you that joking around with inmates and socializing with female inmates resulting in you falling behind in your duties can lead to problems. Inmates do not want you taking that advice seriously; they may convince you that the veteran officer is a burnout [or another colorful name] and ask you “why are you listening to him?”

A little clarification is in order here. If a veteran CO is giving you advice such as “all inmates deserve a good_____ whipping” or that the socializing with them is OK, hopefully you will rely on your ethics,

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training, and common sense to resist the advice and perform your duties in a correct and professional manner.

- ♦ Mind your own business-do not gossip and spread rumors: Like the discussion in number 4, the less that inmates know the better. They have big ears, and unless you are in a closed room away from inmates, there is nothing as a private conversation in a correctional facility. Inmates should not overhear conversations about the personal lives and troubles of staff members. They will twist a problems such as an officer's divorce or financial problems into methods of gaining friendships and sympathy. They will say "I heard about your divorce...it's rough....I am divorced, too." Or- "I heard about your money problems...I know how you can make some cash...."

However, some clarification...if you see a fellow officer making some bad mistakes, you may have to make it your business to pull him or her aside and talk to them, or tell a supervisor. We all like to mind our own business, but sometimes we can't.

There you have it - both the brick wall that we work behind to keep ourselves safe and the methods that inmates use to knock cracks in it. Talk about these cracks and be aware.

References:

1. Silverman, Ira J. (2001). *Corrections: A Comprehensive View Second Edition*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
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About the author: Lt. Gary F. Cornelius retired in 2005 from the Fairfax County (VA) Office of the Sheriff, after serving over 27 years in the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center. His career included assignments in confinement, work release, programs and classification. He is an adjunct faculty member of the Administration of Justice Department at George Mason University, where he has taught four corrections courses. He also teaches corrections in service in Virginia, and has performed training and consulting for the American Correctional Association, the American Jail Association, and the National Institute of Justice. He has authored eight books in corrections. His most recent books are *The American Jail: Cornerstone of Modern Corrections*, 2007, from Pearson [see IACTP Buyer's Guide] and *The Art of the Con: Avoiding Offender Manipulation Second Edition* 2009, available from the American Correctional Association. In 2008 he co founded ETC, LLC: Education and Training in Corrections with Timothy P. Manley, MSW, LCSW. Gary can be reached at 571-233-0912 or at adjinstructor@aol.com.

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