

MCA TODAY



News from the Michigan Corrections Association Spring 2010

Welcome to MCA Today's Officer of the Year Issue

The Michigan Department of Corrections 2010 Officer of the Year is Shawn Minerick

Shawn is a Resident Unit Officer at Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility in Baraga, MI. He has been an Emergency Response Team member for the past ten years, influencing the team in a variety of ways including the development of an ERT ready room to prepare for ERT deployment and to review and critique incidents that have occurred. Shawn is a role model that all staff can be proud of. He is a team player who is dedicated to success. Shawn is a community leader as well, providing support to several youth sports and social programs within the community.

Minerick was one of five finalists for the 2010 Michigan Corrections Officer of the Year chosen by the selection committee. The committee is comprised of members of the Michigan Corrections Officers Training Council and the Michigan Corrections Organization, and select Michigan Department of Corrections employees, and the current Officer of the Year. The four other finalists include:

- ◆ **Tim Halfman:** Tim is a Resident Unit Officer at Carson City Correctional Facility. He started his career with the MDOC in 1990.
- ◆ **Mary Smart:** Mary is a Corrections Officer at Newberry Correctional Facility, where she has worked since she started with the MDOC in 1997.
- ◆ **Jamie Jorns:** Jamie is a Corrections Officer at Pugsley Correctional Facility. He started his career at Carson City Correctional Facility in 1999 before transferring to Pugsley in 2000.
- ◆ **Richard Miller:** Richard is a Resident Unit Officer at Thumb Correctional Facility in Lapeer and has been with the MDOC since 1999.

Congratulations to each of the finalists and to 2010 Michigan Corrections Officer of the Year Shawn Minerick.

Joe Bouchard,
MCA Today Editor



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THE WHEEL OF CORRECTIONS

BY JOE BOUCHARD

I thought that I had heard all of the idioms and expressions that relate to one of our most common transportation tools. I speak, of course, of the wheel. Imagine how much less interesting our language would be without the following:

...the wheels of industry (or progress)...

...let's not reinvent the wheel...

...let's roll...

How about the Wheel of Corrections?

Recently, my supervisor presented me with a metaphor worth repeating. It was so accurate and insightful, I am printing it here with his permission. What follows is *The Wheel of Corrections*.



"This is how I explain it", he said. He prepared to draw a simple diagram on a piece of paper. In the center he produced a circle. In it he wrote the word housing. "The housing function is the hub", he said. "It is where the offenders live. It is central to everything".

From the edge of the housing unit hub he drew lines that radiated out like spokes. That is, of course, because these represented spokes. To each he assigned a function. There was the business office, programming, education, food services, maintenance, administration, healthcare, psychological services, and the administration. "All of these support the housing hub," he said to me. And it was clear to me that spokes could be added or subtracted to fit the needs of different facilities.

All of the spokes have a part in touching or impacting the central part of the equation – the housing unit factor. If there is too much pressure or emphasis on any of the spokes, the hub would be stressed. In theory, all of these spokes should have equal worth. Health care, while very important, should be as important as food service, as important as the administration, as important as maintenance, etc in their relation to housing. All had to support housing in a balanced harmony or risk warping the structural integrity of the hub.

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I thought that I detected a glint in his eye that signaled the logical and fitting conclusion to his concept.

Drawing a circle around the spokes he said, "This is custody," Then the light bulb in my skull completely illuminated. Custody represents the hard exterior that holds the many complimentary spokes in place on the crucial housing unit hub. Without custody, it would all fall apart. The cohesive factor provided here is security. Then, no matter how strong programming might be for example, it would be weakened by an overall lack of structure from the other systems on the hub. Custody provides the cohesion and keeps all in balance.

I believe that one can expand upon this excellent illustration. Think of the possibilities. The ball bearings could represent the staff who constantly move to keep operations rolling. When we gauge pressure on the tire, we are assessing the internal factors that may cause damage the systems if not checked. Perhaps the tread represents the tough shell of the system that can survive the various hazards that we may encounter as we roll ahead. And the overall quality of the wheel is made of experience, training, and professionalism.



There are rare and wonderful occasions that you hear an analogy from a colleague or another source that gives cause to pause. In other words, the parallel that is so apt that you admire the idea and think, "There is no better way to describe this." And a metaphor is a useful way to bring an abstract concept into a more useful and concrete explanation. *The Wheel of Corrections* certainly gives us a clearer understanding of all of our interrelated subsystems.

**MCA NOW ON FACEBOOK
MCA TODAY TO GO DIGITAL**



Did you know that Michigan Corrections Association is now on Facebook? It's another great networking tool that allows our members to share information about current issues in corrections. Search Michigan Corrections Association and "like" us today! You can also visit us at www.micorrections.org.

Starting in autumn 2010, the *MCA Today* newsletter will become an e-newsletter. You can keep receiving the newsletter two ways: send an e-mail to our membership chair, Tony Owen at MCATOWen@charter.net. He will put you on the distribution list. You can also visit the website and sign up or simply access the newsletter through the website itself.

OPEN WINDOWS

BY TAMMY GAJEWSKI

An experience that opened a window to a foreign world for me occurred at Camp Kitwen in 1997. I was the visiting room officer for that weekend. There were many visitors up that last nice weekend before the snow. The young mother came in with two small children, one in each hand to visit her husband. One little boy was well-dressed and cute as a button. He was around three and one half years old. The other boy was maybe one and a half years old and dressed in clothes that were way too big, miss-matched shoes, messy hair, and twinkle of mischief in his eyes.



As I searched the feet of the mother, and then the diaper bag, I was explaining to the boys how I would have to search them. The cute as a button three year old

hit the wall and spread his legs like he had been frisked by the police many times. The fifteen months old thought big brother was playing a game he didn't know about, and he did a spread eagle on the wall too.

That is when it hit me like a brick that "visiting daddy in prison" was a normal comment in their house. That seeing men leaning against a wall while uniforms "pat them down" was not strange or unusual in their world. These children are now teenagers. Maybe their experiences with prison were not that bad. The nice officer giving them crayons and paper. The candy and drinks with daddy, the nights in hotels to go visit again for a few hours.

I thought about my purpose in corrections at the time and many times since those kids crossed my path. I don't want prison to be the norm for anyone or anyone's family. I changed that day. I thought about my actions and my impact on the young men in prison. I found an ounce of direction could help guide someone more than a pound of tickets. Isn't it time for us to think about our actions making ripples on the pond of life? Open the window for change.

Tammy Gajewski is an Assistant Resident Unit Supervisor at Baraga Correctional Facility in Baraga, MI. Her opinions do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Michigan Department of Corrections.

LAUGH A LOT, LIVE A LOT

BY LT. GARY F. CORNELIUS (RETIRED)

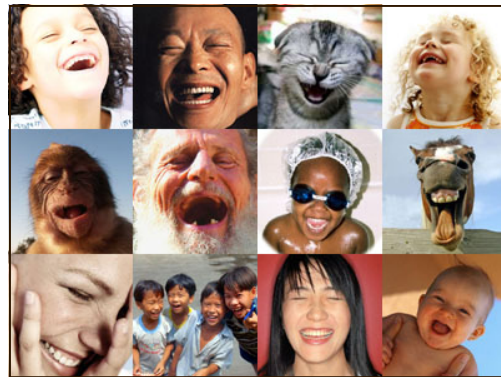
I have to confess that I have always been known as the “class clown”. From grade school on, I reveled in doing impersonations, practical jokes, and telling puns. However, when I entered the field of corrections, I toned down the humor and toned up the seriousness of my profession. But, there was always room for humor.

I came across an article from the November-December 1996 issue of *American Jails* titled “Are We Too Serious? The Value of Humor in Jail Work” by William F. Waters, MS/MSW, an associate professor in the Criminal Justice Department at Northern Michigan University. He writes of the value of humor in law enforcement work.

Waters cites the journal that was kept as a class project by one of the Northern Michigan University students, who also happened to be a full time corrections officer. He noticed that the humor he encountered was dark and personally exploitive and permeated much of the conversations between staff and inmates. The humor also dealt with discussions about the job and staff/inmate relations. However presented, it was humor and its intent was to induce amusement and laughter. However he noticed a key point: humor plays a big part and serves as an important function in correctional work; inmates and staff use it as a coping mechanism to address the ‘grim’ nature of both the environment and their lives. After all, correctional officers feel at times that they are as locked up as the inmates. Working and living inside a facility are stressful aspects of correctional facilities.

Citing research by Pogebrin and Poole in 1988, humor among police officers serves several purposes [which can also be applied to correctional officers]:

- ◆ Humor helps to expose commonly shared experiences and concerns that officers may have trouble expressing. It provides the means to test and bring into the open officers’ attitudes, perceptions and feelings. We feel better when we express ourselves, even in a humorous way.
- ◆ Humor provides social solidarity-or in other words when officers all laugh-they belong. As a supervisor who had five major transfers to different department sections, I knew that I was accepted when my staff made me the brunt of some good natured jokes and humorous banter. The old saying is true-if people like you, they will laugh and be light hearted, if they do not- no one will talk to you.



- ◆ Humor serves as a coping strategy that officers use to manage forces that are beyond their control. “Gallows” humor –the bad jokes, ‘wisecracks’ or one liners can take the edge off a stressful situation, a crisis or a tragedy. By doing so, the situation is less threatening. We calm down; tension ebbs.
- ◆ Humor can be taken down the wrong road-
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belittling inmates and staff and sarcastically making them the brunt of jokes, being racially and ethnically prejudiced, and not taking the job seriously. More clearly-humor can be a negative thing at times, and any veteran officer knows it. For example, telling racially charged jokes around staff and inmate minorities is not a way to facilitate a positive work atmosphere. Also, there is not one correctional officer that has not engaged in griping about the upper management at times. But officers joking about the 'brass' and putting them down over and over can wear thin; don't forget that the inmates can pick up on that too.

- ◆ Humor can make us feel better. That is good for our health and stress management. In my 'burnout days' I griped a lot. When I learned how to handle my stress, I found a great coping mechanism-humorous videos. After a stressful day, I would come home and put in a funny video. I laughed and felt better. Humor is good for the body and soul. It breaks the tension and the world looks a lot less bleak and dark. Comedy clubs are also a fun way to occasionally unwind. Just *laughing* and finding humor in every day personal and professional lives are good for us.

So, how do we put more stress relieving humor into the workplace? We realize that loosening up is OK at certain times. These times include after an inmate fight or confrontation where we must wind down. We also must realize that when an officer cracks a joke, not everyone may be amused. We must know when to turn it off and on-working



in corrections demands attention to detail being vigilant, thoroughness and keeping alert. "Goofing around" on the job too much can make us less efficient.

We also deal with people and must show respect, treating others with basic dignity. For example, my first tour in classification-seven years-had me in intake where I conducted interviews on thousands of inmates. I recall interviewing one who thought that he was a warlock and possessed mystical powers. I conducted the interview with a straight face-a "poker face". The inmate was obviously delusional. He said that he could move fixed objects. Back in the office, we considered (jokingly) asking him to lengthen a couple of cellblocks so we could fit more inmates into the jail and reduce overcrowding. We all have approached a colleague and commented about a "crazy" inmate that we have encountered. I remember laughing about an inmate who was caught on a fugitive's warrant and extradited back to our jail from another state. While on the run, he probably watched too many episodes of *The Fugitive*-he tried to dye his jet black hair blonde with an over the counter women's' hair coloring kit. The result was a "day glow" orange color. I recall that he was booked in on a rushed, hell bent for leather day-but we in the office laughed-but not when we talked to the inmate or were around him.

Every squad or section has a "clown"-and the humor makes us feel better; it takes the edge off. A few guidelines for good taste are:

- ◆ Keep it clean: Off color risqué humor-dirty jokes, etc. makes us look less professional and tend to violate sexual misconduct and sexual harassment guidelines. If inmates see staff engaging in unprofessional behavior, they will target them in attempts to manipulate, playing on a lack of ethics. For example, telling dirty jokes within the earshot of inmates can result in

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Humor (Continued from page 6)

the inmates thinking that the officer has a casual attitude towards sex. The next thing would be for inmates to joke around with the officer about sex, the next thing would be to flirt, etc.

- ◆ Keep it timely: People who are hurt emotionally or physically may not appreciate wisecracks and insensitive remarks. Engage your mind before you open your mouth. A stupid comment to the wrong person at the wrong time can trigger a verbal or physical altercation.
- ◆ Keep it occasional: It is not a good idea to joke around all of the time. Let inmates know by your behavior that the missions of security and safety are always number one.
- ◆ Do not use inmates, especially the mentally ill, developmentally disabled, weak, effeminate, or sexually different-such as inmates who are gay, lesbian, transsexual, transvestite, transgender, etc. as the brunt or target of jokes. This also includes not making fun of foreign inmates or inmates of various ethnic or religious groups. Other inmates will add fuel to the fire by engaging in their brand of humor, which could lead into harassment or assaults-verbal and physical. That is all you need-breaking up arguments and fights between inmates or investigating an assault.

Humor is good for us. But-staff must exercise discretion in using it. Remember:

Life is less vile when we smile...(I made that up myself.)

References: W.F. Waters, "Are We Too Serious? The Value of Humor in Jail Work", *American Jails*, November/December 1996, pp. 47-51. See also: Pogrebrin, M. and E. Poole, "Humor in the Briefing Room: A Study of the Strategic Uses of Humor Among Police," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume 17, Number 2, July 1988, pp. 183-210.

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 sessions 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*, 2008, from Pearson [see IACTP Buyer's Guide] and *The Art of the Con: Avoiding Offender Manipulation Second Edition* 2009, both 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 and welcomes any comments or feedback.



Current Michigan Department of Corrections Director Patricia Caruso is running to retain her position as Vice-President of the American Correctional Association. She has done a great job representing Michigan at the national level and looks forward to a second 2-year term in this position. If you are an ACA/MCA member, please remember to vote when the ballots are mailed out later this year. Michigan needs a strong voice and Patricia Caruso can deliver.