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## ALIGNING ACTIONS WITH GOALS: Strategies for Improvement Within the Florida Department of Corrections

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Leading a corrections department and prisons is challenging. A successful leader must work with government entities, employees, unions, and their accompanying agendas, all while simultaneously dealing with individuals that our society cannot tolerate. An effective corrections leader must balance what is good for inmates and staff with what is good for our shared society.

That being said, a corrections leader has to find the right incentives for each constituent in order to be successful. What does each player contribute and what do they get in return? Incentives, rewards, results, and consequences should always be part of the leader's decision-making process. If he or she gets any of it wrong with any of the players, the walls come crumbling down.

Every single staff member must know what he or she contributes to the mission of the prison and to society. Every employee must link their duties to how it impacts the safety and security of the institution, how it contributes to the inmates' successful reentry into society and becoming a productive, law abiding citizen. Knowing why they perform their duties each and every day, allows employees to see the big picture and provides an incentive.

### STEPS FOR SUCCESS

Everything in corrections must align with the goal of reentry and moving every inmate closer to self-sufficiency, independence and a positive quality of life. Below are some suggestions based on my 33 years with the United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons:

1. Refine the corrections mission to measure societal value;
2. Hold corrections leaders accountable by measuring recidivism and requiring decreasing rates for a specified period of time;
3. Every action must provide the incentives for each stakeholder.
4. Provide mentoring for all corrections staff;

5. Require inmate discipline to be more responsive and responsible by focusing on shared purpose;
6. Provide ongoing feedback and revise as required; and
7. Expand this approach to other DOC responsibilities.

One of these suggestions that can be implemented immediately is with regards to inmate discipline.

### **INMATE DISCIPLINE PROGRAMS: A VERY GOOD PLACE TO START**

One of, if not the most, critical management tool in any correctional setting is its inmate discipline program. An effective inmate discipline program provides a safe and orderly environment for staff, inmates, and society. Sometimes, in the day-to-day operation of a prison, it is difficult to see the importance of an effective inmate discipline program and realize not only its short-term goal of controlling inmate behavior, but its long-term benefits.

Inmates are in prison for breaking laws and not following rules. So the challenge to productively change behavior and follow rules in a correctional setting is an everyday reality for staff. The issue arises when prison staff does not see what role inmate discipline plays in preparing inmates for successful reentry into society. An inmate discipline program is an easily evaluated, evidence-based approach, which adds value to our shared society, is common sense, and also has potential for great cost-savings and societal benefit.

### **TRAINING REQUIREMENTS**

The most important element in an effective inmate discipline program is the staff. Conversely, the staff is often also the biggest obstacle in the inmate discipline process. In order for the program to reach its intended goals, staff members at every level must realize their stake in the process and how it benefits them and society as a whole. Unfortunately, when staff is dealing with the same disruptive inmates day-in and day-out, human nature tends to get personally, rather than professionally involved, which is detrimental to the process and leads to undesired consequences.

Each staff member must receive effective specialized training on the inmate discipline process—from how to recognize prohibited behavior and write an incident report, to how to navigate the hearing and sanctioning processes—in order to understand the important role that they play. Without an effective inmate discipline process, chaos will result, compromising the safety of staff, inmates and society.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR REENTRY**

Well-behaved inmate populations would not only contribute to the safe and orderly running of prisons, but also save taxpayer dollars. Disciplinary segregation (solitary confinement), for example, is one example of a very costly consequence of misconduct in a correctional setting. Other consequences of misconduct, such as loss of visiting privileges, loss of telephone privileges, and loss of e-mail privileges serve as obstacles to an inmate's successful reintegration into society and also poses hardship to his or her loved ones, the very people who will be critical in the reentry process.

When employees understand their roles in the inmate discipline process and deal with inmates more effectively, fewer inmates will receive these consequences and more will be able to successfully function in the general prison population. Once in the general population, these inmates can participate in programs and have access to opportunities that will prepare them for successful release into society where they are better equipped to become productive citizens.

### EVALUATING AN INMATE DISCIPLINE PROGRAM

The success of an inmate discipline program can be evaluated in many ways. Once a staff member receives specialized training, he or she would get certified by taking a valid test, and would require recertification every two years. Those certification scores would show how effective the training was and should directly correlate with the quality and effectiveness of the inmate discipline program. Also, inmate discipline records can be evaluated to see what how many incidents occurred, what sanctions were imposed, if he or she committed additional prohibited acts, and if they escalated in severity. Further, inmates who recidivate and return to custody can continue to be evaluated in relation to their pre-existing discipline records.

### CONCLUSION

In sum, a comprehensive inmate discipline program is one example of many that could significantly improve results and add value to society. An effective inmate discipline program not only provides for a safe and humane prison environment, but prepares inmates for a successful release to society by teaching them how to abide by rules and understand the consequences of their behavior. In turn, these positive changes would realize significant cost-savings in corrections, improvements in workplace safety for staff and inmates, and immeasurable improvements in the community.

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