



**It's O.K., Supervision Enthusiasts:
You Can Come Home Now!** *Harold B. Wooten*

**A Challenge Answered:
Perception of the Probation Officer**

111862- *Richard Gray*
111871

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

**Private Enterprise in Ins
A Call for Caution**

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

*F. Travis III
Latessa, Jr.
maro F. Vito*

**Impact of a Job Training
CETA-Qualified Probation Officer**

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted material has been granted by

Federal Probation

B. Anderson

**Short-Term System-Their
on Client**

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the copyright owner.

*n VanDeusen
h Yarbrough
vid Cornelsen*

**...e Mental Health Problems:
...on for Prison Therapeutic Services** *Kenneth Adams*

...mproving Parole Success with PAS *Lois Shawver
T. L. Clanon
Douglas Kurdys
Howard Friedman*

**...isionmaking in Correctional
...ction** *Dale K. Sechrest
Shelley J. Price*

**...lassification Models in Probation
...ontrol or Treatment-Rehabilitation?** *Peter C. Kratcoski*

...ve Meetings *Carolyn Sue Brown
Glen Plutschak*

111862
111871
111871
111871

Federal Probation

A JOURNAL OF CORRECTIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

Published by the Administrative Office of the United States Courts

VOLUME XLIX

DECEMBER 1985

NUMBER 4

This Issue in Brief

It's O.K. Supervision Enthusiasts: You Can Come Home Now!—Author Harold B. Wooten asserts that probation systems have lost interest in supervision of offenders; instead, trendy practices which are best described as elaborate monitoring mechanisms have taken the day. But, the author contends, before we rally the supervision loyalists, we should first admit that changing self-defeating behavior of offenders has never been significantly reinforced as a value in probation. The author cites historical reasons for this failure, identifies current barriers to effective supervision of offenders, and offers recommendations to various participants in the process to address effective supervision of offenders.

A Challenge Answered: Changes in the Perception of the Probation Task.—Author Richard Gray responds to the point of view expressed in this issue's article by Harold B. Wooten. Do probation officers actually help probationers or are they primarily paper pushers or law enforcers? According to the author, past experience and current job orientation have caused a change in probation officers' perspective of their job. The author discusses the sociology of knowledge in addressing shifts in task-related perspectives.

Private Enterprise and Institutional Corrections: A Call for Caution.—The current crisis of overcrowding in American prisons and jails, coupled with reduced resources available for corrections, has led to the development of innovative responses to the problems of institutional corrections. One such innovation which has been proposed and is receiving increasing support is the idea of "privatizing" institutional corrections. Authors Lawrence F. Travis III, Edward J. Latessa, Jr., and Gennaro F. Vito examine the movement to contract with private firms for the construction and operation of prisons and jails. Focusing on legal, cost, and accountability issues in such contracting, the authors conclude with a call for caution in the movement to employ private companies for the provision of this governmental service.

Impact of a Job Training Program on CETA-Qualified Offenders.—In this article, author Dennis B. Anderson reports on research—conducted in an industrial

midwestern city during 1984—of a job training program for CETA-qualified probationers. Controlling for self-selection and risk factors, the study compared these pro-

CONTENTS

| | | | |
|--|---|----|--------|
| It's O.K., Supervision Enthusiasts: You Can Come Home Now!..... | Harold B. Wooten | 4 | 111862 |
| A Challenge Answered: Changes in the Perception of the Probation Task..... | Richard Gray | 8 | 111843 |
| Private Enterprise in Institutional Corrections: A Call for Caution | Lawrence F. Travis III Edward J. Latessa, Jr. Gennaro F. Vito | 11 | 111864 |
| Impact of a Job Training Program on CETA-Qualified Probationers..... | Dennis B. Anderson | 17 | 111865 |
| Short-Term System-Therapy with Adult Probation Clients and Their Families | John VanDeusen Joseph Yarbrough David Cornelsen | 21 | 111866 |
| Addressing Inmate Mental Health Problems: A New Direction for Prison Therapeutic Services | Kenneth Adams | 27 | 111867 |
| Predicting and Improving Parole Success with PAS | Lois Shawver T. L. Clanon Douglas Kurdys Howard Friedman | 34 | 111868 |
| Planning and Decisionmaking in Correctional Facility Construction | Dale K. Sechrest Shelley J. Price | 38 | 111869 |
| The Functions of Classification Models in Probation and Parole: Control or Treatment-Rehabilitation? ... | Peter C. Kratcoski | 49 | 111870 |
| Conducting Effective Meetings | Carolyn Sue Brown Glen Plutschak | 57 | 111871 |
| Departments | | | |
| News of the Future | | 60 | |
| Looking at the Law | | 63 | |
| Reviews of Professional Periodicals | | 66 | |
| Your Bookshelf on Review | | 69 | |
| Letters to the Editor | | 73 | |
| It Has Come to Our Attention | | 74 | |
| Indexes of Articles and Book Reviews | | 75 | |

A Challenge Answered: Changes in the Perception of the Probation Task

BY RICHARD GRAY

United States Probation Officer, Eastern District of New York

DURING THE early months of 1985, at a convocation of the U.S. probation departments from the Eastern and Southern Districts of New York and the District of New Jersey, Harold Wooten, the Northeast regional probation administrator for the Federal Probation System, set forth a challenge in what he then called a curbside sermon. He engaged the group in an examination of the issue: Are we still seeking to help people, or are we finding ourselves content to function as paper pushing technocrats? Does probation retain lofty goals, or is it now just another part of the self-perpetuating bureaucracy? More recently, he has stepped forward with the assertion that probation as a whole has abdicated its responsibility to solve problems in favor of a simple-minded law enforcement approach or some lesser species of pro-forma exercise in futility. In response, it becomes necessary to consider the history of changing demands upon the probation system, the effects of job-related perspectives upon goal identification, and the pragmatic demands of each of those task-related perspectives.

During the 1960's, when many of the now more seasoned members of the probation work force were first coming into the system, much of America was still riding high on the tide of optimism that had begun after the Second World War and continued until shattered by the media responses to Vietnam and Watergate. The New Society was based upon the premise that, with enough care and enough money, we could turn the world around. Rehabilitation was the catchwork in corrections, and there seemed no limit to what was possible.

Within the realm of probation we found judges meting out probationary terms to those considered most worthy or most in need of a chance: first time offenders, juveniles, and others who "just needed some help." Through this fine judicial sieve the optimism and idealism of many probation officers was reinforced time and again by the successes that a lot of time and care could bring. Within this context the identification and treatment of self-defeating behaviors was often, with social service provision, the central responsibility of the probation officer.

Although the United States Probation System has always serviced both probationers and parolees, the majority of state probation systems, from which many of us were drawn, handled only probationers, and these were usually handpicked. Despite, however, the Federal System's experience with probation and parole, the more general past experience in dealing with probationers alone, in combination with the not uncommon practice of considering parolees as being worthy of more intensive supervision, contributed significantly to the almost universal spirit of rehabilitation that has permeated the period since World War II.

Since that war, and especially during the period that saw the baby boomers grow to maturity, there began a press upon the physical ability of the criminal justice systems of the nation to deal with the increased numbers of offenders. With the further development of a drug sub-culture, an impossible burden was placed upon the courts and the correctional machinery—there was no longer room for everyone in prison. By the mid-1970's there were impassioned calls for the increased use of probation as a matter of fiscal necessity, and parole—in much the same manner—became primarily a way to free up valuable prison space.¹

During this entire period the nature of the caseload was changing. From a largely nonviolent, well-selected group of individuals, the scope of probation supervision steadily grew until it required the management of large caseloads of mixed character, including larger proportions of habitual offenders, violent criminals, drug addicts, alcoholics, and mental patients. This change in clientele worked simultaneously to change the perspective of the line officer regarding precisely what it is that a probation officer does.

The analysis of changes in task-related perspectives is the special province of the Sociology of Knowledge. Central to the findings of the discipline is the idea that experience shapes the way in which we perceive reality.² What this means in probation is that the people with whom I have a client/officer relationship will, in large measure, determine the perspective that I take towards probation as a whole. Moreover, because the reality of the probation situation is in fact determined by such factors as the nature of the caseload, the officer's success

¹ Wilson, James Q. *Thinking About Crime*. New York: Vintage, 1977.

² Berger, Peter and Luckmann, Thomas, *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Doubleday, 1967.

rate with certain types of offender, and the number of rewarding experiences handed down from above for the proper pursuit of paperwork, we may expect some convergence of perspectives among those intimately involved with the day to day tasks of supervision.

A dramatic illustration of the power of context over perspective was provided by Chris Eskridge in his 1979 article, "Education and Training of Probation Officers: A Critical Assessment."³ Here, in a study of probation officers that analyzed education-related perspectives of the probation task, Eskridge found that whatever the level of education, and whatever the original task orientation, probation officers, after a few years on the job, tended to take on a rather uniformly conservative approach. The day-to-day realities of the probation task determined the perspective.

In like manner it may be possible to hypothesize that in happier times, when judges handpicked probationers because they perceived in them some reason for hope, probation officers could uniformly ascribe to a code that made rehabilitation the birthright of every client. However, with changed caseloads, our approach to the probation task must likewise change. We can no longer face probation in terms of the classic dilemma: rehabilitation or enforcement. Our circumstances require sufficient flexibility to provide either in the appropriate context.

To say that we have crossed the line that divides the rehabilitative emphasis of previous years from an archly conservative law enforcement approach is at best unfair. Whether we acknowledge it or not, the task of probation has always contained both poles. We are charged not only with rehabilitation, but also with protecting the public and serving the interests of the victim. The probation statute suggests this by the bifurcation of duties into those that require us to observe for and report to the courts and those that point us towards the more heroic rehabilitative emphasis.

Returning to the task at hand, we are perhaps now better equipped to answer the question as to whether we are still interested in helping people and whether we still hold lofty goals. Are we then, in a word, less "idealistic" than we were? The question must first be answered no. We are not less idealistic; we face a different context, almost a different job, that imposes upon us a different perspective and with it different criteria for success and failure. We can no longer afford the assumption that everyone can be rehabilitated, but must now depend upon a more pragmatic ideal that asks not only if I can help, but who must be helped first, and who can be helped at all. From

this broadened perspective we can readily echo Walter Barkdull in saying we must know how to help and we must know how to control.⁴ Our task requires both.

To say that we are less idealistic would be to betray the joy that each probation officer has known at some point when a real change occurs in a client's life. It would, at the same time, devalue the real disappointment and heartbreak when a near "save" fails. No, we are not less committed to helping than our predecessors were; rather, we have moved into a different field. We have moved into a battlefield where triage rather than elective surgery is the order of the day.

Are we then idealistic technocrats, awash in a sea of paper, sinking in bureaucracy while our clients drown? We probably are, more than we'd like, but much less than it might appear to someone who long ago left the field and now only reaches it through the paper that we generate. Unfortunately, we are called to function within the confines of a bureaucracy, and as such, we are ever in danger of losing ourselves in seas of paper.

That we are pressured by tasks other than supervision cannot be denied. The priority accorded to the preparation of presentence reports and the nightmarish flow of forms for who knows what purpose, inevitably eats into precious supervision time. Nevertheless, the shift in emphasis cannot be tied to time or money or a new love affair with enforcement. It must be seen as part of changed priorities for different caseloads and a far more reasonable assessment of what can be done. What Mr. Wooten's questioning most accurately reflects is a change in the evolution of the discipline, not a wholesale failure of its practitioners.

Changes in probation practice reflect the development of task-related competencies and ideals rooted in the possible. We have learned not only to ask what should be done to or for a person, but by placing that question in the context of what can be done, we have made it a plan for action. Probation, in learning to deal with the complex requirements of multiple, and often divergent tasks, is developing an identity of its own.

Are we then better helpers, or are we so deeply mired in technocracy as to have become ineffectual? It would seem obvious that the question is asked from a perspective that anticipates, to some extent, a confirmation of our utter failure. We, likewise, may frame the question so that only failure is apparent. From a rehabilitative perspective we have failed, not through the burdens of technocracy, but through our consistent failure to realistically assess our own abilities. From the perspective of law enforcement we have likewise failed by seeking healing and rehabilitation too often when punishment or control would have proved sufficient.

At last Mr. Wooten makes the point that supervision is cost-effective—which, of course, is one of the soundest

³ Eskridge, C. "Education And Training of Federal Probation Officers, A Critical Assessment." *Federal Probation*, Vol. 43, No. 3, September 1979.

⁴ Barkdull W. L. "Probation-Call It Control and Mean It!" *Federal Probation*. December 1976.

arguments in favor of our continued existence: We do the job cheaper and better. In the same context he notes that the cost effectiveness of supervision could be further enhanced if the number of violations based upon technical infractions and minor offenses could be cut. On this point he appears to be more than reasonable; however, the assumption that he then makes, that because the violations are apparently trivial, revocations are unnecessary, betrays an absence from the world of practical supervision where minor violations are often the probation officer's only hold on criminally active clients. That the number can be reduced is reasonable, that it may be halved may not be.

As to the issue of technocracy, it may be observed that the person, in this day and age, who is not entranced with the possibilities of the information age for help and control is a rare one indeed. Too often, however, we are tempted to chase the end of computerization and technological prowess without any appreciation for the amount of time and effort the development of such a system will cost. We readily anticipate the end product of efficient information processing, easy and convenient access to all kinds of information, but forget that someone will always be responsible for getting that information into the system. At this point the task has fallen to the line officer. Whatever benefit automation systems may offer in theory, their promises do little to assuage the line officer's impatience with the paperwork required for its implementation. That impatience in turn fosters the multiple minor sabotages and data deletions that bring technical issues to the center of the administrator's attention. Concurrently, those same deletions threaten the validity of the data base towards which they work.

If Mr. Wooten has made any suggestion that speaks to a line officer's heart, it is his call for the assignment

of technicians for data input, thus freeing considerable time for more creative use. But expanding upon the idea, we may wish to establish line officer or specialist positions in computer programming. These officers could help to design, or redesign, information collection and retrieval systems specifically designed for use in probation.

It would also be useful to realistically appraise just what computerization can and cannot do. We may reasonably expect computers to act as glorified file cabinets, data base management systems, that can efficiently sort and compare data. It may not, however, be reasonable to expect at any time soon that computers will significantly increase our ability to predict recidivism rates or the probability of violent behavior. Despite the fact that we will use them to manipulate the data, and perhaps refine our statistical measures, we will no doubt be left with the more obviously subjective assessments of experienced line officers.

The temptation to technocracy will, for many, prove too expensive, time consuming, and at first inaccurate, as compared with the efforts of experienced line officers. Nevertheless, the computer as file cabinet should gain quick acceptance on many levels. Beyond that, the limited application of technological answers to human problems will continue to turn decisions about people back to people.

Are we then technocrats? No, and I don't think that the line officer ever will be. The hierarchy now stands more in need of this technology than the line officer and as a result is more tempted by its promises and constrained by its prospects. Though the line officer will gladly use a fully implemented data system, he will remain a person-to-person professional.