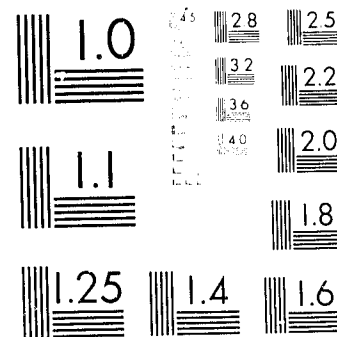


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# Federal Probation

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# Federal Probation

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## This Issue in Brief

**A Revisionist View of Prison Reform.**—According to Professor Hans Toch, the assumption that prisons are here to stay suggests new directions for prison reform. Among these is the amelioration of stress for those inmates who because of special susceptibilities and or placements in prison are disproportionately punished. A classification process that is attuned to inmate coping problems can make a considerable difference, he asserts. In addition, the constructive critic of prison life (as opposed to the nihilistic one) can help prison staff and their administrators run more humane institutions.

**A Positive Self-Image for Corrections.**—The tendency of corrections workers to be apologetic about their work has been a self-defeating characteristic for many years, writes Claude T. Mangrum of the San Bernardino County Probation Department. This tendency, he says, is the result of a poor self-image and it is high time corrections professionals acted to improve this image. The importance of a positive self-concept is discussed in his article.

**Changes in Prison and Parole Policies: How Should the Judge Respond?**—Anthony Partridge of the Federal Judicial Center reminds us that, although sentencing marks the end of a criminal proceeding in the trial court, a sentence of imprisonment is also the beginning of a process presided over by prison and parole authorities. To a substantial extent, the meaning of such a sentence is determined by these authorities. Their policies, therefore, have implications for the performance of the judicial role—both for the duty to select an appropriate sentence and for the duty to ensure procedural fairness.

**Federal Court Intervention in Pretrial Release: The Case for Nontraditional Adminis-**

**tration.**—One of the most unique and comprehensive class action suits involving a major jurisdiction in the United States (Houston, Texas) is the case of *Alberti v. Sheriff*. In December 1975 U. S. District Judge Carl Bue, Jr., issued a sweeping order directed at improving the operation of the pretrial release programs and streamlining other criminal justice procedures to relieve overcrowding and improve conditions of the county jail. This article, by Gerald R. Wheeler, director of Harris County Pretrial Services, describes the pretrial

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# A Positive Self-Image For Corrections

BY CLAUDE T. MANGRUM\*

WHEN one takes a "wide angle" view of corrections, one of the distinct impressions that emerges is the tendency for corrections personnel to be apologetic about their work. This is *not* a recent phenomenon because corrections has a long history of assuming a defensive posture regarding its functions and effectiveness.

Until fairly recent times, much correctional activity was carried on more or less "behind the scenes" and, short of a prison riot or a crime spree by a parolee or escapee from prison, few citizens knew much about corrections. In more agrarian times, prisons were located in out-of-the-way places, a situation which contributed to an isolationist stance. There was a decided lack of positive public relations efforts in most correctional agencies beyond trying to respond to some critical event.

With increased urbanization, more timely electronic news media reports and growing emphasis on human rights, corrections has more and more become the target of a wide variety of attacks. These have included questions of effectiveness of treatment efforts, cost effectiveness of operations and results, bureaucratic ineptitude, violations of civil rights of offenders, and failure to impact the crime problem, among others. Even in this environment and although we do not accept the validity of all these criticisms, corrections has most often been characterized by a deafening silence or, at best, a tentative response. A few correctional agencies have developed before-the-fact public relations efforts but, for the most part, these are of rather recent origin. Even these efforts often lack "punch" because they are influenced by our tendency toward apology.

The timidity that has developed over the years is self-defeating. Although modesty is a virtue and discretion is the better part of valor, timidity in a time of attack can be disastrous. Of course, representatives of the corrections field have mounted admirable defenses in many areas, but all too often they have taken the form of broad generalized claims for corrections that are not substantiated in fact and may even be impossible to substantiate.

\*The author is assistant chief probation officer for the San Bernardino County Probation Department, San Bernardino, California. He had served previously as director of the Department's Adult Division.

To be sure, corrections has suffered from being the stepchild of the criminal justice system in the United States, from public attitudes of rejection and from lack of public support. Corrections has been accused, buffeted, criticized and disparaged; it has been attacked, browbeaten, castigated and disregarded. Although some criticisms are valid, many have been based on isolated and dramatic events rather than overall assessment and much of it has been unjustified. It is to some degree understandable that corrections personnel are apologetic—if you stick out your neck, it just might get cut off!

However, the danger to our necks is not the most powerful factor influencing us to timidity. More potent is corrections' poor self-image—how we perceive ourselves and how we think we are perceived by others. Like the development of a poor individual self-image, corrections' poor self-image has grown out of negative experiences, internalized rejections and self-generated guilt.

It is time for corrections to remedy this weak self-image because it is difficult—if not impossible—for one to be committed to a field about which one does not feel confident. Both confidence and commitment are necessary for corrections to shift from reaction to proaction and to begin to live up to its full potential. It is time to become more assertive—even positively aggressive in some areas; it is time to take command of our future. A first step is to refurbish our self-image so we can feel more confidently committed to our professional field.

## *Importance of Self-Image*

Through training and/or experience, corrections personnel know that many of their clients have a poor self-image which contributes to their ongoing problems of adjustment to their environments. Based on this, building or rebuilding the client's self-esteem has become a priority item in corrections' attempts to assist offenders. These efforts involve both one-to-one and group counseling and methods to help provide practical success experiences. Such activities demonstrate the importance of the concept of self-image for success or failure in life.

Some observations about self-image, drawn from the works of many social scientists, will be

useful in helping us grasp the importance of self-image. Self-concept is the constellation of attitudes that we hold toward ourselves. It is what we know about ourselves; it is our sense of who we are.

We gain most of our conception of ourselves through the eyes of others. We cannot see ourselves very well without the aid of some reflective device or the signals we pick up from others which describe us to ourselves through their view, as verbal descriptions or clues from their reactions to us. We also use others as standards against which we compare ourselves. We are taller, heavier, prettier, kinder, smarter, richer or some other attribute than are others. We do not compare ourselves with every one, however; we select persons or groups that have some meaning to us—called significant others and reference groups.

Based on self-image gained from others, we take on roles or expected behaviors. These roles may or may not be consistent with what we believe to be our *true* selves. If they are not, we are merely "playing a part" in order to fulfill expectations. After a period of doing this we become more comfortable with the "part" and grow into it, especially if we are told we are doing well at it. The "part" may then be integrated into our "true self" and be accepted by us as the way we are.

Part of self-image is self-esteem, which is an evaluative belief about how "good" we are or how well we measure up to our ideal for ourselves or to others' expectations of us. This is more than belief, however, because it also involves some emotion; that is, how we *feel* about ourselves and the way others see us. It further involves experiences we have had of how others react to our expressions of our self-image, whether explicit through verbalizations or more implicit through various other clues.

Attitudes toward self can shape an individual's actions. People with high self-esteem are less dependent on the opinions of others and are, therefore, less likely to be swayed by them. Those with low self-esteem are more susceptible to the influences of others as guidelines for attitudes and actions. There is some experimental evidence to show that positive self-image is correlated with lawful and moral behavior and with attempts to achieve high levels of performance, while negative self-image is correlated with illegal and immoral behavior and failure to achieve.

Applied to corrections, this concept may help to explain the negative view described earlier. Oth-

ers have told us for a long time that we have little to offer or even are outright failures. We have internalized this negative view and made it our own. In turn, we have been acting out the role of failure, thereby fulfilling the expectations of those who express negative views of us. Although there are many other factors involved in bringing corrections to its present circumstances, self-image is important enough to receive serious consideration.

A positive self-concept is critical to success. If we are to be winners, we must think of ourselves as winners. Self-deprecation is not conducive to self-improvement or self-fulfillment. This "power of positive thinking" approach to life has long been the subject of numerous articles, books, sermons and seminars for people of all walks of life. Even children's literature often conveys the same philosophy, as in the story of the little train who first *thought* it could, then *knew* it could.

Such a positive self-image reduces fears, anxieties and defensive behavior. It helps us to have confidence in our ability to meet various circumstances; therefore, we need not be overly anxious about them. It also helps to move us out of a self-defeating defensive posture and helps us to be appropriately assertive. As has long been said, the best defense is a good offense—and this is what has so often been missing in corrections.

A positive self-image also helps to develop and maintain good relationships with others. Acceptance of ourselves because we feel confident about our abilities aids in our acceptance of others and they of us. Few people like to be associated with persons who are negative in their outlook; it is depressing and sometimes contagious. On the other hand, we all appreciate the good feelings that flow from persons who feel good about themselves and exude confidence. It can be the same for corrections when we are characterized by our positive outlook. Others will be much more impressed with our projected image and will be more willing to accept us as bonafide experts in our field.

All this will tend to increase our ability to get the job done. As anxiety levels are reduced, the "juices" of energy and creativity flow more freely and we are able to improve our methods for responding to the demands of our tasks. Acceptance by others, which usually produces cooperation and sharing of ideas, may well smooth the way for corrections practitioners to fulfill their responsibilities.

There is nothing automatic about maintaining a positive self-image in corrections. Because we are



so diverse and scattered, it will require considerable attention from all of us. While it is true that we cannot control our environment or all the forces which impact on us, we should not resign ourselves to "the inevitable." A critical element in these situations is how we respond and relate to our respective environments. We usually cannot change our external environment—it is too big, too complex, too powerful. But we *can* change our internal environment, our self-image, which has great impact on how we relate and respond to the external environment.

Perhaps it will be useful for the present discussion to take another look at some of the things to which we can turn for encouragement and inspiration to develop a positive self-image.

#### *Inspiration for Self-Image*

When we stop to think about it, we quickly realize that corrections has much about which to feel confident—even proud. Among these things which can contribute to a positive self-concept is the noble *purpose* of corrections. We have a mission to protect, to serve, to assist, and in both moral and social context, that is a very worthwhile responsibility. Our job is not to save the world from crime; it is to make our communities a little safer for everyone by helping to change the behavior of that small proportion of the total population that comes within the purview of corrections. To do good—not to be "do-gooders" as we are sometimes accused—is something about which we can have positive feelings.

A tradition of *progressiveness* is another force that can help to inspire a positive self-image. Deep concern for offenders and the community has often put corrections on the leading edge of social developments. Many individual practitioners and agencies have been astute observers of both the social and correctional scenes and have initiated beneficial changes long before legislatures or case law decisions have addressed the issues. There are areas in which corrections has lagged behind legislation and case law—a situation of which some persons have been quite critical. But, by and large, corrections personnel have been in the vanguard of most important developments affecting offenders.

This tradition of progressiveness has included heavy stress on appropriate training to provide personnel with basic skills to do their jobs and to keep them updated in the latest ways of improving performance. Correctional agencies have invested extensively in training programs to back

up this position. Emphasis on professional practice has been an important aspect of progressiveness. In attitudes and actions, corrections practitioners have demonstrated the commitment, concern and careful effort which characterizes professionals. Innovative approaches to service delivery constitute a third area of the progressive tradition of corrections. Wherever you go among corrections workers you hear them asking or telling one another about new methods or variations on old ways of providing services to clients.

Another factor about which one can feel pleased and on which a positive self-image can be based is a corps of excellent *personnel*. The field of corrections has a host of talented and very capable practitioners who, collectively, could accomplish almost anything that needs to be done. They are dedicated individuals who willingly give of themselves far beyond expectations because they care about others. Many of them could earn much higher salaries using their abilities in other lines of work, but choose to remain in corrections because they believe they can make worthwhile contributions. Not all of these people have achieved high levels of academic standing, but they are nonetheless capable. There are philosophical differences among corrections practitioners, but most have a balanced approach to meeting the protection needs of their communities while responding to the legal and social needs of offenders. In short, there are many thousands of corrections workers who need take second place to no one and of whom we can be extremely proud.

An extensive repertoire of outstanding *programs* is a fourth area that should serve as inspiration for a positive self-concept. Criticisms and accusations of failure notwithstanding, correctional efforts *do* work for many offenders. Obviously, the same efforts do not work equally well for everyone under all circumstances; but correctional programs and personnel have been effective in helping offenders to accomplish worthwhile objectives and have been instrumental in "turning around" many offenders. While by no means perfect, corrections workers can be pleased that they generally do a creditable job for and with their clients.

It is readily apparent from this discussion that there are a lot of things "going" for corrections which should serve as inspiration for a strong positive self-image. One other factor we should have "going" for us is a sense of *pride* in our profession. This should be a predictable result of our awareness of the positive factors noted above. This pride is not arrogance; it is self-respect. It is not vanity;

it is nobility. It is not ostentation; it is grandeur. It is not boastfulness; it is proper modesty. It is not pretense; it is dignity. Such pride is these things because it is based on a solid foundation of people, processes and purpose that are themselves worthwhile and effective.

#### *Improvement of Self-Image*

If we recognize that corrections' self-concept is not as positive as it could and should be, how do we improve it? The term, "improvement" is chosen with care because it means a modification or addition by which an object's value or excellence is increased; a change for the better. This is more than merely trying to polish our image so that it appears brighter. Polishing implies artificiality and surface change, while improvement connotes more substantive change. Although polishing might help, corrections really should look toward solid improvement of its self-image.

Corrections is *not* an easy profession; it involves a great deal of hard work, many hours of time and the expenditure of much energy. Effective corrections is a blood, sweat and tears profession; and forgetting this will contribute to a negative self-concept. (Perhaps it has already.) But, then, one does not gain a strong positive self-image by having it easy in life. To struggle, to persevere and to win develops a positive self-concept much more surely and effectively than does having it easy.

How may corrections improve its self-concept? There are four important things corrections personnel *must* be to accomplish this end: (1) we must be *committed* to our profession; (2) *competent* in our work; (3) *credible* among our constituency; and (4) *confident* in ourselves. Each of these will be briefly discussed in turn.

Were it not for many past and present corrections workers who were and are committed to their field, we would still be in the "dark ages." Fortunately, some people cared and acted to bring us to where we are today. The same *commitment* must characterize present corrections personnel if we are to realize our full potential. Commitment is much more than a statement of belief or an intellectual idea of what one should do; it is really a practical matter. Commitment means caring, being and doing. It is attitudes and actions which say, "I know where I must go and how to get there; I intend to keep trying no matter what happens; I will not give up." Commitment means one is aware that there is a worthwhile goal to be reached; it implies a firm decision to work toward

that goal; and it implies perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks.

One common current criticism is that "corrections does not do any good." This is an attack on the competency of corrections personnel and efforts and points to a key aspect of self-image. If we are to have a positive self-concept in corrections, we must be *competent* in our work. Competence has to do with capability and means having ability sufficient for the purpose. In corrections, this has to do with the ability to understand and have impact on illegal behavior sufficient to the purpose of bringing about necessary changes in that behavior. Of course, the corrections practitioner does not do this all alone; only offenders themselves can change their own behavior. But corrections does have the responsibility to facilitate these efforts and must have competency to do so.

We need to think of competency on two levels: it is to be *gained* and it must be *maintained*. There are many methods through which we gain competency: formal study, listening, informal observation and discussion, reading, listening, practice, trial and error, thinking, listening, or any other method by which we can *learn* to do our jobs well. This is more than a matter of repetition until something is indelibly imprinted in our minds and actions; it requires thinking and feeling. It is more than learning the theory and the "rules"; it requires some experimentation and adaption. It is more than merely reacting to whatever happens; it involves identifying and overcoming weaknesses and it requires growth and development.

This addresses the second level of competency: maintenance. It is not enough to "achieve" competency at one point in our careers; ways must be found to maintain a fine edge on our skills. This may be done through continuing education and updating because changes constantly occurring in our work environments require our skills to be updated, modified and sharpened. This, too, will require great commitment to our profession and willingness to invest a great deal of our energies on our own time.

One of the problems from which corrections has long suffered is the lack of *credibility* with the public and its own constituency. It is this lack of credibility that has given rise to much of the criticisms directed toward corrections. To be credible means capable of being believed, reliable, worthy of confidence. Credibility is not inherited; it must be earned. This is not easily done in most areas, and corrections is no exception. Individuals who are worthy of confidence are the ones who are

committed to and competent in their professions.

For corrections, credibility must be both internal and external. Personnel in the field must see the profession as reliable and believable; that is, they must have confidence in correctional leaders, theorists and researchers, as well as their own colleagues. In like fashion, the constituency of corrections—the community, courts, clients and families of clients—must see the field as capable of being believed. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, a situation which has resulted in many problems for corrections.

How may we earn credibility with our constituency? Only through competent performance of our responsibilities in ways that are visible to that constituency. When we are seen by others in a positive light, we will have little difficulty maintaining a positive self-concept.

*Confidence* in ourselves is the fourth requisite to improvement in self-image and flows from the other three factors. When we are really committed to what we do, are genuinely competent in performance and have credibility with our constituents, it is not difficult to feel confident. With confidence, we are less likely to be timid or to engage in self-flagellation, both of which are extremely self-defeating. In fact, solid confidence in ourselves will lead to a more assertive stance from which we can more effectively present ourselves to the public and respond to our critics.

Such self-assurance is not to be confused with arrogance, which is simply unwarranted pride and feelings of self-importance. It is also different from impudence, which is insolent shamelessness.

This self-confidence is born of substance, of commitment, of competence and of credibility. It has been earned through diligent training and difficult labor. It is solid and real; it is the just due of those who clearly know and competently perform their jobs.

Individuals and groups who speak and act with great self-confidence—not arrogance or impudence—inspire confidence in others. The ability to inspire confidence in others is a critical element of successful leadership. Most certainly, it should characterize corrections personnel who should be in the vanguard in efforts to respond to the demands and needs brought about because of crime and offenders. When we are confident in ourselves, others will be confident in us as well.

### *Conclusion*

There can be little question that much work must be done on corrections' poor self-image. The time is upon us and we will be the great losers if we fail to respond to the challenge and the opportunity. We can do something to change our self-concept, but we must act; no one else can do it for us. And there are substantial dividends to be gained from our efforts, as we have seen. We can develop a solid and bright self-concept which will inspire the people in corrections as well as those who interface with us. We can even have great impact on the general public. Of course, it requires a lot of effort—much of which will be different from many of the things we are accustomed to doing. The results, however, will be worth it.

# END

AS CORRECTIONAL practitioners, we desperately need to take an honest look at what we do and make a realistic appraisal of the effectiveness of our efforts.

— CLAUDE T. MANGRUM