THE EFFECTIVE CORRECTIONS MANAGER

Correctional Supervision for the Future

Third Edition

Bridget P. Gladwin
Charles R. McConnell
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Dedication

This text is dedicated to the unsung heroes of correctional institutions—the first-line supervisors who hold the most challenging day-to-day management positions.
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Foreword

Give me the right staff, and I can run a maximum security prison in an old red barn.

–Austin McCormick

In most mission statements of Departments of Corrections, there are words like “... to protect the public, provide a safe and humane environment for staff and inmates...” Implicit in these mission statements is the protection of the constitutional rights of those being held in the system. These lofty goals can only be achieved with strong leadership and dedicated, effective supervisors.

This third edition retains all the relevant information on effective corrections supervision from the previous two editions. The 30 sections in the second edition have been reorganized and consolidated into 15 sections addressing all of the critical issues facing today’s correctional managers, in a more concentrated, compelling manner.

This is not a text about substantive issues such as the security side of correctional management. Rather, it is about management and administrative issues. The reader is not going to find information on key control, tool inventories, inmate accountability, or inmate discipline. These things are important—indeed vital and central—to the operation of most correctional agencies. Every correctional administrator certainly should master the relevant, practical tools and technologies of the trade. But the previous quote, attributed to one of the early leaders in U.S. corrections, suggests that this text is about managing people in a correctional setting—a setting that could be a halfway house, a probation office, a county work camp, a jail, and certainly a maximum-security prison.

In the foreword to the first edition, J. Michael Quinlan talked about contemporary correctional managers operating in “an era of dwindling government resources and a movement to shrink the size of government in the United States.” This statement is as true, in fact more so, than when it was made over fifteen years ago. The weak economy of the mid 1990s has become even weaker in the last several years. Public correctional organizations are still being asked to do more with much less. In addition, the voices in the movement to shrink the size of government have become even louder. Inmates are now more difficult today than ever before. Not only has the influence of prison gangs increased, but the changing economic conditions, high unemployment, and uncertainty
of the future have led to changing social conditions and increased violence. The litigation and regulatory environments have also become more demanding.

These factors continue to make it more important than ever for correctional facilities to be administered in a professional, efficient manner. In cases such as City of Canton v. Harris, 489 U.S. 378 (1989) and subsequent cases, the courts have made it clear that criminal justice agencies must ensure that staff are trained in the basics of job performance in any areas where their work might violate constitutional requirements. What this means is that staff must know the policies that affect their work, and managers must make sure that the policy of the agency reflects constitutional requirements. Properly equipping managers for this and other supervisory tasks is critical. This text is intended to serve as a reference work for those involved in either developing their own managerial skills or teaching others how to be professional supervisors in the correctional environment.

Effective management is an essential element in the stability and safety of the correctional system. Almost 45 years ago, Warren Bennis, in an article entitled “Changing Organizations” (Bennis, W. G. 1968. The case study. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science. April/May/June), expressed the belief that “the most pivotal strategies of change are political, legal, and technological.” This is just as true today as when Bennis wrote these words nearly a half century ago. The business of corrections has changed over the years. Shrinking budgets and public scrutiny have made correctional administrators more accountable for running lean and efficient organizations. Technological advances are occurring at breathtaking speeds. New legislation and litigation continues to alter the context of decisions and priorities. Today’s correctional leaders require complex and subtle skills to deal effectively with a wide range of people, resources, and challenges from both inside and outside the organization.

This text reflects a particular point of view—that corrections is, at its heart, a people business. Whether discussing public or private operations, confinement or community facilities, the fundamentals of sound correctional management are the fundamentals of managing people.
Introduction

The quality of correctional life depends far more on management practices than on any other single variable.

—John Dilulio
• They must deal with the problems of overcrowding in an era of intense fiscal pressure.
• They must supervise and prevent violence among poorly socialized, aggressive inmates.
• They are obliged to provide drug treatment and literacy programming to poorly motivated subjects.
• They must put to work large numbers of inmates who have minimal or no work experience.
• They must provide care to a population with serious medical and mental health problems.
• They must balance the need to provide a reasonable level of programs and activities for inmates against the public’s current sentiment that correctional institutions provide too many amenities and are too often like “resorts.”

Managers of community-based correctional programs have the additional burden of being unable to control the actual whereabouts of their clientele for long periods of time while those individuals are in close contact with the general public.

These factors place corrections in a unique position, and many other published works have discussed those macro-level dynamics. Yet at the individual supervisory level, managing in the correctional environment has a great many traits in common with management in other specialties. Correctional managers must:

• Satisfy their organizational superiors with respect to accomplishing a specific mission.
• Monitor and control workflow.
• Develop and stay within budgets.
• Deal with employee performance issues.
• Ordinarily work in an organized labor environment.
• Comply with applicable statutes, regulations, and laws.
• Ensure that numerous concrete tasks are accomplished—supplies purchased, grounds maintained, plumbing repaired, meals served, hallways cleaned, and laundry processed, to name a few.

In those respects, correctional work is not unlike that encountered in other “total institutions,” such as the military, hospitals, and residential mental health facilities. It is true that in correctional settings, many tasks are performed by inmate workers who are not highly motivated and who may not even have the requisite skills for the jobs to which they are assigned, but to a large degree, correctional management at the individual supervisory level has many of the same underpinnings of management elsewhere in society.

This text starts from the central premise that many of the insights and skills that have proven so critical to successful management in the private sector and other public organizations are fully applicable to correctional management. Yet one should bear in mind that supervision in corrections has some very different aspects that require adaptation.

One key difference between corrections and other service organizations is that the population served is held involuntarily. This produces a work environment that can be hostile and even dangerous at times. It also means staff at every level must be concerned with the kind of security issues that present themselves in very few other occupations. Indeed, this comprehensive overlay of security concerns permeates the correctional environment and has an impact on virtually all management issues. It differentiates correctional work from all other settings, save perhaps the high-security environment of a locked mental health institution.

Add to these security issues the fact that the population served generally has no vested interest in participating in the correctional process. Consider the societal mission of corrections—ensuring public safety and equipping (often antagonistic, dangerous, illiterate, poorly socialized) inmates with skills that will reduce the likelihood of future criminality. This lack of inmate interest in participating in correctional endeavors has very clear implications for the staff whose job it is to manage the people and resources in this setting.

Paradoxically, it also is true that correctional programs and facilities could not operate in an orderly manner without the compliance of the subject population. However, that compliance is superficial at best; it is grounded in (coerced by, it may be argued) a well-defined security and supervision structure. That structure is backed up by a disciplinary system that can levy considerable punishment against the noncompliant inmate or community supervisee. Every agency or facility employee is expected to participate in these critical security and control systems. One is hard pressed to find another managerial environment with these overtones, which impact line and supervisory staff equally.

The fact that the physical operation of confinement facilities depends on manpower supplied, in part, by the inmate population also produces a bifurcated supervision situation. A line staff member in the official chain of command also can be a first-line supervisor with respect to inmates working in his or her charge. While this text
will not dwell on that specific aspect of correctional management, it is clear that many of the skills and personal traits that help managers direct staff activities also can apply to directing inmates.

These factors are important in understanding how the setting in which correctional managers operate makes their day-to-day management tasks somewhat different from their noncorrectional counterparts. But these differences do not mean that fundamental management principles do not apply to corrections. Rather, it means that in some cases special approaches are needed for their application. Managing within a correctional facility, or any other enterprise, hinges on effectively recruiting, training, directing, and motivating people, and for that reason at the individual supervisory level, corrections and other industries can draw on the same fundamental management principles.

This text is intended to be read and used by first- and second-line correctional managers (including those supervising inmates) and mid-level managers at the headquarters level. It can be of value to those with or without prior formal training in management, including potential supervisors. It can also serve as a refresher text for managers at all levels of a correctional organization, and this includes many upper-level managers in terms of lending perspective to the top-down view of what happens at lower levels.

Readers can use this text for general information about correctional management. They can use it also as a reference, seeking out specific topics through either the index or the table of contents. In addition, it can be used as a text for supervisory development classes.

This text draws some of its content from the material developed by author McConnell for his work, *The Effective Health Care Supervisor*, 7th edition (Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2012). But it is in every way focused specifically on the needs of managers in the correctional setting, whether at a first-line level or higher in the organization. Sections include corrections-related examples and exercises that help illustrate the concepts and techniques described within. These may be used for individual reading and study or informal discussion, and are also intended as activities for supervisory development classes.

Readers will find there is no correct order for the material in this text. Although divided into sections covering specific topics, it is really not possible to fully appreciate any single subject without some awareness of others. “Communication” is a case in point; it is a principal topic of one section, yet the principles of effective communication are critical to other sections as well. Each section is implicitly or explicitly part of perhaps several other sections’ topics, but each is written to stand independently.

Because of the way the subject material is intertwined, sections can be read selectively. But it may be most helpful to begin with the two sections titled “Corrections in a Changing Environment” and “The Nature and Functions of Management” for the sake of obtaining a strong introductory perspective. Then, read those sections on topics of specific interest or concern. For example, if the last meeting you attended was a disaster and you would like to learn about running an effective meeting, go straight to that section. Do not worry about skipping sections that do not apply to your situation—just as long as you are certain they do not apply. For example, if you do not have budget responsibility at present, save that section until later. Use your valuable reading time for those topics that will benefit you the most.

Each section includes illustrative material drawn from the real world. The reader should not presume these stories are presented in an exact manner, in some cases it was necessary to alter facts for privacy reasons. But each of them is placed in an actual organizational situation and is provided to show how the content of the section relates to the reality of corrections.

Corrections is a profession intertwined with legal issues, and therefore this text touches on several key legal topics. Neither of the authors is an attorney, and the information contained in those sections should be considered as general guidance only. Agency counsel, and if necessary private counsel, should be sought in any instance where legal issues arise in the workplace.

Whether in a correctional environment or elsewhere, supervision can be a difficult task. One of the reasons for this is that so often there is no totally clear solution to a specific problem. If this text was presenting technical task instructions, it would simply say, “Here’s how to do it, period.” However, the problems of supervision more often than not are commonsense problems involving people, most of whom are unpredictably, but quite naturally, different from each other. When presented with a specific problem, the “correct” answer may be any one of several courses of action, or no action at all, depending on various factors. The employee involved in technical tasks may spend a great deal of time with very clearly delineated options and choices. There is only one way, for instance, for the records technician to correctly compute and record the terms of an inmate’s sentence. Yet the supervisor often has no such fixed guidelines for...
his or her actions. There is only general guidance on how to suppress a disturbance, make a complex personnel deployment decision, or decide how to distribute scarce budget resources.

Parts of this text are concerned with what are necessarily gray areas for the correctional manager. This text can guide supervisors in making many decisions. It cannot, however, prescribe cut-and-dry solutions to “standard” problems, since few such problems exist in the real world of corrections. Moreover, every idea presented herein will not conform to each agency’s policy or regulatory requirements. In its totality, it presents a wide array of informational and strategic resources for the new as well as the veteran correctional manager.

I have two final comments, the first of which has to do with the content devoted to quality management and reengineering-related issues. Many current managers may recoil from the thought of even skimming content about Management by Objectives (MBO), Total Quality Management (TQM), or any other quality-related management scheme that seems “gimmicky” to them. This will no doubt result from their unsatisfactory experience with these or other such endeavors. The material presented in this text is not intended to provide the means for a manager to implement any such program on his or her own. In virtually all such cases, these kinds of programs are systemic in nature and require major resources that can only be endorsed by top agency officials. Rather, by acquainting line managers with these concepts and practices, the authors intend to plant the seeds of an inquiring, productive, quality mindset in new managers and those who seek to upgrade their skills and abilities. The conceptual and practical materials on these topics provide an important foundation for overall positive managerial practice.

Second, while this text does not dwell on it, the need for a sense of humor in any line of work is of paramount importance to the authors. As serious as corrections is, having a sense of humor is an important trait for a balanced, successful manager. It is not inappropriate that Scott Adams’ entertaining book *The Dilbert Principle* is on the list of recommended reading. The managerial and bureaucratic foibles Adams chronicles have common threads that weave in and out of corrections, just as they do in the business world. But the real lesson that should be instilled in the reader is to find and take those opportunities to laugh when laughter is appropriate, and thus leaven the gravity of our work with healthy humor.

Whatever value this text possesses for correction professionals lies largely in its potential as a working guide. Use it as particular questions and needs suggest. If it helps on the job in any substantial way, even only now and then, it will have served its intended purpose.
About the Authors

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