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The Failure of Correctional Management— The Potential for Reversal

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GUEST EDITOR

Introduction

THE DEVELOPMENT of strategy for those in the political arena, to paraphrase Whitaker Chambers (as quoted in Blumenthal, 1986:24), should be a primary concern for managers and if they will not surrender on its terms or to its terms, must learn to maneuver within its terms. "To live," he wrote, "is to maneuver." This view of politics is as applicable to the field of corrections for its managers must not only learn to maneuver, they must guide their agencies in truly turbulent times.

It may be unfortunate but true that those who have learned to survive political, judicial, and legislative machinations have done so at significant cost to their agencies and programs. Those who survive, but do not thrive, it can be said, have taken a "pedestrian" view of their roles and responsibilities. Their view is frequently narrow, if not tubular, as they hold on to their positions at great personal and programmatic cost.

Fortunately, there is a sufficient number of "progressives" in the field who have vision, understanding, wisdom, and move proactively rather than reactively through the societal and superordinate minefields. They exercise leadership, recognize the need for internal as well as external support groups, plan for change, and appear to be willing to take calculated risks in the stewardship of their agencies. They are a different breed of correctional managers from their predecessors. They breed success rather than failure (see, for example, Cohn, 1973, 1979a and 1981).

Is corrections, and especially probation, stabilizing itself or is there to be more dramatic change? I think the former more likely to occur than the latter. There is no doubt that society demands that miscreants be controlled, but there is willingness to manage this social problem according to constitutional guarantees. But, society also demands—and is entitled to—positive results.

Service to Clients

Irrespective of philosophical approach, clients are being supervised in one fashion or another by those with derivative authority from the courts and legislatures. That this will continue and at greater intensity as a result of increased caseloads is

undeniable. However, unless policy decisions are made concerning how better to deal with such caseloads and by agency-based managers, these decisions will be made by superordinates and not necessarily in the best interest of the agency, its staff, or the clients.

Instead of fighting the conjunction of forces between internal and external agents to monitor and develop programmatic services and programs, correctional leaders should work with these superordinates to forge a more meaningful, administrative partnership. What used to be a *laissez faire* supervisory stance needs to be re-directed into a positive, systematized collaboration to ensure that clients, staff, and programs receive creative input and the maximization of resources.

That we are in an era of transition is unquestionable and that responsible and responsive change in the way corrections does business is undeniable. Changes in beliefs, cultural patterns, processes of interpersonal relationships, and styles of management in the larger society should be reflected by changes in correctional practice. A decade ago, Schrag (1971:9-10) suggested: "Conceptions of crime and control, of deviance and social order, are responsive to changes in man's experience, knowledge, technology, institutions, and physical resources." He goes on to state (p. 10) that the primary task is not one of crime control, but the management of social change; and ". . . if the task is more difficult today than before, it is largely because of the increasing disparities in people's beliefs, interests, practices, and resources."

Interestingly enough, almost one-half century earlier, Sheldon Glueck (1936:326-328) suggested that it was important for the field of probation that it construct an effective "science and art of correction." To do this, he argued, it was necessary for the administrator to take into consideration the moral milieu of the time, the tremendous mobility of the population . . . and the conflict of penal philosophies. In summarizing the state-of-the-art of probation of 1936, Glueck said: "Probation cannot be successfully conducted from the humanitarian and scientific viewpoint of modern social work, as long as other

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instruments and institutions tied up with probation have different and contradictory objectives."

Therefore, as Glueck long-ago suggested and I would concur today, no matter how much the field of social casework has contributed to the field of corrections, its utility and appropriateness as almost the sole approach to dealing with offenders must and should be reduced. The skills and resources simply do not permit it; the needs of many clients do not require it; and other agencies in the community are better prepared to provide it. Yet, social casework remains the approach of choice, especially by "pedestrian" administrators who were schooled in and remain governed by "the old ways"—ways which die hard by those least willing to take risk, but who still control agencies.

Probation and Social Casework

From its earliest days, probation, as a system and a process, was nurtured and expanded from a social casework perspective. It was born in the Positive tradition of dealing with the individuality of the offender—one who was not viewed as having free will, but one who was suffering from the pushes and pulls of life over which there was little or no control. Probation, as an alternative to institutionalization, was necessarily geared to attempts to understand the offender and why he or she engaged in criminal behavior. Probation was an experiment in social welfare policy that was accepted cautiously by the judiciary and reluctantly by society at large.

There is no doubt that probation developed as "professionalism" prospered. It was and remains a noble attempt to save those who have been viewed as "sick" and in desperate need of change. It became a medico-welfare approach to controlling crime and delinquency and was enhanced by what has been called the "rehabilitative ideal." This approach toward treatment and cure was succinctly summarized by Charles Chute (1938:43), then executive director of the National Probation Association, who a half century ago stated:

Probation work was begun and has been carried forward in a spirit of high idealism It was established to save the unfortunate victim of himself or of his untoward surroundings, to reclaim him, to offer "another chance" under more favorable surroundings, to apply the power of intelligent, friendly, personal guidance, so often lacking in the lives of offenders.

That social casework became and remains for some the primary approach to dealing with offenders was extolled in 1930 by Professor Harry Best (pp. 506-507) as follows:

Probation shows forth in extraordinary measure the possibilities and implications of social case work, and at a vital point. Its aim is the reform and rehabilitation of the offender . . . (and) it will rank *second to nothing else among the achievements of human society.* (emphasis added)

Casework in Disrepute

Rehabilitation efforts, notwithstanding the casework model, have been in disrepute since the so-called Martinson report (Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks, 1975). This has been confirmed in some measure by Sechrest et al. (1979) and Albanese et al. (1981) and lamented by Allen (1981). Further, research indicates that probation itself has had questionable impact as a successful intervention model (see, e.g., Petersilia et al., 1985). As a consequence, these findings have combined to precipitate profound changes in correctional philosophy and programming.

In 1976, the Comptroller General of the United States issued a report on probation and concludes (p. 25) that probation cannot effectively rehabilitate offenders and protect society as long as problems in the delivery of services exist. The report suggests that a highly significant statistical relationship exists between the extent to which offenders receive needed services and their success on probation—at least in terms of successful completion of probation term.

Administrators who remain unaware of these changes, the results of research studies, and changes in societal mood, and who refuse to accept them are either stupid, naive, or some combination of the two. That these non-risk takers, who fortunately are in the minority, are oblivious to societal changes, needs, and demands and are still in command of their agencies is nothing short of a tragedy and truly reflect what is meant by "the failure of correctional management."

Managers Should Think

"People should think things out fresh and not just accept conventional terms and the conventional way of doing things," Buckminster Fuller once said. The brilliance of Albert Einstein, in part, was reflected in his commitment to *Gedankenexperimente*, a favorite ploy of his, which is German for "thought experiment," wherein one attacks a problem or situation by setting up a series of events and constraints, and then solves them in one's head. Although it may seem like a paradox and challenged as a process by critical decision-makers, Einstein's approach may be useful to correctional administrators, for it suggests that free thinking to solve problems may be better than the formalism and logic of rational decision-making.

Historically, corrections has on occasion taken a hard look at itself, but this has occurred mostly as a result of dramatic events and external pressures, rather than as a result of introspection and internal examination. Attica, prison/jail overcrowding, court intervention and the appointment of masters (a new career!), legislative abolition of parole, determinate sentencing, and the increasing presence of private corrections are but a few examples in recent history

that come to mind. But they are examples that have resulted in imposed changes in corrections, and changes which have been met with resistance in many correctional quarters.

Further, as the authors of a 1978 report state in a disheartening voice (Nelson et al., p. 2):

... considering community corrections in its entirety, it is easy to become discouraged about the prospects for genuine institutional reform. The mainstream of probation and parole is not grossly different from what it was a decade ago. Too often, new and innovative efforts are essentially "side shows"—intriguing, exciting, but devoid of major impact upon the overall operation.

If correctional administrators generally have been unwilling or unable to innovate (Cohn, 1979b), in part, this must be laid at the doorstep of diminished resources. When a manager is called upon to keep the agency afloat in spite of increased demands for services and in the face of a disgruntled, overworked staff, there probably is little time to innovate. The shame, however, is that under such circumstances, the real leader would reassess programs, look for different ways to solve old problems, reject tradition for tradition's sake, forge new partnerships and new constituencies, and otherwise take all necessary risks and steps to direct his or her organization in ways that reflect *leadership*.

Unfortunately, it is probably true that contemporary concerns often alert us to aspects of the past that previous experts in the field of corrections have overlooked. Yet, it may be this very accumulation of perspectives, including old dogmas, that keeps the past continuously alive when it should have been put to rest years ago.

In *Making a New Science* (1987), author James Gleick reflects on the works of Thomas Kuhn, the historian of science, who discusses the fitfulness of progress. According to Kuhn, people hold on to familiar concepts for as long as they can, allowing shifts to take place only long after it should have become plain that the old concepts simply do not suffice. If correctional administrators are to face—if not create—change, can this occur without fulfilling Emerson's dictum that man is great "not in his goals but in his transitions?" Is the issue further exacerbated by the fact that the problem for these administrators is not arrogance, but apathy; not power, but passivity?

Six Imperatives for Leadership

To paraphrase John Keegan (1987) in *The Mask of Command*, the author argues that to be a successful leader, a manager must master five imperatives: the imperative of kinship (persuading his staff

that he understands and cares for them); the imperative of prescription (being able to tell the staff exactly what he wants and why); the imperative of sanction (convincing the staff that they will be rewarded for doing what they are supposed to do and punished if they do not); the imperative of action (knowing when to act); and the imperative of example (showing that he is capable of doing what he asks the staff to do). According to current management theory, a sixth imperative could be added: the imperative of participative management (proving to staff members that their collective voice is essential in formulating policies and procedures that impact them).

There are some caveats associated with planned change which have resulted in some correctional managers' resistance, but perhaps for the wrong reason—inertia. Yet, in view of the above discussion and, paradoxically, it would appear, as Tom Peters, the author of *In Search of Excellence* and *Thriving on Chaos*, who discusses large corporations, has stated (1987: 3), there are five areas of management which constitute the essence of "proactive" performance in our chaotic world.

They include: (1) an obsession with responsiveness to external agents and forces, (2) constant innovation in all areas of the organization, (3) partnership—the wholesale participation of and gain-sharing with all people connected with the organization, (4) leadership that loves change instead of fighting it, and (5) control by means of simple support systems aimed at measuring the "right stuff" for today's environment.

It is important to note that what Peters suggests appears to be contradictory to the prior discussion about failures in correctional leadership. More rightly, the issue is one of absolutes; it is a matter of degree rather than rightness or wrongness. Peters uses such terms as "obsession," "constant," "wholesale," "love and fighting," and total "control." In a sense, he urges moderation, not total commitment. A careful reading suggests that his thesis is that the only way for an organization to be excellent is to improve constantly and respond to changing conditions. He argues that there indeed are no absolute answers, but that "renewal" is what is critical.

And, this may be the essential point about the future of correctional leadership: the development of a cadre of managers who can think; who can anticipate future problems and needs of staff, clients, agencies, and communities; who can recognize the need for and cultivation of support groups and constituencies; who have a vision of the future of corrections; who can deal with superordinates in firm,

realistic, but understanding ways; who can develop agency-based priorities and work strategically to find the requisite resources for implementation; who are not fearful of evaluation and assessment; and who are committed to and find the means for organizational renewal.

Critical Problems

What, then, is a correctional administrator to do? How can he or she develop a stance of thriving rather than merely surviving, of finding the resources needed for renewal? How can the administrator become "progressive" rather than "pedestrian?" What, in the final analysis, are the critical problems that must be faced if corrections is to be a meaningful service today and in the future?

The sensitive administrator is faced with a number of critical problems and issues, including:

1. The need to reassess the organization in terms of its goals and priorities; to re-examine mandates and requirements; and to evaluate required resources to mount effective delivery systems of services.
2. The need to develop processes for accountability for all staff, regardless of hierarchical position in the organization; and to develop fair but appropriate means for evaluating performance as such relates to organizational mission and goals.
3. The need to develop program evaluation strategies to determine which programs and services are effective, which indeed do or do not meet established programmatic objectives, and to be prepared to discard those programs which do not meet defined needs in a cost-effective manner, even though they may be popular services. In short, the administrator must learn how to husband scarce resources in order to utilize them as efficiently as possible without sacrificing the clients, courts, or communities.
4. The need to say "No" when it is not possible to take on new assignments without appropriate resources, when such a declination would be received unpopularity, or when the proposed new service does not fall within the mandate or priorities of the organization.
5. The need to insist on consistent, quality services from all staff.
6. The need to reject old dogmas—old ideas, simply because "that is the way we have always been doing it."
7. The need to develop a style of management

that reflects participation and an organizational team effort that results in commitment to service, willingness to take risks, and an atmosphere which provides mutual support.

8. The need to develop support groups and constituencies among staff, judges, legislators, elected political officials, and critical community-based groups and organizations.
9. The need to resist change that is inappropriate, create change where it is appropriate, to innovate where indicated, and to seek renewal when needed.
10. The need to relate to other units and components of the administration of justice in a collegial manner in order to enhance systematization efforts.
11. The need to deal with, if not embrace, private correctional efforts in order to develop a coordinated and effective delivery system of services in the community.
12. The need to develop responsible training—and more training—at the inter- and intra-organizational level, not only in substantive areas of concern, but especially for middle and top-management personnel in process areas of concern.

Difficult Tasks for the Future

The correctional manager of today and tomorrow has a difficult task. He or she not only must learn how to balance competing and conflicting goals and demands, there is also the need to negotiate and compromise. It is easy to prescribe, it is difficult to treat. However, the successful manager, as Bartlett and Kayser (1973:xi-xii) suggest, must learn how to problem-solve, not concentrate on blame-fixing. Further, as Jay Hall (1980:56-57) argues, a manager must always seek "competence" in himself and those with whom he works, for it leads to "...creativity (which) is an outgrowth of commitment and both, in turn, are by-products of a third antecedent factor, participation...which is the activating agent."

Hall goes on to state (p. 251):

A commitment to competence will...require a different kind of management... (those) who can deal in a productive way with the multitude of human forces...which are unleashed in the organizational community. All that is required to insure such management is to recognize the dependency of organizational competence on managerial competence and develop managers accordingly.

A competent manager not only is unafraid of power, he willingly uses it to develop and sustain meaningful systems and programs. Further, as Ben-

nis and Nanus (1985:17) point out:

... power is the basic energy needed to initiate and sustain action or, to put it another way, the capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it. Leadership is the wise use of this power.

Corrections is often viewed as a slow-moving, rigid bureaucracy that can fail to act appropriately and swiftly to meet ongoing challenges. Accused of inflexibility and obeisance to the dead hand of custom, such organizations breed contempt among staff and those persons for whom services ostensibly are being provided. On the assumption that these conditions can be reversed, there is no room for incompetency, ineptness, or inadequacy among its managers. If correctional management has failed, there is no one to blame but the managers. There are no "paralyzing rigidities," as Greenblatt et al. (1971: xvii) use the term, there are only inflexible managers.

Competency, commitment, creativity, change, and innovation perhaps should be the hallmarks of successful management in corrections. Obviously, it is almost always easier to "say" than to "do." What is needed is less rhetoric and more action. As Updegraff (1961:36) concludes: "The world is cluttered up with unfinished business in the form of projects that might have been successful, if only at the tide point someone's patience had turned to active impatience."

For the correctional manager, yesterday has been and today is now. All we have left is tomorrow. Since there is much to do, shouldn't we get on with it?

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