



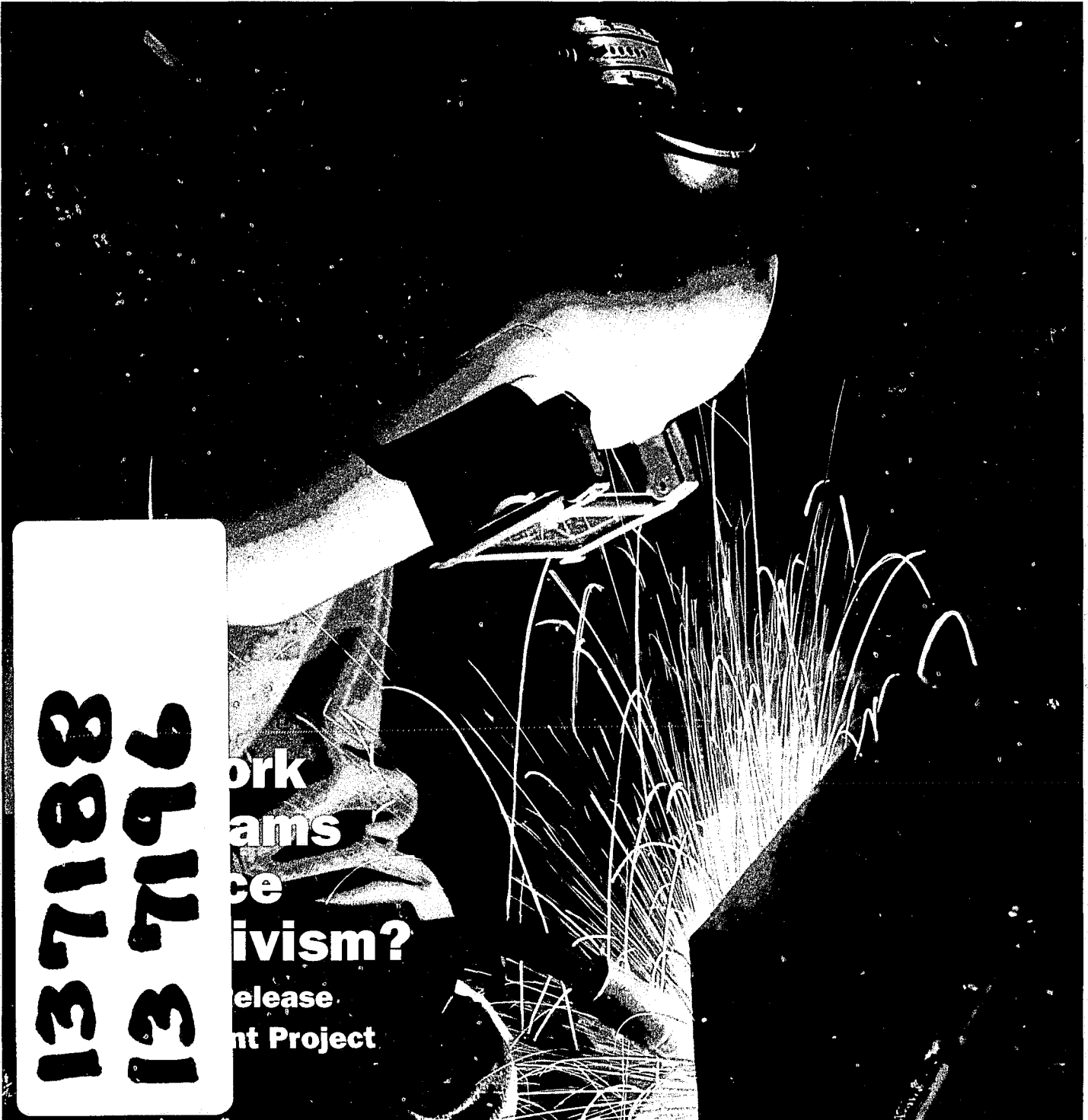
U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Prisons

Federal Prisons

JOURNAL

VOL. 2, NO. 4

WINTER 1992



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**U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice**

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The Correctional Worker Concept

Being connected in the 90's

Margaret Hambrick

Connectedness. It's a word you'll hear more and more frequently in the 90's. When people are connected, good things seem to happen. They feel good about themselves and what they do.

In any workplace, being connected can mean having a say in what goes on through strategic planning or some other planning process, receiving support from co-workers, knowing there is a system to provide assistance when you need it, having a sense of common purpose, or sharing a common knowledge base. In the correctional workplace, fostering this sense of connectedness is vital to the success of the institution and individual workers.

How do we achieve this connectedness among a large number of staff, where turnover fills the ranks with inexperience and where education ranges from advanced degrees to GED's?

In the Federal Bureau of Prisons, security is everybody's business. All job delineations include basic correctional practices and security. We say that we are "correctional workers" first and whatever else we are second.

The Federal system has operated under the correctional worker concept for nearly 20 years. Walk into a living unit in any Federal prison, and you are likely to wonder where all the staff are. The answer: they are throughout the facility, and not just in correctional officer uniform.



In contrast to many State and local correctional systems, the Federal Bureau of Prisons staffs its facilities with only one class of personnel. All Bureau of Prisons staff are correctional workers first. Everyone understands that specialty roles are assumed after the security needs of the institution are met.

In one institution, the word spread like wildfire—the warden had written a “shot”—a report on an incident involving a rule violation by an inmate. Not only one, but two! And busted contraband on the food cart going to a housing unit! Writing a shot was not something executives usually did. It certainly made the point—security was everybody’s business.

As correctional workers, all staff, including the warden, take responsibility for the security of the institution and supervision of inmates. If the unit officer—or any other staff member—needs emergency assistance, all available staff respond. Department heads leave a meeting, caseworkers leave their desks, construction and maintenance personnel leave their projects—all respond to help the officer and perform any necessary correctional tasks. If a physician comes across an inmate who is out of bounds, the physician assumes responsibility for the inmate, escorts that individual to the appropriate area, and writes disciplinary reports, without assistance from the correctional officer staff.

Many visitors to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Detention Center when I was warden there remarked on the staffing patterns, particularly that of the housing units, where correctional officers supervise up to 134 inmates. They typically asked, “Is this officer alone in

here with all these inmates?” The officer would answer, “I’m by myself but not alone.”

The Bureau of Prisons’ supervision system has evolved over the past 2 decades, originating with management’s goal of establishing a centralized training center and a standardized training model. Previously, the Bureau had operated



Courtesy Staff Training Academy, Glyco

All staff are trained in self-defense, first at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glyco, Georgia, and annually thereafter at their institutions.

using the traditional program/custody division—and with the resulting byproduct, a sometimes problematic “we/they” philosophy. In the early 1970’s, however, the Bureau began to provide the same training for all staff, reinforcing the philosophy that we are all correctional workers first.

All staff are given the same basic correctional training—2 weeks of institution familiarization at the local institution and 3 weeks of Introduction to

Correctional Techniques at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glyco, Georgia. All new employees, from the correctional officer and secretary to the doctor, lawyer, or psychologist, start their careers from the same frame of reference.

There are many reasons for training all staff as correctional workers:

Caseworkers or counselors may be the first on the scene if an officer calls for help. All inmates can count, even the most disturbed ones. Many situations are defused by the mere appearance of numbers of staff trained in security procedures.

■ When all staff know the emergency routines, it multiplies the numbers available to assist. Staff in the immediate area—caseworkers, psychologists, or counselors—may be the first on the scene if an officer calls for help. All inmates can count, even the most disturbed ones. Many situations are defused by the mere appearance of numbers of staff trained in security procedures. Huge inmates have been heard to mutter “too many” and hold out their hands to be cuffed.

■ All staff are more conscious of security issues in their own areas, knowing that they too must respond if something goes wrong. It provides additional incentives to check the security of doors and windows and account for inmates if all staff know that they will be called out in the middle of the night if there is an escape—not just correctional officers.

shop supervisor knows he or she may have to respond to an inmate fight on the yard.

■ It eliminates the “we/they” attitude among staff that implies some may be too important to participate in the unpleasant business of dealing with a disruptive inmate.

Staff in upper management need a good grounding in basic correctional practices, which the Bureau’s current training philosophy provides. In the Federal system, staff may work in several disciplines on their way up. Someone may start off as a correctional officer, move into case management, possibly back into custody as a supervisor, and then into Federal Prison Industries on the way to becoming an associate warden or warden. If he or she feels unsuited for a certain kind of work, there are always other options.

■ It keeps inmates from looking at staff as “good guys” vs. “bad guys,” depending on whether they are responsible for enforcing the rules.

Inmates always try to play staff off against each other. An understanding of the correctional basics helps staff sort out the truth. If you’ve worked the officer’s post as part of your training, you are more likely to know what really goes on and less likely to fall for a story.

I recently stepped up beside the officer doing shakedowns of the inmates as they left the noon meal and helped him check coats. The inmate’s response was, “Hey, I got shook down by the warden.”

When I discuss institution familiarization training with new employees, they often mention time spent on such correctional posts as their favorite part of the training. Those who may have had an unconscious bias against others who were going into custodial positions have new respect for their co-workers.

■ It creates team spirit among staff to know they all have the same training, regardless of position.



Courtesy The Miami Herald

Members of Special Operations Response Teams (here, at the August 1991 disturbance at the Cuban detainee unit in Talladega, Alabama) come from various departments in the institution.

One of my “fond” memories is of spending all night on an escape post near a railroad track with another institution department head. We didn’t personally catch the inmate, but we learned a lot about each other and our respective departments.

Allowing a knife to be made in the metal shop becomes more serious when that

Education and position, as well as the formal organizational structure, can create hierarchies in institutions. Having common correctional responsibilities is a great leveler. In the black jumpsuits of a BOP Special Operations Response Team, everyone looks alike; the skills needed to quell the disturbance have nothing to do with education or rank.

■ It provides more career flexibility, allowing staff to move back and forth between disciplines and into management. There are no separate career tracks for custodial or “professional” personnel.

I really enjoy talking to staff just back from "basic training" at Glynco. They are confident and excited and ready to go to work. They have made friends in other parts of the country and have a sense of connectedness with the entire system.

A recent, failed escape attempt at the Federal Correctional Institution in Lexington, Kentucky, was a good example of team spirit. In this instance, the day shift, consisting largely of specialty workers, was held over to help search the entire institution. Everyone pitched in. From searching remote corners of the compound to preparing and serving the evening meal, they all did what was asked of them. The next day several staff commented that they had enjoyed the challenge; they felt they were all part of the team.

■ The staff complement can be more effective when program staff are available for emergencies.

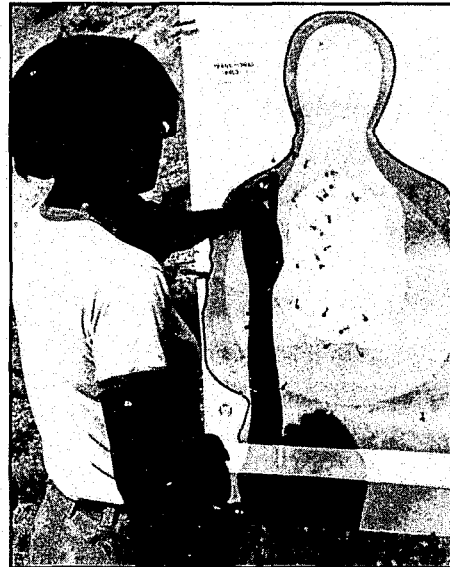
As you can imagine from the above example, it was a tremendous help to have all the staff available to search for the inmates who were attempting to escape. In emergency situations, the available, trained staff is multiplied many times when all have been trained to respond first as "correctional workers."

In the event of a disturbance or riot, all staff can be counted on to help. Staff from all disciplines can be deployed for temporary duty, primarily to serve as correctional officers. Since each has been trained and then refreshed annually on weapons and other basic security procedures, we are confident of their ability to perform, even under the most difficult conditions.

During last year's budget crisis in the Federal Government, institutions were

faced with the possibility of furloughing one-third of their work force. Our ability to reassign any staff member into a direct security post meant the basic functions of the institutions would continue even though we would be critically short of staff.

Make no mistake, it is more expensive to train all staff in all aspects of correctional



Courtesy Staff Training Academy, Glynco

As with self-defense, all Bureau of Prisons staff receive basic and refresher training in a variety of firearms.

procedures rather than just selected categories. But the long-term cost-efficiencies of this approach definitely outweigh the initial investment in comprehensive training.

The correctional worker system works well for the Bureau of Prisons. It complements the philosophy of direct supervision—operationally keeping staff in immediate, regular interaction with inmates—and creates a positive spirit and cooperative atmosphere among staff that improve the work environment. It also offers administrators a crucial manage-

ment tool by increasing their options in an emergency.

This approach may become even more important in the '90's. The staff we hire will be a part of a society that values "connectedness" and will work best in organizations that offer it. With our growth rate, we will need every advantage we can get.



Courtesy USP, Lewisburg

Staff at the U.S. Penitentiary, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, participate in an escape training exercise.

We will also be promoting staff into positions of responsibility much sooner than in the past, and with correspondingly less experience. They will need all the support they can get from the whole correctional team. The correctional worker concept fosters this teamwork, so that correctional officers are "by themselves, but never alone." ■

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