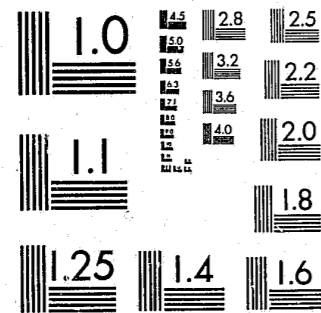


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# Offender Rehabilitation: The Appeal of Success

BY PAUL GENDREAU, PH.D., AND ROBERT ROSS, PH.D.\*

CORRECTIONAL workers have been repeatedly told that their efforts at offender rehabilitation are unlikely to be profitable. The pundits have stated that correctional rehabilitation programs have been tried, tested, and found wanting. They have been advised that research has demonstrated that treatment of delinquent and adult offenders is an ineffective response to criminal behavior; that according to Martinson (1976) "nothing works."

While Martinson's conclusion was the most widely disseminated and the most popularized, his rallying cry for the antirehabilitation zealots was supported by the conclusions of many others: "... there is no evidence to support any program's claim to superior rehabilitative efficacy" (Robison & Smith, 1971); "... no delinquency prevention programs can be definitely recommended" (Wright & Dixon, 1977); "... evidence supporting the efficacy of correctional programs is slight, inconsistent, and of questionable reliability" (Bailey, 1966). Such pronouncements have served to engender feelings of pessimism, hopelessness, and even worthlessness among correctional workers.

The "nothing works" conclusion did not go unchallenged. Rather, it sparked a long and heated debate throughout the criminal justice system about the effectiveness of correctional intervention. In the field of criminal justice, few questions have stimulated so much controversy. The debate raged (literally) for more than 10 years and had major impact not only on criminological theory, criminal justice policy, and correctional service. It stimulated the development of new correctional models such as radical nonintervention and justice as fairness (cf. Empey, 1979). In large measure, these were viewed as palatable alternatives to the much criticized medical disease model which was thought to provide the underpinnings for correctional treatment. Moreover, it provided support for corrections' swing to the "right" (not necessarily, "correct") as exemplified by demands for a return to fixed sentences, sure and swift

punishment and deterrence. Other factors, of course, were at play such as the growing conservatism of North American Society and the economic pressures that faced correctional managers who were hard pressed to provide funds for expensive treatment programs which seemed to pay limited dividends.

### *Effective Correctional Programming*

Ironically, now that the dust thrown up during the debate has begun to settle, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the antitreatment movement in corrections was based on a faulty premise: the assumption that treatment does not work. That conclusion has more and more been called into question. Even Martinson changed his views on the matter (cf. Martinson & Wilks, 1977; Serrill, 1975). The contention that treatment has been a failure is simply wrong. As a matter of fact, as Palmer noted (1975), Martinson in his original work identified a substantial number of successful programs.

Confirmation of the potency of correctional treatment was obtained in our recent reviews (Gendreau & Ross, 1979; Gendreau & Ross, 1981; Ross & Gendreau, 1980) of the correctional literature from 1973 to 1980. (Almost all of the conclusions about treatment ineffectiveness were based on pre-1967 research!) Our examination of the literature revealed a substantial number of treatment programs which have been demonstrated in methodologically impressive research to be effective in offender rehabilitation. We did not find panaceas, but we did find clear evidence that some treatment programs when applied with *integrity* to appropriate target populations can be effective in preventing crime and/or in reducing recidivism.

As we noted in our reviews the results of these effective programs were not trivial. Reductions in recidivism ranged from 30 to 60 percent in some well-controlled studies. They were not short-term effects. Positive results were found for as long as 3 to 15 years after treatment! They were not limited to one correctional setting. Successful results were found in community-based diversion programs, probation programs, and in institutional programs

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for hard-core juvenile delinquents and multirecidivistic adult offenders.

The evaluation of these programs involved research methodology as stringent as one can find in any criminal justice enterprise. Thirty-three percent of the studies were randomized experiments, 23 percent employed baseline line comparisons, and 25 percent used matched comparison groups.

The evidence of the success of correctional treatment is far greater than is the evidence of the success of other correctional approaches, including deterrence, and it is based on much more sophisticated research (Gendreau & Ross, 1981).

Not all programs "work." Many have been successful, but many others have failed and failures will, no doubt, be reported in the future. Given the variety, quantity, and quality of programs that have been tried, the complexity of the individuals they have tried to treat, and the nature of the settings in which they have tried to do so, this is precisely what one should expect. And yet, we expect across-the-board success. Corrections never seems to be content unless it is enamoured with some new elixir. We always seem to alternate between an obsession for some miracle-promising new approach and a depression engendered by its failure to live up to the unrealistic expectations with which it is introduced. "Panaceaphilia" characterized our initial romance with treatment during the sixties when we thought we could make our institutions into hospitals and "cure" all the criminals. "Negativitis" was the disease that infected the "nothing works" cynics when our idealism met reality. We have identified some successful programs, but we do not promise miracles. Some programs will work; some will fail. It is important to attempt to determine which approaches have promise and which have not.

#### Some Prescriptions for Effective Intervention

Our research is not yet at the stage where we can state without qualification exactly what factors differentiate successful and unsuccessful programs. However our examination of the available literature does allow us to offer some useful guidelines which can assist the correctional manager or practitioner in deciding which approaches have the greatest likelihood of success.

First, it should be noted, that presently no one technique can be thought of as the absolute treatment-of-choice. Effective programs encompass a wide range of modalities. They include behavioral counselling, contingency contracting, role playing, employment skills training, cognitive

development, modeling, operant conditioning, peer group programs, family therapy, among others.

Not all programs are equally effective with all types of offenders or in all settings. For example, offenders with sociopathic traits respond much better to a highly structured concrete program, e.g., token economy, than to an unstructured program that promotes open communication (Jessness, 1975). It is now possible to categorize offenders in terms of the degree and kind of supervision to which they are likely to respond favourably (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980). Research has also identified some offenders for whom specific treatment programs are likely to have a deleterious effect (e.g., Andrews, 1980; O'Donnell & Fo, 1980). Indeed, differential treatment is no longer a "will-of-the-wisp" phenomenon as Martinson (1976) once concluded.

Successful programs also differ from unsuccessful programs in terms of the explanatory model of criminal behavior on which they are based. No successful programs were found which were based on the oft-maligned medical disease model. On the contrary, most of the programs were based on a social learning conceptualization of criminal behavior (cf. Bandura & Walters, 1963; Neitzel, 1979). They focussed not on correcting underlying psychopathology but on modifying inappropriate behavior, faulty reasoning or social perceptions, or on changing antisocial attitudes or developing interpersonal or vocational skills. It seems reasonable to assert that programs which attempt to change aspects of the offender's functioning which are not correlated with his illegal behavior are unlikely to "work" in terms of reducing the probability that they will recidivate. Successful programs select as targets for their intervention not vague factors such as "emotional adjustment" or "personality" but concrete identifiable factors which are known to engender delinquent or criminal behavior. One might wonder why it ever made sense to do otherwise!

We are by no means ready to present cookbook formulas for effective programming. We continue to be distressed by the failure of many reporters to describe their practices concretely and in sufficient detail. This is, of course, essential if they are to be adequately replicated. Too often in the past successful programs have failed when others have failed to ensure that they applied the original techniques or paid insufficient attention to differences in the settings or the therapist or client characteristics.

Nevertheless, it is encouraging to note that recently correctional treatment researchers have

paid more attention to process analysis in an attempt to ascertain the crucial components of effective programs. This is an important development which needs to be augmented if only in order to ensure parsimonious, manageable, efficient and cost-effective programming. Andrews and Kiessling's (1980) analyses are good object lessons in this respect. By analyzing the differences between effective and ineffective counselling/supervision with adult probationers they have been able to articulate with good reliability the essential dimensions of successful intervention. For example, they have found that the level of authority employed, the type of problem-solving and environmental facilitation, the nature of the practitioner/client relationship, and the use of an anticriminal modeling and reinforcement model of behavioral change were crucial to success in the system they analysed. Similarly, Phillips and his colleagues have systematically gathered a wealth of program information that, in effect, provides valuable policy guidelines for developing and evaluating successful behavior modification programs for offenders (cf. Hoefler & Bornstein, 1975; Phillips et al., 1973). Walters & Mills (1980) have done likewise for behavioral-employment programs for juveniles.

These researchers, among others, give eloquent testimony to the fact that we must attend to therapeutic integrity (cf. Quay, 1977)—the degree to which the program practices what it preaches, the degree to which it actually provides what it is supposed to provide and the degree to which various program components contribute to program success/failure. This is the crucial issue that confronts practitioners today. Correctional research has taken us well beyond the stage of asking whether anything works. That question has been answered in the clear affirmative.

The programs recorded in the literature which have failed (and earned treatment a bad name) did so because they were derived from conceptual models (e.g., psychiatric, nondirective counselling methods, clinical sociology) that made little sense in terms of offender populations or were applied to inappropriate target populations or sought to effect behaviors which were unrelated to crime. They failed because they were badly managed, because they were not sufficiently intensive, and because they employed staff who were inadequately skilled, who exerted insufficient effort or who were not aware of or supportive of the program's techniques and goals.

Correctional managers who wish their programs to "work" must attend to all the foregoing. They

must continuously re-examine the operational and system variables that distinguish their successful and failed attempts at setting up viable programs (e.g., Gendreau & Andrews, 1979). By dealing with the social and political dynamics of the treatment setting and with the system variables which can too easily dilute an otherwise powerful program and make it a mere gesture they can effect meaningful change.

There are programs that work, but their success requires that corrections provide quality control in their management.

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