

Recommendations For Correctional Policy Makers

by Ned Rollo

The primary goal of imprisonment is "public safety" and the same is true post-release, but it cannot be achieved by attempting to extend the controls of prison out into the community. Supervision following release, even under maximum conditions, cannot hope to attain 1/50th of the control which the offender has already learned to function under while in a prison! Thus, if the system has not made a positive impact on the person by the time he or she leaves the institution, "post-release management" is a rhetorical farce!!

In reality, a person's "risk potential" cannot be effectively measured within an institution, where personal decision making and free will are all but non-existent. The true test is ultimately in the free world! Thus it is incumbent on the correctional system to take positive, creative steps while the offender is in custody to influence and assist pro-social conduct after release. This function should not be confused with expanded "surveillance and control." No form or degree of post-release surveillance and supervision can hope to curtail criminal behavior if a person is intent on living an outlaw lifestyle. To have a real impact on public safety, clients must CHOOSE to conduct themselves in ways which render a positive impact on themselves and others.

The use of domination as a control method, although universal across adult corrections, is the antithesis of what is needed to influence the adoption of socially beneficial values and behavior. The core concern of adult corrections must evolve beyond human zoo keeping to a point of awareness and responsibility where we focus on preparation of the offender as a "value-added product." However, the process through which an offender comes to make constructive decisions and translate them into daily living is a highly complex undertaking which corrections addresses, if at all, on a simplistic, one-dimensional level (e.g., anger management, criminal thinking, life skills, cognitive restructuring, GED, etc.). When such efforts are ineffective, contemporary correctional "wisdom" interprets this as justification for minimizing the value of all forms of treatment.

To make effective use of treatment to improve public safety, corrections must adopt a holistic approach to release preparation which speaks to the practical priorities of incarcerated and post-incarcerated clients. This is a long-term process of guidance and support whose goal is to impart to clients both the ability to make "good," pro-social choices and the understanding that this is the best means for achieving their primary concerns for freedom, family and future. To be effective, release preparation needs to help offenders find both reasons and means to care about themselves and their role in the community. It can be done --- but not within the current mind set!!

"Successful reentry" must equate to "constructive empowerment." This demands setting aside current mandates to track and control the 36 million felons of record across this nation and instead tailoring correctional policy and procedures to facilitate the client's motivation and ability to live as a social "contributor" rather than "detractor." Anything less will simply serve to expand the already rampant criminalization of our culture.

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