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CHAPTER 12

JAIL OFFICER TRAINING

Goals, Techniques and Evaluation Criteria

Lucien X. Lombardo

IN THE FIELD of corrections perhaps no resource among the field's scarce resources is more underutilized, undertrained and less understood than the line-level correctional worker.¹ Nowhere is this more true than in our local jails. This underutilization of jail officer potential is reflected in training efforts directed at improving officer performance. In 1980 the authors of a report on a national survey of correctional training programs observed that correctional training programs usually proceed without knowledge of the training needs of the specific organizations or personnel involved and conclude without formal evaluation of training efforts. In addition, the authors point out that "a gap occurs in linking training to performance on the job" (Olson, et. al, 1980: vol. 2, V. 23). With regard to jail officers, there can be little doubt that one of the reasons for the "gap" between training and job performance is the lack of knowledge concerning the social and psychological dynamics of jails as correctional environments and the equal lack of knowledge concerning the social and psychological dynamics of jail officer behavior.

Only during the last 10 years has the knowledge gap begun to close with regard to **prison officers**. Research studies have begun to show that prison officers are able to and do make significant contributions to smooth institutional operation and to reducing inmate stress (Johnson and Price, 1981; Klofas and Toch, 1982 and Lombardo, 1982).

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Other research has focused on the relationship between prison inmates, prison officers and their environments (Toch, 1975; 1977; Johnson and Toch, 1982; Lombardo, 1981). These studies demonstrate the techniques and strategies utilized by inmates and prison officers for dealing with the stress caused by conditions of confinement, and in doing so, they may inform the development of prison officer training.

When it comes to jails, however, the research is sparse. Gibbs (1978) has described the stresses of jail confinement and their relationship to inmate self-injury and Rottman and Kimberly (1977) provide insight into social relationships in jail; however, studies focusing on the relationships between jail inmates, jail officers and jail environments are seriously lacking. In fact, as Gibbs recently concluded:

A systematic survey of the environments of jails may result in the discovery of a number of institutions, sub environments, and personnel with ameliorative qualities for inmates who are experiencing certain difficulties or who are susceptible to certain stress (1982:111).

The training process described below attempts to take Gibbs up on his challenge, i.e., to merge training and research in ways that began to systematically survey jail environments and also close the gap between training and job performance.

Training Package Assumptions

The training program described here is intended primarily for in-service jail officers. (However, with adaptations it might also be useful for pre-service training efforts.) As such, the program is not intended to be a replacement for training geared to basic orientation, security procedures, first aid, self-defense and physical training, fire prevention and safety, human relations and communications skills, and crisis intervention/emergency procedures courses most frequently offered as standard jail officer training (Olson, et. al, 1980: vol. 2, VIII-9). The program described here is intended to be "an exercise in learning about one's work and work place" in an effort to improve the quality of living for inmates and the level of job satisfaction for staff.²

In designing this in-service training program I make a number of assumptions:

- (1) There exists within the jail officer corps of any institution men and women who carry out their formal assignments in ways that contribute to the achievement of a humane jail environment (described under goals section below);

- (2) These officers do not share the techniques and strategies they have discovered;
- (3) These officers do not always recognize the value of their contributions;
- (4) There exists a negative group subculture that emphasizes values antithetical to humane jail environments;
- (5) That this subculture rests on pluralistic ignorance;³
- (6) That officers develop and are able to identify strategies for coping with stresses of jail work, some of which are constructive, some destructive.

These assumptions are derived in part from the research on prison officers cited above. They also reflect data gathered during the author's involvement in the design and implementation of jail officer training programs.⁴ Material gathered during one of these programs will be presented in the discussion which follows.

Selection of Goals for Training

General Goals: Inmate Related

The training program described here attempts to focus on the quality of life in jails, both the conditions of confinement experienced by inmates and the working conditions of jail staff. As such it attempts to integrate the day-to-day realities of jail life and work into the training process. This quality of life focus draws our attention to four more specific goals for correctional institutions described by John Conrad as characteristics of humane correctional environments: (1) Safety, (2) Lawfulness, (3) Industriousness and (4) Hope. These goals overlap with the pains of jail confinement described by Gibbs (1982: p. 99) who writes that jail inmates

are faced with four interrelated major problem areas: withstanding entry shock, maintaining outside links, securing stability (and sometimes safety) in a situation of seeming chaos, and finding activities to fill otherwise empty time.

Conrad's goals and Gibbs' inmate problems should provide challenges for legislators, administrators and all involved in the correctional enterprise. However, my concern here is to demonstrate how these characteristics of humane correctional environments can provide substance for training and translate into specific behaviors for jail officers.

(1) **Safety:** For the jail officer safety means not only protecting oneself but also protecting the prisoners in his or her charge. It includes

creating an environment in which prisoners are less likely to suffer from the victimization of their fellow prisoners (see Bowker, 1980; Lockwood, 1980); less likely to suffer from self-victimization of suicide attempts and self-mutilation (see Gibbs, 1978; Toch, 1975; and less likely to suffer victimization at the hands of correctional staff (Barnes, 1972). To create such a safe environment is a challenging task. Officers involved in the New Jersey Training program recognized this task in their responses to questions dealing with handling conflicts between inmates. Here they identified both positive and negative officer behaviors. On the positive side they indicated that officers should (1) take preventive measures to separate inmates if they suspect the possibility of conflict, (2) discuss with the inmates possible alternative solutions, (3) refrain from stereotyping inmates in negative ways and (4) remain calm and impartial. On the other hand, these officers recognized the conflict producing impacts of negative officer behaviors of taking sides in inmate conflict, ignoring problems, running to supervisors when problems emerge, punishing without listening and behaving in loud, offensive, public ways which aggravate already bad situations.

(2) Lawfulness: For jail officers lawfulness is a reflection of two overlapping areas. One, ensuring that legal obligations for their positions as specified in legislation, court decisions and departmental policy are upheld. It also means that the assertion of "legal rights" by inmates is not looked upon as a "threat to authority" but rather as a request that "legal obligations" of jail officials be enforced. Where differences of opinion exist, officers should demonstrate that it is the responsibility of legally designated parties to resolve such differences (see ACA, 1982).

On a more personal level, however, the jail officer in his or her day-to-day interactions with prisoners "represents" the law, and the officer's response to rule violations by inmates represents the application of lawfulness to the jail environment. If officer behavior gives the impression that "rules and procedures" are meaningless in the jail environment then a perception of lawlessness will prevail. This may be reflected in the inmate's resort to "censorious" behavior (see Mathiesen, 1965), where officers are criticized for failing to live up to the values of justice, fairness and equality that the legal system espouses. According to the New Jersey jail officers, opportunities for such responses arise when officers reprimand inmates in public, use force or aggressiveness which aggravates problems, overreact to small difficulties, are rigid, harass inmates or ignore rules designed to regulate intra-inmate conflict. These officers also indicated that officers could contribute to the "lawfulness" of jail

environment by informing inmates of rules and that the inmate is violating them; evaluating the seriousness of violations and finding out reasons for violations, exercising control without anger, using minimal force. (See Lombardo, 1981 for an exploration of the informal rule-enforcement practices of prison officers.)

(3) Industriousness: Perhaps the most difficult goal for jail administrators to achieve is industriousness. With limited resources for jail maintenance let alone inmate programming the challenge is formidable. Where programs do not exist the challenge for the jail officer becomes one of recognizing the need for activity and accomplishment (however meaningless) as a necessary condition of psychological survival in liberty depriving situations (Toch, 1975; Cohen and Taylor, 1973). Conversely, this implies a recognition that boredom and inactivity can take a heavy toll.

For the officer, the task becomes not one of designing formal programs but rather one of reducing the monotony and redundancy of jail environment, of infusing into the day-to-day life of the jail (within the officers' own sphere of operations) some variety, some on-the-spot challenges where things can be accomplished. This means that officers must be aware of their own and the institution's resources.

Where programs exist, officers should do what they can to promote inmate participation in such programs and to assist program staff in implementing such programs. The usual conflict between treatment/program staff and security staff needs to be recognized as counterproductive and problem causing rather than problem solving. This is especially important where the informal emerging role of correctional officer as human services provider merges with the professional responsibilities of treatment personnel. Again, the New Jersey officers recognized this in their emphasis of the human services content of their tasks and the job satisfaction derived from contact with inmates.

(4) Hope: People need to have some reason to believe that things will get better. In jails the most common situation is that things will get worse and that life is truly beyond ones personal control (Gibbs, 1982). In many respects, especially with regard to the inmates' legal status, this is no doubt true. However, with regard to the conditions of confinement, and day-to-day jail life, this need not be the case. Again, jail officers from New Jersey have identified some characteristics of "Mature jail officers" that from an inmate's perspective provide hope. Here the officers focused on the human services content of their work and described what they felt were "mature coping officers": such officers are

and sharing their concerns and information across groups. In this way, discussions are task oriented and focused; they involve a great deal of discussion and analysis. (These were characteristics of training courses identified as "useful" in the 1980 national survey. See Olson, 1980: Vol. 2, VIII-17). In this way, the training program also serves as a research program, generating data about the environmental and social characteristics of jails and the responses to these characteristics of jail officers and inmates.

Specific Training Exercises

Training Exercise #1: Jail Officer Tasks

This exercise focuses on the tasks of jail officers. Here officers are asked to explain what jail officers do to someone who knows very little about the operations of jails. In addition, they are asked to indicate which jail officer tasks they most and least prefer and why and which locations in the jail they most and least prefer and why.

This exercise is designed to elicit information on the nature of correctional officer tasks as the officers perceive them. It also surfaces the diversity of officer needs and the relationship between individual needs and the correctional environment. (This will be the focus of training exercise 4 described below).

Training Exercise #2: Stress and Coping

This exercise is designed to surface factors related to **stress among jail officers**. Officers are asked to describe the **most difficult** thing about their jobs, the **biggest problem** they have doing their job, and the **worst** thing about their jobs. In addition, they are asked to indicate how they cope with each of the forces they identify. The officers are also asked to indicate what they find to be the **most rewarding** aspect of their work.

This exercise is designed to get officers thinking about problematic areas in their working lives, and to help them identify both constructive and destructive ways of coping. Since officers will be sharing experiences, the exercise aims at expanding each officer's repertoire of constructive coping skills.

Training Exercise #3: Jail Officer Characteristics

This exercise focuses on behavioral aspects of jail officer tasks and to draw out characteristics of "mature copers" and "immature copers" in

three day-to-day work situations. Here officers are asked to describe how officers they would **most like to work with** and those they would **least like to work with** would handle: (1) inmate requests for assistance (2) inmate rule violations and (3) conflict between inmates. In addition, officers were asked to give two concrete examples for each situation. In addition, officers are asked to estimate the percentage of their fellow officers who exhibit these characteristics, as well as the percentage who agree with their characterization of "mature copers" and "immature copers."

The purpose of this exercise is to generate descriptions, analyses and evaluation of day-to-day work strategies. In addition, the exercise generates data which is helpful in illustrating the concept of "pluralistic ignorance" and moving toward the development of a "positively oriented jail officer subculture."

Training Exercise #4: Environmental Mapping

This exercise is designed to test and develop officer skills at analyzing jail environments and resources, and relating these environments and resources to the satisfaction of specific inmate needs. Here, the officers are asked to play the role of inmates while utilizing the knowledge they have gained as officers. They are presented with a list of "environmental concerns" (Privacy, safety, structure, support, activity, freedom, social stimulation and emotional feedback) and their definitions (Toch, 1977:16-17).

They are asked to identify the needs that would be most important to them if they were prisoners. Subsequently, for each need they are asked to indicate the **places** where these needs will most least likely be met. Next, they are asked to identify **particular officer assignments** most and least likely to contribute to satisfying this need. They are then asked to **identify specific resources** (things, programs, activities, people) that can help them meet their concerns. Finally, they are asked to indicate **what officers can do** to help them satisfy their needs and to describe the conditions that prevent officers from helping them meet their needs.

From this exercise, officers should learn to relate inmate behavior to resources and environments of individual jail settings rather than to the peculiar psychological characteristics of inmates. In addition, it should sensitize officers to the need to constantly assess their own working environments in relation to specific inmate needs. In this way, officers should be able to contribute more effectively to the creation of more humane institutional environments.

Evaluation

Perhaps the most complicated and difficult task associated with jail officer training is the evaluation process. Evaluation implies judgment of success or failure, and accountability. Evaluation puts into the open the weaknesses and strengths of specific programs and in doing so, has serious political implications.

In reviewing evaluations of correctional training Olson, et. al. (1980: Vol. III, X-8) observe:

. . . Several characteristics occur with predictable regularity. Most evaluations in corrections are not written into program plans and are thus conducted *ex post facto*—virtually eliminating the possibility of controlling experimentally or statistically many of the variables that influence training, learning and performance. A majority are conducted by outside consultants, the most costly and transition kind of evaluation (transitory in that the evaluation is not continual, providing feedback for on-going program improvement, and thus likely to be weak and transitory in its effects). Evaluation too often is a one-shot, post hoc deal, pertaining only to the group of trainees studied. Rarely, is the training program and its evaluation designed simultaneously before hand, as they should be. There is generally a failure to link training with on-the-job performance; to access transfer of learning and skills from the classroom to the job. Most evaluation results point to the need for the establishment of clearly defined organizational and training program goals and objectives, regular inspection of the skills and abilities required to perform the job, and continuing monitoring and feedback of the implementation of recommendation. Assessment of how interesting and how enjoyable the training has been is far more common than attempts to establish whether or not the training has fulfilled on-the-job needs (if, indeed, needs have been identified).

This observation has a number of implications for the training program described above. First, it implies that the organizational goals of developing a jail which attempts to provide safety, lawfulness, industry and hope are accepted goals of the organization utilizing the training program. Second, it means that the inservice training program described above must become part of the on-going training within the organization, involving officers as trainers as well as targets of training. This approach is described by Toch and Grant (1982) as change through participation. They write

We are hard put to separate "organization change" and "person change." We know that people including people in organizations—learn to grow and fulfill themselves as they become involved. Often, the product of focused involvement is change. To put it differently,

when persons become concerned with efforts to improve their environments—particularly, their work environments—the inhabitants and their environments are liable to benefit. (p. 14)

Thus the jail officer training program must have as a necessary component, the training of officers to be trainers for other officers. This will increase the resources and skills of not only the officers involved but also the organization as a whole.

Finally, Olson, et. al.'s (1980) observations mean that training and evaluation becomes part of overall organizational assessment. Assessment, in the terms described here, relates to the degree to which the organization approaches the four goals described above.

The implications of these observations for evaluating the training program described above should focus our attention on evaluation criteria related to

- (1) Jail officer behavior;
- (2) Jail officer job stress;
- (3) Organizational change and climate.

Olson, et. al. have pointed out the methodological problems in attributing changes in any of the above to training programs, and these problems are important (Vol. III). However, by focusing training on specific officer behavior, specific stress producing conditions and specific organizational issues, the monitoring of indicators related to each of these areas should provide at least some gross indication that the training is effective. (Remembering that training and individual and organizational change are on-going processes.)

For jail officer behavior, evaluation should focus on (1) rule enforcement practices (2) human services provision and (3) extent of institutional conflict. Here jail staff should monitor (1) both the number, type, institutional location, and staff involved in formal rule enforcement, (2) the utilization patterns for services provided (e.g., sickcall) by the jail organization, inmate self-injury, and suicide attempts, and (3) the types, location and staff involved in interpersonal conflict (either staff-inmate or inmate-inmate violence.)

For job stress, evaluation should focus on absenteeism rates, sicktime utilization, and turnover rates, officer involvement in violence and inmate disciplinary problems.

Conclusion

The jail officer training goals, process and evaluation described here envision an actively involved jail staff and administration. The processes

of goal setting training, and evaluation must be on-going and long-term. If the program described here has maximum effectiveness, it should expand the role of jail officers and contribute to the reduction of jail officer stress and create a climate of humane correctional treatment. It will do so by tapping a vast reservoir of resources located in the indigenous correctional officer ranks. (See Lombardo, 1985.) In the long-run, such training will be cost-effective and reduce the likelihood that jail conditions have to be improved through the process of litigation.

NOTES

- ¹The author is indebted to Dr. Robert Johnson of American University for his insights into the training process and for his collegueship in the two training programs described below.
- ²See C. Cherniss (1980) for a discussion of the importance of the "learning" component in the organizational design of human services tasks.
- ³Klofas and Toch (1982) have found that those guards that hold progressive views feel themselves to be in a minority (though, in fact, they were the majority). Those who hold non-progressive views (reflecting the negative subculture) feel themselves to be in the majority (though, in fact, they are in the minority). See also Lombardo (1985).
- ⁴The author was involved in the design and delivery of two jail officer training programs. One for the New York City Department of Corrections in April, 1983 and another for New Jersey jail officers in September, 1984. Both programs were sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections.

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