

Reinvigorate a New Correctional Leadership

The field of corrections will get nowhere without effective leadership. It is from its leaders that corrections will receive the vision for a new future; it is from its leaders that corrections will find

the capacity to embark on the difficult road of change.

Great leaders are not so easy to come by. Many studies of leadership suggest an important idea about "fit"—how the skills of a leader need to "fit" the problems being confronted. In other words, different situations call for different kinds of leaders because the skills needed for solving one kind of problem are not the same as those needed for a different kind. For example, historians tell us that Winston Churchill's tenacity and tirelessness were perfect for England during wartime, but his lack of interest in give-and-take did not work well after peace was restored.

When a leader's skills fit the situation, effective leadership follows.

What are the characteristics of the situation that corrections now faces? The key consideration that the new generation of correctional leaders will face is how to redirect an enormous enterprise in need of a new vision. Numerous pressures—political, economic, and social—have created the corrections system in its current form. Leaders will have to balance these pressures effectively while promoting a new correctional agenda.

At the same time, correctional leadership will never be *solely* about a vision for the future. When Martin Horn was commissioner of the Department of Probation and Corrections in New York City, he was one of the most successful correctional leaders in the country. He ran a complex system that includes one of the world's largest jails, Rikers Island, and one of the nation's most overstretched probation departments. Asked recently to comment on the role of a correctional leader, he emphasized three tangible results for which leaders must be responsible:

- Acting in ways that correctional clients see as "legitimate"—that is, fair and reasonable.
- Maintaining safe, drug-free environments in prisons and jails where staff and those confined inside can stay "clean."
- Making management "transparent" so the general public knows how corrections is being run and has confidence in it.²²

The problem of leadership is subtle. Good leaders have strong vision for their work, but they also have an on-the-ground ability to motivate people working in the system to do their best. While education and experience are known to be important qualities in effective leadership, history also tells us that good leaders come from all walks of life and from every kind of background. The challenge facing corrections is how to attract the best leaders to the field.

Refocus Our Investments in What Works

Studies of program effectiveness have grown dramatically in recent years. Where once we would have been lucky to have a study or two to decide a course of action, we now have literally hundreds of high-quality studies to inform our work in corrections. Such studies are now common enough in corrections that a new academic society devoted to promoting them and understanding them has sprung up: the Campbell Collaboration on Criminology, which publishes the *Journal of Experimental Criminology*.

The new research has enabled researchers to go from studying correctional programs to studying studies of programs, looking for patterns and consistencies in findings. Called *systematic reviews*, such research helps to show what kinds of programs are powerful and what kinds are not promising. For example, systematic reviews have shown that boot camps do not work but that therapeutic communities often do.

So while we know a great deal about "what works," we know much less about how to get good programs into practice. Programs that have been proved ineffective have surprising staying power, while programs with a solid track record are sometimes difficult to mount. Programs that work often involve providing the kind of offender support that the general public tends to reject. Programs that fail often present appealing goals, such as "scaring kids straight," and therefore engender unwarranted support.