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Roll Call Training

THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

**Lessons on Correctional Work,
Leadership, and Effectiveness**

**By
Gary F. Cornelius**



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Preface

I was fortunate to enjoy a 27-year corrections career with a large jail system in Virginia. I began as a line officer, advanced through the supervisory ranks to Lieutenant, held positions in classification, confinement and the community corrections departments, and after completing my service embarked on a new career as a correctional trainer. This book is the product of what I have experienced and learned as an officer, supervisor, and teacher.

Like any field of endeavor, there is a right way and a wrong way to be a corrections officer. The right way is harder—at least in the beginning. Doing it right becomes easier when it becomes a habit, a way of approaching the job and the people you encounter on your shift. This book covers a wide range of issues and best practices in corrections, but common to everything here is doing things the right way for the right reasons. It can be hard to treat inmates with the dignity and respect that every human being is entitled to, but you'll be better at your job and feel better about doing it if you find the humanity in the inmates you're responsible for. It can be even harder to follow a higher path when co-workers don't, but at the end of the day, your shift will go more easily, your encounters will go more smoothly, and you'll get better results if you do.

As a trainer, whenever I get up in front of a roomful of line or supervisory officers, no matter what the subject I'm covering that day, there are two things I know I have to get across: *what* to do and *why*. That's the focus of *The High-Performance Correctional Facility*, too. "What to do" is, of course, the most important aspect of the job—the fundamental knowledge, based on experience with what works and what doesn't work, every correctional officer must be able to summon whenever the situation demands it. "What to do" is the core of your facility's policies and procedures manual. But the "why" is important, too. Corrections, like law enforcement, operates on a military model—uniformed officers are expected to obey the lawful commands of their superiors, and especially in an emergency there's usually no time for "why." I've learned, however, from the training classes I've led, that "why" matters, especially to new officers. I've tried to put a special focus on the "why" in *The High-Performance Correctional Facility: Lessons on Correctional Work, Leadership, and Effectiveness*.

As a supervisor, I was always a believer in "Roll Call" training. Roll call was an ideal time to remind, refresh, and reinforce best practices. Not every roll call, of course—not even the most eager corrections officers can absorb that much information or inspiration. But occasionally I'd take a little extra time at the beginning of a shift to review an important court decision that might affect us; or "lessons learned" from a recent incident that went well or didn't; or a new directive from "the brass" on an important matter of policy or procedure. The essays in *The High-Performance Correctional Facility* grew out of the roll call training sessions I had experienced in my career and later promoted to supervisors attending my in-service classes as an effective way to communicate with staff. That's one way I hope you'll use this book—to prepare concise, relevant presentations on the day-to-day challenges of being a competent, ethical, and effective corrections professional. If you supervise or train correctional staff, I hope you will feel free to borrow these ideas in developing your own lessons.

I also hope you'll turn here when you need inspiration. Corrections is a tough profession—there are very few occupations that call on a person's compassion,

courage, and common sense the way corrections does. You're going to have very good days, and very bad days. It is my hope that *The High-Performance Correctional Facility* will help you get through the bad days, learn from them, correct course and right the ship, so that the next day is a good day.

Gary F. Cornelius
Williamsburg, VA
December 2022

About the Author

Lt. Gary F. Cornelius retired in 2005 from the Fairfax County (VA) Office of the Sheriff, after serving over 27 years in the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center. His prior service in law enforcement in several agencies included service in the United States Secret Service Uniformed Division. His jail career included assignments in confinement, work release, programs, and classification.

Gary taught four corrections courses for the Criminology, Law and Society Department at George Mason University from 1986-2018. He also teaches corrections in service sessions throughout Virginia and has performed training and consulting for the American Correctional Association, the American Jail Association, the National Institute of Justice and for several jails in Virginia. He also presents online webinars and presentations on correctional issues. His latest book, *The Correctional Officer: A Practical Guide: Third Edition* was published in April 2017 by Carolina Academic Press. A new third edition of his best-selling book, *Stressed Out: Strategies for Living and Working in Corrections*, will also be published by Carolina Academic Press. Gary has authored several other books in corrections, including *The Art of the Con: Avoiding Offender Manipulation, Second Edition*, (2009) from the American Correctional Association, and *The American Jail: Cornerstone of Modern Corrections*, (2008) from Pearson Prentice Hall. Gary has received a Distinguished Alumnus Award in Social Science from his alma mater, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, and an Instructor Appreciation Award from George Mason University. Gary is a regular contributor to *Corrections Managers' Report*, and hosts two blogs, "Tales from the Local Jail," on *The Corrections Connection* (www.corrections.com) and "Talks About Training" on *Corrections 1* (www.corrections1.com). Gary has served on the Board of Directors of the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel (IACTP) representing local adult corrections. Gary consults for corrections firms, including Lexipol and Guardian RFID. Gary has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, and Tier Talk, discussing corrections security, training, and staff issues. He resides in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Acknowledgements

This book reflects the lessons and experiences of a career as a jail officer, supervisor, and trainer. Along the way, I have learned from the knowledge and example of some outstanding professionals, and it has been an honor to work with them.

In writing this book, I reached out to a number of experts whose assistance made *The High-Performance Correctional Facility* better. They include Superintendent Chris Smith, Western Tidewater Regional Jail in Suffolk Virginia, for his assistance with the chapter on inmate tablets. For the chapter on juveniles, William Orris and Reteka Bright from the Merrimac Center in Williamsburg, Virginia provided some great material. A good friend from the Fairfax County, Virginia, Adult Detention Center Forensic Unit, Timothy P. Manley, LCSW, MSW graciously allowed the use of his material on inmates with dementia. Dr. Carol Ray was kind enough to share her experiences with us about being confined inside a jail. In developing this work, I cited some outstanding corrections professionals and subject matter experts, including William Collins, J.D., Joe Bouchard, Larone Koonce, Matt Dolan, Esq., and Dr. Debbie Goodman. Jennifer Helton, from the William G. Truesdale-Alexandria (Virginia) Adult Detention Center helped with the chapter on inmate tablets. Captain Frank Milano, (Ret.) also from the Alexandria, Virginia Detention Center assisted with the chapter on strip searches. The discussion of gangs in correctional facilities is important, and I am thankful to Master Deputy Sheriff (Retired) Dwight Greear, Fairfax County, Virginia Office of the Sheriff for his input. I also am grateful to Sergeant Cindy Jo Gibbons, Albemarle-Charlottesville, Virginia Regional Jail, for her input as well about gangs. My good friend Gary York, retired deputy, Polk County Florida provided excellent material on gangs.

One thing that corrections is dealing with is the safe housing of transgender inmates. I wish to thank Lt. Jay M. Doyle, Sarasota County, Florida Sheriff's Office for providing its policy on transgender inmates. Sumter County Florida has an excellent policy on employee use of social media. Also of great help was the inmate handbook from Loudoun County Adult Detention Center and I thank Major Charles Richardson.

Thanks also to Nancy Perry at Corrections1, Amanda McCarthy and Jamie Noonan at The Corrections Connection, Shannon Pieper at Lexipol, the American Jail Association and the American Correctional Association for their material that is cited in the book.

Some of the material here originated with a training column I wrote for *The Correctional Trainer*, a publication of the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel. As its name implies, IACTP is dedicated to raising the status and professionalism of correctional training and the professionals who provide it. I am grateful to President Trish Signor, the Board and members of International Association of Correctional Training Personnel for their support in this project. Please check out the information about the Association that is included in the book's Foreword.

Many of the chapters took shape in my columns written for *Corrections Managers' Report*. I would also like to acknowledge the ideas and expertise of my editor, Mark Peel. I consider him one of the best editors in the field of corrections

writing. I would like to thank the Civic Research Institute and Mark Peel for making this publication possible.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you—the researchers, programs staff, supervisors, training instructors, and the men and women on the line as corrections officers in our nation’s correctional facilities, both adult and juvenile. You have a tough job and we hope that this book makes your job easier and safer.

Foreword

Corrections is an integral part of the criminal justice system. Police officers arrest criminal offenders, and corrections personnel maintain their safe custody and try to facilitate rehabilitation. This is not an easy task for our nation's correctional officers, probation and parole officers, and juvenile detention personnel. We all work together to keep the public safe.

In addition to keeping offenders in custody and supervised, today's correctional staff must deal with problems, including high levels of stress, mentally ill offenders, offender manipulation, contraband, and segregated inmates. Courts and legislative bodies are making decisions that frequently lead to revision of agency policies and procedures. To keep up requires good training.

Since its inception in 1974, the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel has worked to enhance and consistently improve correctional staff training. We are an international association, serving our members in training, the administration of training and education. Through networking, webinars, annual conferences and publications, we strive to bring out the best in corrections training.

One of our premier publications is *The Correctional Trainer*, our online training journal. Since 1989, one of our members, retired deputy sheriff lieutenant Gary F. Cornelius, has written the quarterly column, *The Twenty Minute Trainer*. It has been of great benefit to our members, presenting training in a concise, but thorough form for use in on-site trainings and staff roll calls.

On behalf of the board and members of the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel, we are pleased to have played a part in introducing Gary to our members and readers, and provided a forum trainers and readers to benefit from these ideas. *The High-Performance Correctional Facility: Lessons on Correctional Work, Leadership, and Effectiveness* will add to any trainer's resource library. This book explores many of the most important and timely issues correctional managers and trainers focus on in staff development, including safety, security, best practices for managing inmates and special populations, and constitutional principles as they apply to conditions of confinement in prisons and jails.

We also extend our thanks to Civic Research Institute for publishing *The High-Performance Correctional Facility* and including information about the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel. I hope you'll take a moment to learn more about IACTP and the benefits of membership at our website, <https://www.iactp.org/>.

Sincerely,
Trish Signor
President
International Association of Correctional Training Personnel

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Introduction

There's a popular saying that the job of the correctional officer is 99% boredom and 1% sheer terror. That's not how I see it. Boredom suggests sameness, and in my years as a correctional officer and supervisor, a typical work day presented me with a tremendous variety and range of challenges. You never knew exactly what to expect when arriving for a shift, except to expect the unexpected. Before you left last night, you had to help put down a disturbance in the common area; things had calmed down but would today bring a flare up? Who will booking turn over to you today? What new arrivals will enter the general population? Some will surely suffer from a mental disorder, perhaps a serious one. Some will have medical problems. Some will be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, perhaps coming down off opioids. Some will be combative, angry, and dangerous. Some will be compliant and cooperative. From one day to the next, you can never be sure what's in the cards—the only certainty is that you'll have to play the hand you're dealt.

The safe, humane, and lawful custody of detainees and offenders involves a lot more than just watching them, counting them, and making sure they don't escape. Offenders are complicated people, different from the rest of us but in many ways just like us, too. No two are alike. Each has a unique story, his or her own mix of problems. Many have substance use and co-occurring psychiatric disorders. Many have been shaped by a lifetime of hardship and abuse. Many are undereducated. They may be members of a gang. While some are 'streetwise' and have long histories of incarceration, others are 'first timers,' perhaps ashamed, even suicidal, and fearful of what may happen to them inside a correctional facility. Some act maturely and just want to do their time peacefully until they are released. Others resist any cooperation with staff, refuse to follow instructions, and assert themselves by intimidation or manipulation.

While the residents are there because they've broken the law, correctional staff must know and adhere strictly to statutes and case law, agency policies and procedures. Jail and prison staff are officers of the law—and that demands they follow the law. How you conduct your dealings with inmates is, in large measure, guided by law—by the Constitution, by federal and state laws, and by the policies and procedures of your agency, which have the force of law. Jails and prisons are agencies of county and state government, but the U.S. Department of Justice also has oversight responsibility for conditions and practices in correctional facilities, and federal statutes like the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA), Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), and the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) are the law of the land for state and county facilities as well as federal institutions. Fortunately, correctional officers do not have to know these statutes by heart because their requirements are almost always written into the policy and procedure manual officers are given their first day on the job. Officers must have a working knowledge of civil liability and conduct themselves so as to prevent being found liable in a lawsuit. Many prisoners make a point of reading, studying, and knowing the law, and using it to protect themselves and get what they consider their fair shake. When inmates know the law, corrections officers need to know it even better.

Corrections has come a long way. Officers are better educated, better trained, and more professional than ever. They are held to a higher standard, too. Correctional officers are not just “guards”—security is still the top priority, but COs must also function as first responders, mediators, referees, mentors, counselors, and psychologists. Thanks to research, we know more now about how incarceration affects inmates—how the experience of deprivation, “prisonization,” and adjustment can produce behavioral and psychological changes that can make a resident easier to manage or harder. How medical problems and mental illness factor in. How ethnicity, culture, sexual identity, and gang affiliation are expressed and intensified in a jail or prison environment. The correctional officer must understand and be prepared to deal with all of these potent forces. The job, clearly, is not an easy one.

As corrections has become more complex, so has the need for training. Academy and in-service training now must cover a wide variety of issues in order to equip today’s correctional officer to meet the challenges of the profession. While training tends to focus on the formal duties of a correctional officer, there are important intangible skills that the officer also needs to develop beyond merely following policies and procedures—control, observation, empathy, de-escalation, and a “sixth sense” for detecting contraband or recognizing trouble, manipulation, or the “con.” You may be called upon to recognize the symptoms of mental illness, withdrawal, or medical distress. Advise inmates of services and programs available to help with their problems. Officers must be diplomats, defusing conflicts between inmates. The more officers know about inmates in their custody, the better they are prepared to maintain a safe, orderly facility.

ROLL CALL

Training plays a vital role in the public safety professions. Jail administrators and commanders, prison wardens and superintendents have a professional and legal obligation to see that staff are informed, educated, and drilled on the skills and duties of the job. A finding of “failure to train” will subject an agency to serious legal liability, including damage awards and scrutiny under a court-appointed monitor.

Training does not end at the Academy. The training a new recruit undergoes, no matter how rigorous, is only a beginning. Not until a corrections officer has experience with life on the cell block does the “real” job training begin—it’s on the front lines, where book knowledge meets reality, that deep learning takes place. Every shift is and should be a learning experience. Every challenge, whether met with success or failure, teaches something important—and whether an encounter ends well or badly, it becomes part of a learning process that never really ends until you retire. Working and learning form an ongoing, continuous feedback loop. That’s why it is so important that the lessons we take away from our successes and failures are the right lessons—because bad habits and wrong thinking can just as easily become ingrained in an officer as best practice and a positive attitude.

Training comes in three varieties. Academy or off-site training at a dedicated training center is the most formal. Getting away from the job elevates the importance of the training and allows trainees to immerse themselves in the issues, while enjoying the group learning experience. Of course, off-site training is time-consuming and can be costly—so it’s an option that most agencies use periodically, not continuously.

In-service, on-site training conducted by experts offers many of the same immersive benefits as off-site training, but logistically and economically it's easier for managers to provide—no travel, smaller budget, and very effective. A third type of training is even less formal and less costly, yet many jails and prisons don't use it—"roll call" training. Roll call training is exactly what the name says it is—training that takes place at the beginning of a shift. By necessity, roll call training is brief. But because it can be improvised on short notice in response to a recent development or event, roll call training can serve as a quick, tactical response to a critical incident as well as a regular, ongoing opportunity to hone vital knowledge and skills through repetition and reinforcement. Regular off-site and in-service training is mandatory for almost all prisons and jails. Roll call training isn't mandatory—but maybe it should be. Corrections managers should embrace all three approaches to ensure a competent and effective workforce.

The material in this book is intended, in part, to support you in the development of a regular program of roll call training. The topics and ideas presented here can form the basis for quick presentations of twenty minutes or less, suitable for an ongoing program of instruction at the outset of a work day. (See Appendix A for a brief guide to instituting a roll call training program for your facility.) The chapters are not "lessons" per se. Rather, they are reflections on the serious issues, responsibilities, and problems that face corrections officers every day—meditations, if you will, on what it means to be a corrections officer. As a professional trainer, I like to re-read these essays myself before getting up in front of a class: I use them to immerse myself in the subject, wrap my head around the main issues under discussion, and ground my presentation firmly in the basic principles—the "what" and "why"—underlying best practices.