
JAIL BULLETIN

NUMBER 7

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The Jail Bulletin is a monthly feature of the Crime Commission Update. The Bulletin may be used as a supplement to your jail inservice training program if officers study the material and complete the attached "open book" quiz. The Bulletin and quiz may be reproduced for use by your staff. We welcome any jail training material you would like to contribute to the Bulletin.

SUPERVISION OF INMATES

One of the most difficult--yet interesting--aspects of the jail officer's job is that of supervising inmates. Because he/she is responsible for the management and safety of inmates, the jail officer must be skilled at his/her work, possess and know how to use "common sense", intelligence, imagination, and utilize effective interpersonal skills.

While all jail officers should possess these qualities when they are hired, they become more adept at applying them as they gain on-the-job experience. No one can "teach" a jail officer how to use "common sense" when dealing with inmates. "Common sense" is a quality the officer possesses and refines as he/she works in the cell blocks. The same holds true for intelligence and interpersonal skills. The officer should intelligently observe and judge each individual incident and use effective interpersonal skills and "common sense" to solve the problem.

The main responsibility in a jail officer's work is to provide effective supervision and maintain continuous custody of inmates from the time of admission until release. Supervision is defined as managing inmates and their time through communicating with them and motivating them to function within defined guidelines, rules or policies, and to achieve specific goals.

The traditional idea of supervision meant that the jail officer "watched" inmates as they went about their daily routines to make sure they didn't do anything wrong and to reprimand them if they did. Supervision has a much broader meaning and it incorporates managing. The difference is that the contemporary officer knows that securing the cooperation of the inmates is in their own best interest because it reduces trouble and tension, whereas, the more traditional approach invited conflict due to the "us vs. them" attitude.

The entire corrections process relies on the way the officer carries out supervision duties since inmates who are poorly supervised begin to gain control. Poorly supervised inmates have a tendency to cause trouble in the jail by

fighting, provoking disturbances, etc. On the other hand, inmates who are supervised properly can usually be motivated to follow the jail rules, carry out work assignments, and participate in rehabilitation programs.

How does a jail officer properly supervise inmates? This is not as difficult a task as it may seem on the surface. The key is to win the confidence of the inmates and show them that you are in control of the situation and can effectively supervise them. It is very important for the officer to supervise inmates in a fair, consistent, yet firm manner. Officers must also view the inmates as individuals and supervise them according to their individual differences. For example, an immature inmate may need to be handled in a firm, no-nonsense approach, while another inmate may respond to a more casual approach.

Inmates will use every "test" in the book of jailhouse lore to try to prove that an officer is unable to manage them, but a knowledgeable officer will recognize and be aware of these "tests" and know how to pass them. For example, consider the following "games" or "tests", which frequently occur in the jail setting:

SITUATION ONE: The "explosion" game - an inmate attempts to exert power in the cell block by pushing an officer until he/she loses his/her temper. The inmate "wins" the power game when he/she manages to make the officer angry enough to start yelling or swearing.

SITUATION TWO: The "watch me embarrass you" game - this is commonly used by inmates to provoke an officer of the opposite sex, causing fellow inmates to laugh at the officer's embarrassment if the officer reacts to the situation in the way the inmate anticipates he/she will. For example a male inmate will expose his genitals to a female officer to get a reaction.

SITUATION THREE: The "play one officer against another" game - in this game an inmate attempts to gain control over two officers at once by getting them angry at each other. While this game is being played, other inmates are aware of the play-by-play action. It happens like this: the inmate "player" tells Officer A that Officer B said he was wrong when he/she told inmates to perform a task in a certain way. Then the inmate later tells Officer B that Officer A said he/she was a "stupid jerk who doesn't know which end is up". The inmates expect the officers to get involved in a dispute, which also draws the attention of a supervisor. Officers should be aware that this game is one of the most popular methods inmates can use to gain control in the jail. This game is easily played in jails where there is not good staff communications and consistency in operations between shifts.

SITUATION FOUR: The "I'm on my deathbed" game - in this game an inmate convinces an officer that he/she is suffering from almost every ailment and disease known to mankind and therefore needs special attention and consideration, such as plenty of bed rest instead of a work detail. The inmate "puts one over" on the officer and gains some power in the cell block. The American version of this game developed in the Continental Army in 1776 and has since been refined by generations of soldiers,

sailors, inmates and others who find themselves in institutions which they cannot leave for a few years. Officers should have an inmate who complains of illness examined by a physician. With those inmates who play this game, a pattern will soon emerge. The physician will be able to determine if the inmate is playing this game and give the officer advice on how to proceed with the inmate. But the jail officer should never assume he is feigning illness--let a qualified doctor make that determination.

There are many other "games" which inmates play to gain control over an officer, thus sabotaging the officer's efforts to properly supervise the entire inmate population under his/her care. By being aware of these "games" and comparing notes with other officers on power games they may have encountered, the officer can circumvent these inmate attempts to undermine his/her authority.

There are several positive steps the officer can take to communicate to inmates his/her ability to effectively supervise them. This communication can take several forms:

1. Knowing how to LISTEN to what inmates have to say.
2. Knowing how to ASK QUESTIONS to determine what the real problems are.
3. Knowing how to GIVE ORDERS and DIRECTIONS so that the inmates can understand them.
4. Knowing how to OBSERVE non-verbal communication and behavior to detect hidden messages and attitudes.
5. Knowing how to MOTIVATE inmates through proper communication procedures.

Proper officer-inmate communication can decrease many supervision and management problems and lead to a smoothly functioning jail. Communications between jail officers and inmates is important in order for the officer to recognize the inmates' needs and individual differences to ensure effective supervision. The officer needs to take the time to talk with and listen to inmates on an individual and group basis to ensure open communication between jail officers and inmates. Jail personnel cannot expect to maintain a positive or effective relationship with inmates when communication is in only one direction. For example, consider what potential problems were averted by the officers in the following situation:

CASE STUDY:

The newly built Big Sky County Jail was designated to be an escape-proof fortress with high cement walls and no outside windows. On the day of the final game of the World Series, a tornado hit Big Sky County and knocked down the jail's T.V. antenna. The inmates had been eagerly looking forward to watching the game on T.V. in the jail dining room. However, game time arrived and no officers came to the cell blocks to escort the

inmates to the dining room. The inmates began to grumble and become restless. Then an officer appeared on each cell block to tell the inmates about the fierce tornado and express the superintendent's regret about the T.V. antenna. Each officer also said: "We've got a man rigging a hook-up to pull in the audio and we'll put the game on the loudspeaker system--it should take another 10 minutes." The inmates cheered since they now understood the situation and realized the superintendent was trying to help them instead of punish them, as they had first believed.

SUMMARY:

1. The main responsibility of a jail officer is to provide effective supervision and maintain continuous custody of inmates from admission through release.
2. Supervision is defined as managing inmates and their time through communicating with them and motivating them to function within defined guidelines, rules or policies and to achieve specific goals.
3. In order to effectively supervise and motivate inmates, the jail officer must develop the ability to communicate effectively and solve problems.

--Adapted From Material Contributed By:
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QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of inservice training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement inservice training if an officer studies the bulletin, completes the quiz, and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during annual jail inspections.

SUBJECT: SUPERVISION OF INMATES - #7

NAME _____

DATE _____

1. Inmate supervision is defined as: _____

2. Playing one officer against another is an inmate game that is easily played in jails that lack _____ and _____ between shifts.
3. An officer who believes an inmate is faking illness should:
 - A. Ignore the inmate
 - B. Keep an eye on the inmate to see if he/she is really sick
 - C. Have the inmate examined by a physician
4. Inmates should be supervised in a fair, consistent, and _____ manner.

CREDIT: 1/2 hour credit for Jail Inservice Training requirement

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1. Inmate supervision is defined as: MANAGING INMATES AND THEIR TIME THROUGH COMMUNICATING WITH THEM AND MOTIVATING THEM TO FUNCTION WITHIN DEFINED GUIDELINES, RULES OR POLICIES AND TO ACHIEVE SPECIFIC GOALS.

2. Playing one officer against another is an inmate game that is easily played in jails that lack GOOD STAFF COMMUNICATIONS and CONSISTENCY between shifts.
3. An officer who believes an inmate is faking illness should:
 - A. Ignore the inmate
 - B. Keep an eye on the inmate to see if he/she is really sick
 - C. Have the inmate examined by a physician
4. Inmates should be supervised in a fair, consistent, and FIRM manner.

ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR OR TRAINING OFFICER

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