

JAIL BULLETIN

Number 77

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SECURITY & COMMUNICATIONS - PART II

Security and Communications:

Internal security is strongly affected by communications. A jail staff person's effectiveness is measured by their ability to make their thoughts, feelings, and needs known to others and on their receptiveness to the attempts of others to share similar data with them. Communications in corrections is especially difficult because the jail staff must deal with a wide range of persons coming from all sorts of backgrounds. This not only deals with staff-to-inmate relations but also staff-to-staff communications.

Communication Skills:

Because listening is a highly selective and subjective experience, interference to communications processes can arise out of the listener's frame of reference (vested interest/hidden agenda) and other attitudes about the world. If a person expects to hear certain things (based on preconceptions about the message sender's personality and background or opinions about the subject matter), interference may occur and block the message. Information which conflicts with the listener's pre-set ideas may again be simply blocked out and not heard. Active listening is a key skill in corrections work.

The first component of listening is that of attention. In corrections work, we hear a lot of noise. When we work the cell areas, it is our job to pay attention and sort out those noises for cues. Those cues cause the second component, reception, which is the actual receiving of the sound. The third component is that of perception. Meaning is assigned to these sounds (sounds of distress, fighting, arguing, other threats to safety and security) and we respond accordingly. These three elements are present in every instance of listening although depending on the situation and the listener's motives, different aspects may be stressed. A trial lawyer, for example, pays close attention to the flow of a witness' testimony and concentrates on unearthing inconsistencies, contradictions, and evidence of distorted perception. A staff person listens to an inmate's tale of woe and thinks, "I've heard that one before" and shuts off the message only to learn later that the inmate did have a problem and now the facility is being sued.

The following are some good communications skills:

- A. **Paraphrasing:** By such phrases as “Are you saying...”, “Do you mean...”, “Your point is...”, restating what the inmate says before you add words of your own shows the inmate that you can and want to respond with an accurate idea of their message.
- B. **Perception Checking:** Deals more with feelings rather than the knowledge aspect of a message received. Using phrases such as “you appear to be...”, “It sounds to me like you...”, demonstrates that you are aware of the feelings of the speaker.
- C. **Non-Verbal Expressions:** “Yeah, I’m listening to you,” Officer Gerbal says to Inmate Harpie, but Officer Gerbal is looking at the jail housing sheet, his face is frowning, and he obviously is not listening. Officer Gerbal’s body language gives him away. He is not interested in Inmate Harpie’s message.

Here are some non-verbal expressions or body language signals and their meaning.

- 1) Amount of eye contact (people normally look at each other from 40-60 percent of the time). More eye contact can reveal interest while avoiding eye contact may indicate disinterest, dislike, or evidence of guilt.
- 2) Leaning or moving close to someone may demonstrate interest while moving away shows disinterest and a non-verbal statement of not wanting to disclose information (too close for comfort).
- 3) Crossing one’s arms (which may indicate an unwillingness to change or defensiveness).
- 4) Facial expressions of approval or disinterest (smiling, nodding, or frowning).

The important aspect of body language is that it is a largely unconscious form of communication. Thus, in the example of Officer Gerbal, he was giving Inmate Harpie a verbal message of “Yeah, I’m listening to you”, but it was his non-verbal body language (eyes diverted to another task, frowning expression) that told Inmate Harpie the true message. Therefore, when “mixed” or conflicting verbal and non-verbal messages are sent, the receiver tends to instinctively depend on the non-verbal cues to determine the true message.

- D. **Argument Avoidance:** This is perhaps the greatest challenge that anyone can be faced with and in the corrections business it is critical. More times than not, what we first have to question when listening to a disruptive inmate is where is this person coming from...from their cognitive domain (knowledge, facts, etc.) or from their affective domain (emotions, feelings, etc.). Is there some substance to their insistence? Avoiding arguments (and this involves co-workers too) involves strategies for re-routing arguments into more constructive channels:

- 1) Listen, really listen, to what the other person has to say, instead of interfering...instead of concentrating on your hidden agenda or trying impatiently to interrupt.

- 2) Paraphrase what is being said to you so that the speaker knows that you want to understand. State the speaker's position accurately.
- 3) Avoid flat statements of disagreement.
- 4) Concentrate on probing questions that clarify, (Mr. Jones, you sound angry...what made you angry?)
- 5) Establish points of agreement and emphasize your agreement.
- 6) Back up your viewpoint with reason and facts (if you have none, or have not searched out the problem, keep quiet and listen with no emotion).
- 7) Effect a resolution (agree to meet again after the problem is investigated or restate points of agreement).

Security Risk Reduction:

The primary impact of staff, locks, alarms, and other tools of custody is to constrain inmates and to prevent serious breaches of security. But to create an environment in which the majority of inmates cooperate requires more than just equipment and a show of force. To prevent staff-inmate battle for the "real" control of the facility, there must be good staff-inmate communication, fairness, and an awareness of the constitutional rights of those in custody.

Most inmates want a peaceful facility and want to stay out of trouble. Since inmates spend 24 hours a day living in an environment that does not afford much privacy, they want the personal protection a good security system offers. This desire is often unexpressed but it is there.

It is recognized that arbitrary, unfair treatment of inmates and constant inmate idleness will stress a security system. Some of the factors that reduce risks and prevent security problems are:

- A management team who are able to communicate effectively and provide guidance and coaching to staff;
- Good staff communications through verbal and written pass-down logs, written reports;
- Good staff-inmate communications;
- Knowledgeable, alert, conscientious jail staff;
- Continuous appraisal of policies and procedures;
- Firm and fair enforcement of rules, regulations;
- An efficient, prompt disciplinary and inmate grievance process;

- Provision for classifying inmates;
- Provision for visits;
- Providing inmates the opportunity to do constructive work while incarcerated;
- Providing inmates the opportunity to be involved in constructive leisure-time activities, including outdoor recreation and exercise, and;
- Providing inmates with opportunities for self-betterment, such as religious services, educational programs, and rehabilitation programs.

All of these factors, if successfully addressed, communicated, and implemented by the jail staff can alleviate frustrations and keep tensions at a low level, thus, they affect security. Virtually all activity within the jail facility has an impact on all other elements of the facility's operation.

Jail staff should realize that inmates do not escape from buildings but from the people who staff the buildings. In essence, security is people attending to people. All staff must constantly be alert, looking for actual or potential security problems, and then going one step further, doing something about what they see. Working in a jail facility is a full-time profession, and it is no place to catch up on sleep, do homework for a college course, or read the newspaper. The jail staff persons have sold their time to the county, therefore, they must be accountable for that time.

Summary:

1) A jail security program should have four primary objectives: a) Ensure the safety of both inmates and staff; b) maintain order within the facility; c) prevent escapes; and d) control contraband.

Any security program becomes less effective if inmates fear for their safety. Inmate tension in turn creates stressful working conditions for facility staff. In such situations, routine encounters between staff and inmates can degenerate into explosive situations. Thus, our security program has as its goal the development of a secure environment that ensures safety for the public, our staff, and inmates.

2) The single most important factor of security is the jail staff person. The jail staff person has a great responsibility to ensure that the functions of safety, security, discipline, and custody are carried out. The effectiveness of our security program depends upon the jail staff person and their abilities to demonstrate acceptable behavior and positive interpersonal communications skills. Staff persons, for their own protection and to make sure observed problems are taken care of, should report all problems in writing.

3) Internal security is only as good as staff communications are between staff and with inmates. It is the responsibility of the jail staff to create a normalized environment for inmates.

4) Inmates do not escape from a building but from the people who staff the building. Therefore, the facility management team must take every step possible to reduce security risks. Security is a constantly evolving process. Jail staff must be ever alert for actual or potential security problems. This involvement would be in written and verbal communications that process problems into workable solutions.

QUIZ

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

SUBJECT: SECURITY AND COMMUNICATIONS, PART II

JULY, 1991

NUMBER 77

NAME _____

DATE _____

- 1) The single most important factor in our Security Program is your _____.
- 2) Jail Standards state that all facility employees who work in excess of _____ hours annually in _____ or _____ contact with inmates shall satisfactorily complete _____ of initial training and _____ of yearly in-service training.
- 3) The two basic types of facility security are _____ and _____ security.
- 4) Perimeter security is all that our jail staff has to be concerned about? TRUE FALSE
- 5) A Security Program has four primary objectives. They are:
 - A) _____
 - B) _____
 - C) _____
 - D) _____
- 6) Good communication skills include _____, _____, _____, and _____.
- 7) Listening has three components. They are: 1) _____, 2) _____, and 3) _____.
- 8) Inmates don't escape from buildings but from _____.

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

ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR OR TRAINING OFFICER.

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SUBJECT: SECURITY AND COMMUNICATIONS, PART II

JULY, 1991

NUMBER 77

NAME _____

DATE _____

- 1) The single most important factor in our Security Program is your STAFF.
- 2) Jail Standards state that all facility employees who work in excess of 200 hours annually in DIRECT or CONTINUING contact with inmates shall satisfactorily complete 36 of initial training and 18 of yearly in-training.
- 3) The two basic types of facility security are PERIMETER and INTERNAL security.
- 4) Perimeter security is all that our jail staff has to be concerned about? TRUE FALSE
- 5) A Security Program has four primary objectives. They are:
 - A) ENSURE SAFETY OF STAFF, INMATES, AND PUBLIC
 - B) MAINTAIN ORDER WITHIN THE FACILITY
 - C) PREVENT ESCAPES
 - D) CONTROL CONTRABAND
- 6) Good communication skills include PARAPHRASING, PERCEPTION (CHECKING NON-VERBAL EXPRESSIONS), and ARGUMENT AVOIDANCE.
- 7) Listening has three components. They are: 1) ATTENTION, 2) RECEPTION and 3) PERCEPTION.
- 8) Inmates don't escape from buildings but from THE PEOPLE WHO STAFF THE BUILDINGS.

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