

N E B R A S K A

JAIL BULLETIN

Number 60

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PRINCIPLES OF INMATE SUPERVISION - PART I

Often, detention facility managers and staff rely too much on physical devices (facility, equipment) to create a safe and secure facility. Prisoner supervision is an essential part of any safe and secure operation.

Supervision of prisoners requires special skills and attitudes of officers, and it requires special programs and planning by management.

Officers need to be aware that the most critical element in appropriate organization functioning is positive control of prisoners through interpersonal communications.

A. INTRODUCTION

The most important element of controlling prisoners, whether in a short-term holding facility or in a longer-term jail situation, is the quality of contact between the detention officer and the inmate. The contact should be as direct as possible. Officers should be in a position to safely talk to a prisoner, listen carefully, observe non-verbal behavior and create some privacy.

Under these conditions there are many officer-prisoner supervision situations: officers are in immediate contact with prisoners during the booking and release process; officers are in constant contact with prisoners while on the health and welfare check rounds; officers are in contact when there is a crisis, during meals, during sick call or while transporting to court or doctors.

In many new facilities, the physical design of the detention area places the officer in direct contact with prisoners during all activities. In each of these situations the tension level or environmental atmosphere and the overall functioning of the detention operation is affected by the type of control the officer exerts over the prisoner. The officer will either maintain a positive control or a negative control over the prisoner.

B. POSITIVE CONTROL

Positive control, as used here, will be determined through many factors, such as the skills of the officer, the history of the prisoner, the values of the officer, the philosophy of the facility management, and the tension level of the situation.

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Positive control results in non-violent, cooperative, low stress, productive behavior between the detention officer and the prisoner.

Elements of Positive Control:

1. The officer is completely in control of the situation. While the prisoner will not feel intimidated or feel a loss of self-esteem, the officer will be guiding the situational events toward the operational goals of safety and security.
2. The officer handles the situation in a logical and rational manner, avoiding the emotional entanglement which may confuse or skew important decision making. It is imperative that the officer keep outside of this emotional circle and maintain rationality.
3. The officer should have developed and maintained a skill level for helping prisoners quickly solve immediate problems. The process of rapid problem solving requires practice and ability, but its contribution to a positive detention atmosphere is significant. While we do not expect detention officers to change individuals or solve problems that have life long histories, the crisis of arrest and the problems created by incarceration are significant to the prisoner. How the officer addresses these problems will determine, in many situations, the working environment for detention staff and prisoners.
4. The accountability process should be consistent, fair and just for violations of detention rules. The detention officer will soon develop a reputation for the type of punishment administered. While prisoners must be held accountable for their behavior, the officer who is arbitrary in punishing or who does not consider the particular situation will create unnecessary conflict and stress. Prisoners, as do most persons, recognize the need for accountability systems as long as they are fair and appropriate.

C. SUPERVISORY TECHNIQUES

There are three primary components of officer responsibility in the supervisor-subordinate relationship. First, the officer must be skilled in problem solving with the subordinate (the prisoner). The problem solving technique should be directed toward a positive outcome for both the supervisor and subordinate.

Second, the officer should have a method of clearly stating the rules or expectations of the organization. This is the training aspect of supervision. The officer is responsible for training the inmate to understand the rules, procedures and expectations.

Third, the officer is responsible for keeping the prisoner accountable for resulting behavior. If that behavior is not appropriate in relation to the rules, procedures or expectations, a negative or retraining action is required. If the prisoner's behavior is appropriate then it is the officer's responsibility to reward the individual. When there is no negative action nor positive reward there is no accountability system. In the absence of an accountability action, procedures or rules become non-existent.

1. Problem Solving

Problem solving between the officer and prisoner requires the three elements of problem identification, understanding and action.

Problem identification of the prisoner's problems by the officer requires:

listening carefully to the prisoner's statements. Listening requires that the officer focus on the words and actions of the prisoner suspending all personal judgements temporarily;

identifying key words during the listening process which identify what, where, when, who, why;

observing the non-verbal behavior of the prisoner which reflects on the problem. Mood, voice, intensity and body actions are examples of non-verbal behaviors; and

responding to the prisoner's statements and actions by paraphrasing or questioning the prisoner concerning issues and implications of the prisoner's messages.

Once the problem has been clarified, the officer should indicate to the prisoner that an understanding has occurred. The officer relays this message by making further clarifying statements.

The problem-solving occurs when the officer, with the problem clearly identified and the prisoner trusting the officer's sincerity, helps the prisoner to identify possible alternative solutions. While rarely telling the prisoner what to do, the officer should help the prisoner clarify realistic alternative actions.

2. Expectations

Expectations, rules or procedures are clearly established by the officer through various methods:

Written rules are made available to all prisoners;

The officer explains rules and the rationale supporting them. The officer must take part in rule and policy formation with management in order to accomplish this goal; and

Prisoners are rewarded or reprimanded in response to rule boundary testing.

3. Accountability

Accountability is difficult for most detention officers. The primary elements of this final stage of supervision are as follows:

Behavior may be rewarded or reprimanded through quick, specific statements by the officer;

The accountability action should be in close time proximity to the behavior; and

The accountability action should be in the same degree as the behavior involved.

This month's Jail Bulletin is taken from the National Institute of Corrections Jail Resource Manual, May, 1989 edition. The authors are Rod Miller and Paul Katsampes.

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 annual jail inspection.

SUBJECT: PRINCIPLES OF INMATE SUPERVISION
PART I

NAME: _____

NUMBER: 60

DATE: _____

1. The most important element of controlling prisoners is the _____ between the detention officer and the inmate.
 - a. strength of the bars
 - b. friendship
 - c. quality of contact
 - d. degree of mistrust

2. Positive control requires a strong emotional entanglement on the officer's part.
_____ TRUE _____ FALSE

3. List the three primary components of officer responsibility in the supervisor-subordinate relationship.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

4. Accountability action should be taken soon after the behavior.
_____ TRUE _____ FALSE

5. Don't allow inmates to see the written rules, that way you can make them up to fit the particular needs of the moment.
_____ TRUE _____ FALSE

CREDIT: 1/2 HOUR CREDIT FOR JAIL IN-SERVICE TRAINING REQUIREMENT.

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

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3. List the three primary components of officer responsibility in the supervisor-subordinate relationship.
 - a. PROBLEM SOLVING
 - b. CLEARLY STATING RULES OR EXPECTATIONS
 - c. ACCOUNTABILITY

4. Accountability action should be taken soon after the behavior.
 XX TRUE FALSE

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