

The Correctional Officer

The Correctional Officer

A Practical Guide

Third Edition

Gary F. Cornelius

CRIMINOLOGY, LAW AND SOCIETY DEPARTMENT
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY



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Dedications

The corrections field is a demanding one, and sometimes a thankless one. I have been fortunate to pass on my observations and experiences to the current and new generation of correctional officers. I dedicate this work to them, as I am going out to pasture and you all are coming in. God bless you all—be safe and be well as you enter a building day after day and work among people who do not want to be there.

I could not have accomplished this without the support and guidance of several people. I dedicate this work to my children, Gary Jr. and Amber, and the loving spirit of their late mother and my wife, Nancy.

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Corrections can strive to help inmates become better citizens when they are released to the community. Travis County Jail (Texas) inmates' flag ceremony. Used with permission, Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

Introduction

When most people hear the words *correctional officer*, they think of a “guard” — a uniformed person patrolling Spartan-looking cell blocks, keeping an eye on sinister-looking inmates. In reality, highly trained, professional, and motivated men and women patrol the cellblocks, hallways, recreation yards, towers, and walls of our nation’s jails, prisons, and lockups.

The job of a correctional officer in the twenty-first century is a demanding one. The days of a correctional officer being a “watchdog” are long gone. Gone also is the notion that correctional officers are only “custodians” of wrongdoers. The philosophy of merely warehousing and keeping an eye on inmates has given way to such revolutionary concepts such as direct supervision, improved electronic monitoring, improved medical care, and alternatives to traditional forms of incarceration.

Another demand on the correctional officer of today is that of keeping up with information about offenders. Additional knowledge is available now thanks to the Internet and improved communications about inmates. More information is now known and being updated about offenders’ medical issues, mental health, gang affiliations, and civil rights, to name a few. There have been new developments in institutional security and procedures; for example, the development of emergency procedures, correctional emergency response teams, and new methods of security. Correctional officers face dangers — for some, working in correctional facilities and being around offenders has resulted in injuries and death.

Public opinion and criminal justice policies throughout the 1980s and 1990s resulted in mandatory sentencing, “three strikes and you’re out,” and the abolition of parole in many states. These changes, combined with more research on inmate violence, security threat groups, recent legislative acts, and court decisions all had an impact on the job of the correctional officer. Today’s correctional officers need as much knowledge and skills training as possible to be the best and safest at their jobs.

This book, while concise, is a relevant “hands-on” informational tool for correctional officers. Its purpose is to be a training resource for correctional officers in correctional facilities such as lockups, prisons, jails, and community corrections facilities. It is specifically designed for entry-level and in-service training, with the following goals:

- To serve as a written training guide for correctional agency instructors and field training personnel;
- To provide an understanding of the history, philosophy, and evolution of past and present correctional systems;
- To serve as a guide for correctional officer job skills training;
- To provide an understanding of the sociological, educational, and behavioral characteristics of inmates;

- To give the correctional officer an understanding of the positive traits and characteristics needed to maintain a successful career in corrections; and
- To give correctional officers an understanding about the future of corrections and the skills they need to meet future challenges.

Knowledge is power in any correctional institution. To be effective at their jobs and safe, correctional officers must have the latest, most practical knowledge that instructors and trainers can provide. Sometimes this can happen in the training academy; sometimes college instructors can use information such as what is contained in this book. This third edition has been updated; hopefully, it will be more reader friendly. In the first chapter, the previous edition focused on the three correctional ideologies. In this revised version, there is a discussion of the functions of corrections and how they fit in and overlap into each ideology. The text is updated throughout to reflect current statistics and operational practices, as well as current information on offenders. Chapter 14, “Inmates’ Rights and Needs,” has been modified to provide a good, commonsense look at liability, the basic civil rights of inmates, and a strong emphasis on how correctional officers can avoid inmate litigation, especially concerning special populations, such as the mentally ill and inmates with medical problems.

This book can be used in an undergraduate class in corrections, especially where the instructor wishes to inject a realistic view of operations and staff in different types of correctional facilities. By doing so, college students considering a career in corrections will be provided with a good look at the field. No matter in what way the book is used, it provides a valuable resource for the “unsung heroes” of the corrections field—the correctional officers.

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