

**WISCONSIN STATE
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Keynote Presentation Abstract:

Truth Is A Treasure!

The Role of Education in Corrections

Truth is hard to come by in our line of work. Even rarer is a consistent and logical basis for the policies and procedures we must follow each day. Adult corrections -- driven by the ever-changing winds of political trends and lacking the anchor of a positive, universal service objective -- displays its own unique brand of contradiction and non-reality.

The main frustration we face in working in the punishment business is not the pathology and resistance of our clients. Rather it is the paradox inherent in our function as correctional educators. While the educator part of our job description requires us to impart greater knowledge and understanding to our clients, the core mission of corrections is to keep these offenders power-less and under control -- *and knowledge really IS power.*

The means used to maintain control over prisoners leads to fragmentation of mind, isolation of body and alienation of spirit, all of which reduce the capacity and will of our clients to connect to and cooperate with the world. This result is in direct opposition to our role as educators and persons dedicated to human growth. So how do we best fulfill our vocational and ethical vision, given the barriers we face both from our clients and from the system within which we strive to operate?

To resolve this conflict, we must begin by re-examining our basic role. *What is a teacher?* Ours is, upon serious review, one of the most powerful and purposeful of all human functions. Why? Because we help others evolve! Not just change *but grow.* But just how powerfully and purposefully we perform depends on our individual definition of what it takes to be a teacher. *Just how far are we willing to go?* Do we content ourselves with merely giving information, or do we tackle the challenge of how to transfer understanding? Do we follow a standardized, one-dimensional course outline, or do we strive to infuse energy and creative excitement?

My definition of a teacher, given my background and perspective, is one who endeavors to transmit truth, buffered with compassion and respect and buttressed by an unbending faith in the dynamic nature of human change. "Truth" for our special population goes far beyond mere "information"; it takes in ethics, honor, reality, along with the rationale for and rewards of pro-social choices.

Of course, our job descriptions do not commission us to address these issues. And, equally daunting, our clients as a rule are not receptive to a direct attack on their core values. In fact, the historical nature of our profession is far deeper and more challenging than seems required by -- or even acceptable in -- our present role in society. *But, so what?!* Looking back, how many of the great teachers were rejected and, often, paid the ultimate price for their work?

So how do we address the CAKE -- the core issues and values which form the foundation of a successful life -- when the mandate of the system and the expectation of our clients are focused on the ICING -- facts and how-to information that will bring short-term gains? Well, first, we follow the instructions of Aristotle on how to deal with persons operating on a lower level of consciousness: WE FOOL 'EM.

Thus, you may let your students think they are learning to read or be drug free or to fill out a job application; but that is just the icing. The secret agenda is to model for them, in spirit and in fact, the

qualities of character that are the true foundation of a positive, honorable, rewarding life. To do anything less is simply to serve as a conduit for facts; it does not fulfill the higher calling of being a teacher.

To fulfill this higher role, we must actually BE of good heart; BE in a state of constructive becoming; BE the ethical, decent being we are calling upon our clients to become. And we must do this while surviving and individually pros-pering in the twisted and conflicting environment of the modern prison.

How do we do this? Again, we must return to our definition of a teacher and consciously aspire to emulate the behavior of true teachers throughout time. This requires that we elevate our motives to a spiritual level, thereby divorcing our ego and self-worth from the short-term responses of our clients and the hypocrisy of the criminal justice process. From this perspective, we can strive to influence the evolution of our students, using as our primary tool the subtle, indirect influence generated by our own actions and attitude.

In short, our role as teachers is not so much a function of what we say or even how we say it, but what we are and our willingness to grant our students insight into the ebb and flow of our fundamental character and deepest values. This requires exceptional courage, but most of all, the clarity and determination to actually live those essential values which we constantly call upon our clients to adopt. It is through this level of commitment and service, and this level alone, that we can achieve the pride and satisfaction of both a job and a life well done.

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