

A Fatal Flaw

Ned Rollo - OPEN, INC.

Since 1798, the overriding mission of adult corrections in America has been to "maintain the safe and orderly operation" of the correctional process and its web of policies and procedures. Treatment provision to offenders has been little more than a token, ancillary and ill funded appendage, with less than five percent of the correctional dollar applied to anything which relates to "human development."

Three years ago the correctional industry "awoke" to the long-ignored reality that millions of men and women are exiting prison and most are failing. "Failure" defined as "recidivism" or return to the criminal justice system. Based on this one-dimensional measure, the nature of an ex-con's success is defined as the mere "absence of failure." Such a primitive perspective is immediately inappropriate in real life terms because "success" is comprised of infinitely more than can be gauged by the myopic objective of simply "not going back to prison!"

In human terms, "success" is no different for a drug addict than for the President of General Motors. It is a process of positive growth and achievement linked to results valued by the individual in concert with his or her community. Such an "unfolding" springs from a mix of pro-social values supported by constructive action and an expanding sense of achievement. Therefore, any meaningful measure of post-release success should be acknowledged as a far more complex undertaking than simply not going back to prison! In this regard, a primary function of the correctional process is to enhance the client's will and ability to operate as a value-added social unit---*as a whole, healthy, contributive human being.*

This demands a paradigm shift from the long-standing mind set of raw human control "by any means necessary" to a product-directed philosophy and style of management consistent with promoting human development. This in turn requires a base of consistent, high quality service provision! Not the ineffectual, haphazard farce we've called "treatment" for two centuries. Rather a wisdom-based approach founded on creative vision, competency and, above all, the ethical determination to do right!

But why are we faced with needing to enact such core change in the way we do business? Above all because the adult correctional process is a 100% political animal. As such it operates by pandering to the lowest level of public consciousness, which subjectively interprets treatment provision to offenders as a de facto "reward for criminality." Based on this mindset, meaningful service to "criminals" is anathema, resulting in our historic reluctance to give more than lip service to provision of effective treatment.

Catering to this subjective, punitive perspective acts in diametric opposition to what is required to both "reduce failure" and "promote success." Far worse, it is a precipitating cause of the very "high risk behavior" it hypocritically bemoans!! The most insidious and counter-productive aspect of contemporary corrections is that it constitutes a "culture" which serves to exacerbate the anti-social perspective and behavior of its charges. As such, the correctional process itself stands as the greatest single barrier to promoting "successful reentry." And until this well spring of systematic alienation is acknowledged and rectified, debate over how to "enhance successful re-entry" of convicts is little more than a cruelty joke.

Why? Because "re-entry" exists downstream from years of cumulative abuses under the iron hand of the same punitive system which, while breaking its own rules with impunity, demands that inmates "cage their rage" and correct their "criminal thinking." This blatant hypocrisy must be openly addressed and resolved before there can be any hope of improvement in the end product of the punishment industry.

You see, we cannot focus on "re-entry" without taking up the matter of a "positive product" --- and that cannot be done without coming to grips with the ramifications of cause and effect across the board. In the end, the most valuable outcome of the reentry debate will be the moment of truth when we openly acknowledge our double-standard and adopt the same level of responsible values and conduct we so forcefully demand of adjudicated felons!

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