

**Federal Bureau of Prisons – San Antonio, Texas**  
**September 12, 2002**

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## **Reentry Staff Briefing**

Since 1979, I have actively pursued the issue of effective reentry, having elected to focus on the mental, emotional and social factors which stand to influence a person's will and ability to both survive and succeed following imprisonment.

My efforts have been balanced across the full span of the "correctional experience," from the day a person enters an institution, throughout the full period of incarceration, across the overall adaptation into the free world for periods of as long as 12 years, and, in some cases, right up to the time of death of our clients.

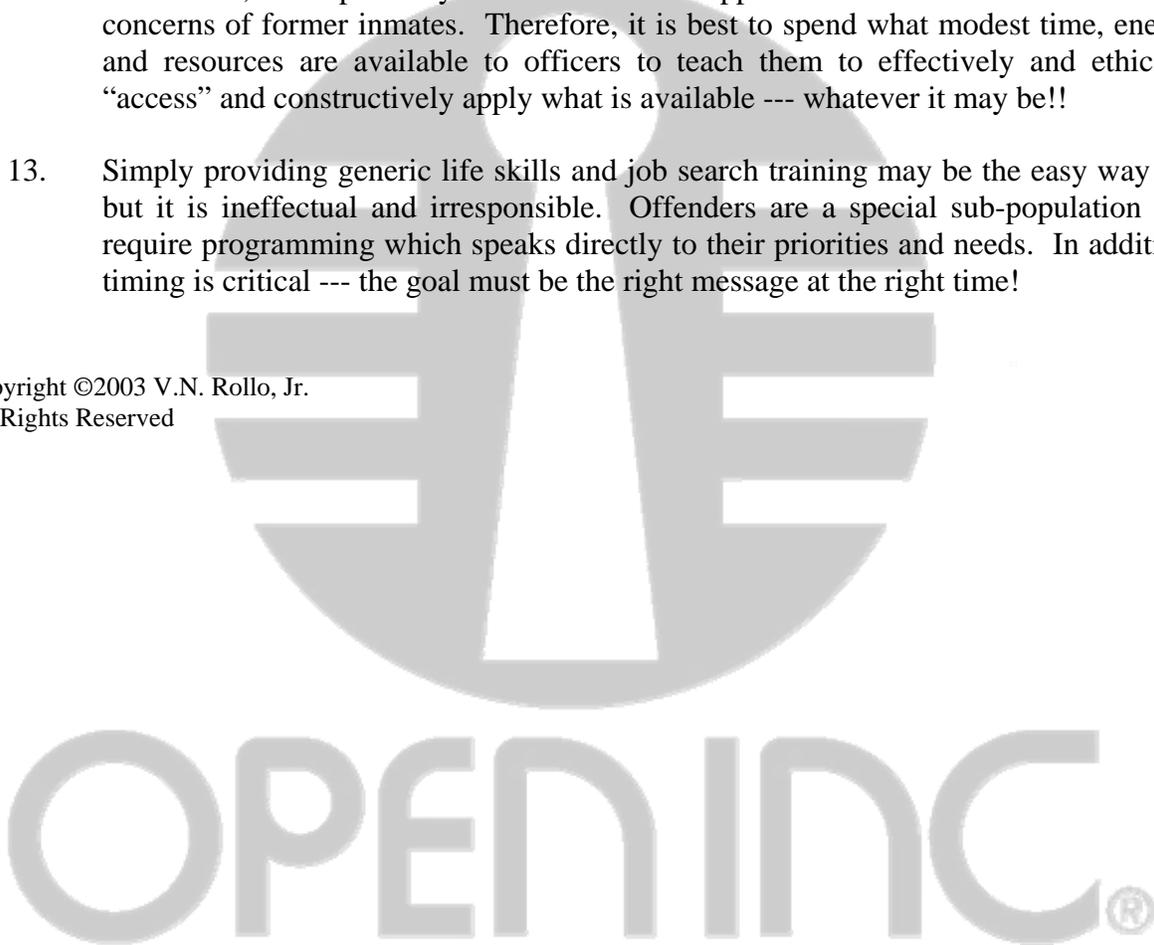
Based on the cumulative insight gained through interaction with approx. 30,000 offenders, linked with lessons learned from correctional staff we have worked with and trained in 26 states, the following are a few of the key lessons we have learned:

1. The "event of release" is distinctly different as relates procedurally to the CJ system and as applies experientially to someone living through captivity and return to the community. For the system is simply the end of one phase and initiation of another, marking a departure from institutional systems, policies and services to those based in the community. For offenders, however, no such artificial or mechanical division applies. For them, release is a pivotal moment; a mid-point in an overall life experience for which there is no "point of closure." This difference results in a major disparity between what the system thinks is needed to reduce the risk of future criminality and the offender's perception of his or her quality of life.
2. Independent of a wealth of rhetorical claims and reams of "paper programming," not one system in this country is effectively addressing and substantively enhancing the post-release success of its clients. Only in isolated cases, is an individual service provider making any useful impact on a person's will and/or ability to survive and function, during or after incarceration.
3. For policy or programming administrators to fall back on or strive to make "creative" use of existing program/treatment models or their remnants, is counter-productive, serving only to perpetuate 200 years of dysfunction. This cycle of failure-based behavior will continue until corrections factually takes on the role of human development as its primary responsibility, with human zoo keeping / security being defined as a secondary concern.
4. What very few know is that approximately 70% of the "challenges, changes and opportunities" faced following release are, in fact, inherently predictable aspects of

- the overall experience. This fact offers a great deal of promise because it holds forth the potential for clients and practitioners to get a grip on the nature of “the process” and establish workable roadmaps to pro-social survival and success.
5. There are no magical programmatic fixes or short-term remedies to antisocial values and conduct. Much of the support needed post-release can be functionally defined as forms of “adult parenting”: as such, it demands ongoing, timely “handholding” over a sustained period of time. This reality has profound implications on what should and can be done in terms of support and supervision, in prison and in the community.
  6. The “absence of failure” or “lack of recidivism” does not equate to “success” post-release and therefore does not constitute a suitable single measure for evaluation of the validity of treatment programs or initiatives. The most pragmatic goal for both inmate and system alike is achievement of “five years of arrest-free behavior” because we know that if a person reaches that mark, there is less than a 5% overall probability of future incarceration. The reason is remarkably simple: for a person to actually achieve this behavioral bench mark, an ex-con has had to dramatically redefine his or her sense of self and relationship to the world. In short, it is impossible to achieve 60 continuous months of arrest-free living if a person is engrossed in a criminal life style.
  7. Treatment initiatives are best approached as “continuing or adult education” and must include the critical ingredients of appropriate timing, consistency and continuity.
  8. There are far more “program models” than there are appropriate people, opportunities and resources to apply them! Most importantly: the greatest barrier to effective program/treatment delivery is the profound absence of “*integrity of application.*” In short, it doesn’t matter how logical or “well researched and validated” a treatment model may be if the delivery agent fails to do it and do it right! Which, unfortunately, is the rule, not the exception, across the punishment industry.
  9. Motivation is a gateway concern to all behavior change. We know this but universally fail to effectively enhance client motivation, assuming that the offender is solely responsible for this all-important concern. Plus, we falsely expect the client to possess a self-defined drive to perform the functions essential to survival and success (such as the work ethic and will to endure hardships).
  10. In order to both “connect with” and enhance the motivation of persons during and following captivity, we must couch our efforts in keeping with the three core priority areas fundamental to all powerless people world-wide: *freedom* (and all it represents/offers); *family* (and the positive results to them); and *hope of future good* (with the wide range of rewards potentially available.) In so doing, we must shift from what the public wishes to “impose” on criminals to what clients themselves value: values and actions in keeping with their well bring in concert with the well being of the community-at-large.

11. It IS possible to enhance the capability of a person to effectively function in the world following participation in the criminal justice system. But to do so requires defining the client holistically, not simply addressing sub-elements of behavior, such as substance abuse, anger, parenting, employability, etc. Collateral service delivery results in “collateral damage!”
12. The concepts of “continuity of care” and “seamless provision of services” are little more than wishful thinking and rhetorical babble, having no basis in reality! No such condition exists for anyone, especially social rejects and persons at the lowest end of the socio political and economic continuum. In truth, each community simply “has what it has,” with painfully few resources and opportunities that match the needs and concerns of former inmates. Therefore, it is best to spend what modest time, energy and resources are available to officers to teach them to effectively and ethically “access” and constructively apply what is available --- whatever it may be!!
13. Simply providing generic life skills and job search training may be the easy way out but it is ineffectual and irresponsible. Offenders are a special sub-population and require programming which speaks directly to their priorities and needs. In addition, timing is critical --- the goal must be the right message at the right time!

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