The Future of Federal Corrections

An introduction by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons

J. Michael Quinlan

I want to use this inaugural issue of the *Federal Prisons Journal* to share some thoughts about how I think the Bureau of Prisons is likely to develop as our profession enters a period of astoundingly rapid change.

During the past year, scientists' dire predictions about the "greenhouse effect" and the depletion of the ozone layer, as well as such disasters as the recent Alaskan oil spill, have made all of us more conscious of ecology. As a Nation, we are beginning to realize that there are no quick fixes for environmental problems, and that decisions—good and bad—made decades ago have a lasting influence.

The ecology comparison helps us understand the criminal justice system. Only recently have we begun thinking of the entire process (and the many agencies) through which a criminal passes—from investigation through arrest, trial, sentencing, prison or diversion, probation and parole—as a system. We are not so far removed from the days when all these agencies operated in virtual isolation, with little thought for how decisions at one level would affect others further down the line.

And yet, we are now entering a period that is likely to see the greatest overall expansion of prison capacity in American history. It is not unreasonable to think that we will have almost twice as many prisoners in Federal custody by the middle of the next decade. As American citizens, we should not be proud of this—indeed, many see it as a symptom of national failure.

But the mechanisms are in place to drive prison growth through the end of the century, even if major judicial and law enforcement policies were to be reversed today—an unlikely event. As corrections professionals, however, we are now presented with a problem—and an opportunity—very much like that of the scientists working on the greenhouse effect: the greatest professional challenge we will ever know. We will need all the creativity we can muster to manage prisons in the Information Age. Let me mention a few areas:

■ *Moving away from "walls and fences" prisons.* Information Age technologies such as electronic monitoring and intensive use of satellites may make it possible for an increasingly large percentage of offenders to serve their sentences under conditions of home confinement—holding down jobs, keeping their families intact, and keeping off the streets.

■ *Monitoring our own performance.* Public accountability in the Information Age means more than answering our mail. It means developing sophisticated feedback mechanisms to measure how well our programs work, allow for midcourse corrections, and provide a solid data base so that we can manage better and help States repeat our successes and avoid our failures.

o *Keeping pace with the private sector.* We must take account of the private sector's technical and managerial innovations while retaining our distinctively public goals. UNICOR provides us with a unique laboratory to do just that.

■ *Reaching out to our colleagues and the public.* Institutions know the importance of Community Relations Boards and joint ventures with other public safety agencies in cementing support in their localities. But we must also use the full range of Information Age technologies—old (film, radio, public displays, newspapers) and new (video, computer networks)—for telling our story.

Inevitably, this challenging new "prison ecology" will require change within the organization to keep pace. Correctional officers joining the Bureau in 1989 will retire as senior administrators from a very different agency.

The Bureau wants to maintain a leadership role in corrections. We enjoy strong support in Congress. The Federal courts have time and again backed our policies when challenged. But this is not enough. We are moving into a wider arena.

The public's attitude toward prisons is paradoxical. On one hand, "lock 'em up" never fails to win support at election time. On the other, "not in my back yard" is the typical response when we get down to hard cases of siting and construction. Most of all, the public is unaware of the staggering costs involved—and that the costs of operating a prison don't decrease with time. It is cheaper to send a prisoner through college than to keep him locked up for a year.

Corrections agencies have generally preferred to live with this "out of sight, out of mind" attitude, and have stayed largely in a reactive mode as far as the public is concerned. We have not particularly tried to get our message across—we may not even have been aware that we had one. But we do.

Our message grows out of the Bureau's mission statement, which conveys the Bureau's goals to:

"Maintain secure, safe, and humane correctional institutions for individuals placed in the care and custody of the Attorney General.

"Develop and operate correctional programs that seek a balanced application of the concepts of punishment, deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation.

"Provide, primarily through the National Institute of Corrections, assistance to State and local correctional agencies."

Let us look at each of those elements.

We do have a message to get across. The message is that good correctional practice works.

The foundation of corrections is security—protecting the public. If we fail at this, our successes in other areas simply will not matter. No conceivable security system is 100 percent perfect, but our objective is to approach that level of perfection to the greatest possible degree.

It's frustrating to all of us that the occasional walkaway or escape—more often an escape attempt that fails—receives so much attention. But the public has the right to take security for granted; it's the first principle of the entire criminal justice system. We must be open in acknowledging the occasional security breaches, quick in fixing them, and constantly looking for ways to prevent them from occurring.

The "safe and humane" part of the statement is much less well understood. Sadly, many people still hold to the notion that a criminal belongs to some sort of separate species that deserves no consideration whatever. But prison, for the overwhelming majority of inmates, is not the end of the line. Almost all will be released back into the community.

We must help the public understand that the *prison experience itself is punishment.* It is neither Constitutional nor good correctional practice to increase that punishment by allowing inhumane conditions to exist in prisons. The Bureau's record of leadership on this issue must continue to be strengthened in the next decades.

Overcrowding is a serious problem and will remain with us for years to come. At least some of its bad effects can be reduced through good management, however. If inmates feel safe from assault, and if sufficient opportunities for work, education, and recreation are available, then a reasonable level of overcrowding is manageable.

This brings us to the second element. The concept of "balance" is a particularly important part of the statement. Sometimes we feel that it is difficult to maintain our balance in the shifting winds of public opinion, but leaning too far toward punishment or toward rehabilitation is not professionally responsible.

It's not our job to change an inmate's ways of thinking—and we have to admit that we simply don't know how to rehabilitate people consistently. The recidivism rate is proof of that. Nevertheless, inmates do straighten themselves out in prison—and it's our job to help those who want to change.

Still, it is the rehabilitative aspect of the Bureau's work that most often meets with public incomprehension. It seems to many to be "coddling criminals." But we know that the mix of programs and opportunities we offer within our institutions actually enhances safety and security. Again, almost everyone now in Federal custody will return to the community. We can't "cure" criminal behavior, but we know that *some* programs work for *some* inmates *some* of

Growth of the Federal Prison System

the time—and that's a better chance than many of them had on the street. Our goal must be to increase our percentages of success.

The third element of our mission statement reflects our position as a public agency and one of the recognized leaders in corrections. Government information—including the collected professional experience of thousands of Bureau employees—is not proprietary; it is meant to be shared. The National Institute of Corrections is our formal mechanism to provide specific types of assistance to States and localities. But there are many other situations, both formal and informal, in which we can help (and learn from) our colleagues in other agencies. Indeed, we have recently begun talks with the Correctional Service of Canada on areas of mutual interest.

So we do have a message to get across. The message is that *good correctional practice works.* It keeps citizens safe, it keeps inmates secure, it allows some inmates to make the choice not to return to prison, and it allows the Bureau to manage an ever-expanding population.

This overall growth in the system means, of course, that the size of our staff will expand as well. We have always thought of the Bureau as a family, and just as with many American families, our "family" is subject to outside pressures—demographic shifts, competition from the private sector, a tightened Federal wage structure, and so on. What will this mean for the Bureau as a place to work, a place in which to grow?

Organizing a Human Resources Division Bureauwide in the past year was one part of our strategy to cope with the reality that our "family" is changing. We are now an *extended* family, and the work we do requires an increasing level of sophistication and more specialization. In that respect we are like the private

sector. Computer literacy, for instance, will be an increasingly necessary skill for all BOP staff. Managers who are used to making decisions "by feel" will find that they must make use of research findings and powerful information-gathering systems in their daily work. Evaluation must become a part of every Bureau activity, not just because it improves our efficiency, but because it ensures a wiser use of public resources. (Our Program Review Division was also established this past year to implement this philosophy Bureauwide.)

Hand in hand with these changes in employees' skill profiles, styles of management must change. Only one person is a real expert when it comes to a particular job—the person who does it. Managers will increasingly involve employees in decisions that affect them. This does not mean running institutions "by consensus," but it does mean allowing everyone's voice to be heard. American business is discovering that a participatory style of management is good for the bottom line—the public sector will see that it increases staff interest and involvement in their work.

The private sector is also discovering that helping its employees maintain their personal health and well-being—through exercise, better diet, assistance in dealing with alcohol, drug, and nicotine addictions, and similar programs—has greatly cut down on the number of sick days and increased overall job satisfaction. The Bureau is moving as fast as possible to expand this concept of "wellness" throughout our institutions, and to make it a permanent part of our thinking.

When the exercise of creativity becomes an accepted part of the job, we will be well on our way to coping with the new world of corrections we are entering.

Corrections is a people-intensive profession. Programs are only as good as the people who administer them. We can be proud of the increasing professionalization of our workforce, without thinking that we've come nearly as far as we have to go. In theory, if you find the best people and reward them well, you should have no staffing problems. Ours are obvious, and not just in specialized areas such as nursing, where a nationwide shortage of trained personnel has placed the Bureau in competition with leading hospitals and medical centers. The unfortunate situation is that we have good people, but can't always pay them what they're worth. We can hope that the long-standing pay inequities in our field will be redressed, but this is out of our control.

What we can do, in line with the concepts of participation and wellness outlined above, is to create an environment in which it is personally satisfying to work—to reinforce already existing skills and cross-train for new ones, to nurture future leaders and give them as much responsibility as possible, to keep communications open up and down the lines of authority. When the exercise of creativity becomes an accepted part of the job, we will be well on our way to coping with the new world of corrections we are entering.

I said earlier that the huge expansion of the prison system we are about to enter reflects a national failure in the eyes of many observers. We have not come to grips with the causes of crime; indeed, we are not even close to agreement about what they are. But we know the symptoms all too well. A recent estimate (by criminologist Simon Dinitz) suggests that to lock up every felony offender for 5 years would mean increasing the American prison population by 300 to 500 percent, with construction costs of $130 billion and operating costs rising accordingly. Clearly, this will not happen, but the shift toward more stringent sentencing and the public's "get tough" attitude have produced changes that couldn't have been foreseen as recently as a decade ago.

The "ecology" of criminal justice in this Nation is in a state of upheaval. The future presents both dangers and opportunities. We must manage this growth, or it will manage us. The *Federal Prisons Journal* is an important part of our integrated approach, and I urge you to read it, write for it, and support it.

As the debate on American crime and justice continues, we in the Bureau of Prisons have a special part. We must all be advocates for good correctional practice. We're the experts on that. ■

J. Michael Quinlan became the fifth Director in the 59-year history of the Federal Bureau of Prisons in July 1987

Ensuring a Safe, Humane Institution

Through the basics of corrections

James D. Henderson and
Richard Phillips

This is a challenging time in the field of corrections—and an appropriate time to consider a few thoughts about contemporary, yet classic, correctional management. The need to focus on safe, humane management has never been greater. Federal and State systems constantly stress "the basics" in training, and continue to be managed in a highly professional manner. But correctional staff now face unprecedented numbers of commitments throughout the country. Thus, it's worth stepping back for a moment to think about just why the basics are so important.

Today there are a multitude of ideas about how to manage prisons better. People "search for excellence," try their hand at "managing by objectives," or even become "1-minute managers." "Theory X" and "Theory Y" may explain how some people act when they manage. "Quality circles" might set up a means for letting staff be more involved in important decisions. Any one of a half dozen other theories could very easily be a basis for successful institutional operations. As a common denominator, though, each seems to involve some type of comprehensive strategic management system, based on principles that are clearly understood and subscribed to by all staff. Within such a management structure, sound institutional operations rely on diligent application of the fundamentals of security technology and common sense, blended with a reasonable response to the human condition.

The fact is that good management in a correctional environment is made up of a relatively few fundamentals: the personal visibility of top staff, attention to high

Thomas Hoffman

levels of housekeeping and sanitation, inmate accountability, key control, tool control, good staff training, and having a sound policy basis for decisions.

You can be sure that there will be a session on "overcrowding" in every major correctional gathering held in the foreseeable future. Obviously, this is a major problem in corrections, yet it is essentially beyond our control—determined by the policies and practices of agencies and individuals outside our own organizations. There are things correctional staff *do* have control of, though—basic correctional practices, and visibility and accessibility of management and supervisory personnel. Having control of those factors will not only make prison jobs easier, but ensure that offenders in custody serve their sentences under safe, humane conditions.

Creating a safe institutional environment should be of paramount importance to every correctional worker. As everyone knows, though, just about anything that can go wrong, will. What is needed is a management style that gives an advantage—an "edge"—on the critical areas that create the most problems.

"Management by wandering around"

The first thing managers can do to gain a critical advantage, and improve the way an institution runs, is to increase the visibility—the physical presence in every area of the facility—of mid- and upper-level staff. While workloads are admittedly high for top administrators, it is imperative that the warden, his executive staff, and department heads regularly tour the institution and make themselves available to staff and inmates.

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A concrete example helps illustrate this point. During a recent visit by one of the authors to a State institution, the warden approached the segregation unit, but stayed in the corridor. It was 9:30 p.m.; individual logs on the doors in the unit indicated that the inmates had been fed all three meals for the day, had been recreated and taken showers, and had been checked by medical personnel. Afterward, the warden was asked if he ever visited the unit. His response was that he never did, because "verbal abuse always leads to physical abuse." Whether or not that was the real reason, one fact was clear—he didn't know what was going on inside one of the most critical areas of the institution.

Administrators need to use their tours of the facility to personally communicate their standards of sanitation, conduct, performance, and professionalism. When they tour, they must actively seek out information, not just passively walk around. If they don't ask questions—probing questions—and give clear instructions leading to concrete actions, then the acceptable performance level moves toward whatever level is in force at the time. Ignoring conditions you don't like, or that violate policy, in effect condones them. If the top staff don't say anything, you can bet that no one else will. It is critical that the warden set a positive example in this respect, and insist that other management staff do likewise. This extends in particular to special housing areas such as death row, protective custody, and detention or segregation units, where serious problems can quickly develop from relatively small issues.

This personal visibility builds staff confidence in their leaders. Instead of visualizing front-office paper-pushers, line staff can relate to managers they see and talk to regularly, and who listen to their concerns and problems. There are institutions in which neither staff nor inmates know the warden. In other locations, unit logs in segregation indicate that the warden visits there for very brief periods, seldom, or not at all. That's simply not enough attention to such a critical area of the institution. In one case involving a serious escape, supervisory personnel had failed to visit death row for weeks at a time.

Personal credibility is almost priceless in the people-intensive business of corrections. There is no better way to build it than through face-to-face contacts between line and administrative staff. Moreover, better decisions are made when administrators know their staff and institution on a personal basis. This is true in ordinary circumstances, and really pays extra dividends in times of crisis. Whether it's an employee job action, a hostage situation, an uprising, or some other crisis, administrators who have this extra dimension of knowledge about their institution will inevitably fare better than those who rely on second- or third-hand information. Maybe it's not the hard

facts as much as the feel of the institution, the more intimate knowledge of the staff and their capabilities, or even personal knowledge of the inmates involved. Those hard-to-quantify benefits of hands-on administration pay off when the tough decisions have to be made.

Many people promote the benefits of so-called "inmate councils" to get this kind of communication and credibility going in their institution. Inmate councils, however, tend to be composed of the privileged few—the inmates who try to style themselves as power brokers in the institution. This situation is ripe for disaster. If, on the other hand, administrators are out and about, and making themselves available to inmates for individual contacts, they will be getting everybody's view, not just the predictable group of gang leaders and jailhouse lawyers who have intimidated and pressured their way into the inmate council. If staff at every level are accessible, the entire population is the inmate council.

Another reason for high-visibility management is to fulfill top administrators' direct supervisory responsibilities. Without constant attention, it is only a matter of time until administrators lose contact with the realities of day-to-day operations, and are unable to see first-hand how their subordinate supervisors are performing. The larger and more complex the institution, the more important this element becomes.

A few years ago, this management style was immortalized in the Hewlett Packard company as "Management By Wandering Around." That's as good a name as any, but it didn't start in the semiconductor industry. It's been going on for years in well-managed correctional facilities, practiced by incorrigible old captains and other wise department heads who made warden, then couldn't keep their noses out of the day-to-day running of the institution.

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The accompanying principle is that if the warden isn't out and around, other supervisors won't be either. The warden should set the example, then insist that the proactive management strategy extends to the associate wardens, and on through to the shift supervisors and other department heads. Every manager should be acutely aware of the need to get out into the institution, particularly the locked units, to ensure that standards are being met. Only by personally conveying and communicating the expectations of the administration, and regularly following up with those who actually carry them out, will managers avoid slippage in critical areas.

In high-security settings particularly, the presence of top staff moving confidently throughout the facility conveys a message—that working conditions are safe. This is not a small matter in some prison systems, where the personal safety of line staff is a pervasive concern, and in some cases they literally work under the gun all day. When the warden shows that he or she is not afraid to go into the housing units, onto the yard, or into other sections of the facility, the message is that it is safe for line staff as well. The morale implications of conveying any other message are serious, to say the least.

As a final pragmatic note on visibility, when superiors are confident that a manager knows the institution, the result is a gain in credibility that should make the manager's job easier in many ways. Persuading agency heads and legislatures to support policy and procedure changes may be one positive result. Another might be less effort in gaining and maintaining the staff and fiscal resources needed to run the institution even better.

This element has been discussed at length not only because it is important in its own right, but because virtually every other correctional management tenet rises or falls on the personal visibility of top management in an institution. Visibility is the vehicle for ensuring that everything else takes place.

Sanitation

The second basic issue is sanitation. Too often, staff overlook the obvious—if inmates (and employees too) have to live and work in a place that is dirty, poorly maintained, and smells like a barn, sooner or later they will start acting accordingly. A strong emphasis on basic housekeeping and sanitation is a clear indicator of a well-managed institution. High standards of housekeeping should be communicated clearly to staff and inmates. Carefully crafted, conservative personal property limitations are essential. When deviations begin to occur,

personnel assigned to the problem area need to act immediately to prevent further deterioration.

This factor has direct implications for inmate behavior and morale. There is no record anywhere of an inmate complaining that the kitchen, dining room, or visiting rooms were too clean. When staff maintain high standards of cleanliness in these and other areas of the institution, they convey a message that they care in a positive way about how the inmates in their charge live.

The kitchen and food service sections obviously require the highest standards of cleanliness. Cluttered shop areas telegraph conditions ripe for accidents. Even in high-security units, inmates should be required to participate in sanitation efforts; where any other tradition exists, changing it should be a high priority. Structured inmate involvement in sanitation activities will relieve staff of this responsibility, provide more wholesome working conditions for employees, and result in better living conditions for the inmates—and higher morale all around.

When activating new institutions or housing units, establishing high standards of housekeeping should be an immediate requirement. Personnel assigned there need to set them immediately to prevent the deterioration that will soon set in if inmates are allowed to set their own standards—ones that will certainly be lower.

Along those lines, it's important to always have some active construction project in the institution, showing the population that there is some interest on the part of the administration in their welfare. This could be constructing a new ball court, refinishing the gym floor, refurbishing the dining hall, or any number of other things. Within the limits your budget allows, you need to have at least one *highly visible inmate-related project* going all the time.

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Policies and procedures

A well-developed body of policy is critical for the efficient operation of any institution. The official agency policies on discipline, visiting, correspondence, use of firearms, use of force, hostage situations, and many others all need to be brought together, organized, and published. Field staff should certainly have significant input into the formulation of these policies. Once these policies are in place, there should be a comprehensive system of local and central audits. Above all, staff need to follow these policies. It may be better not to have a policy than to have it and ignore violations.

Inmate accountability

Accountability for inmates is high on the list of basics, yet it is a complex subject that hinges on a great many other factors. The mission of corrections is to confine properly committed offenders for the courts; if prisons don't keep inmates inside the perimeter, they very simply have failed. That is a basic level of external accountability—ensuring that the right number of inmates are counted every midnight.

There is a second level of accountability, though—internal accountability. It includes a sufficient number of counts at meaningful intervals. But it also entails census checks that monitor the whereabouts of inmates between counts, pass systems to track the movement of inmates on the compound, methods of confidentially posting pictures and identification information on particularly dangerous or escape-prone inmates, as well as other local systems for keeping track of inmates. These, coupled with an alert, well-trained staff, are the minimum components of any effective inmate accountability system.

Any number of facilities have exceptionally secure perimeters, but little in the way of internal inmate controls. If inmates have enough latitude inside the perimeter, eventually they will find some method to defeat even the best wall or fence. This is especially true if other internal control systems are also vulnerable to inmate exploitation.

Contrary to some opinions, inmates prefer to be controlled if procedures are consistent. Internal controls such as pass systems and callouts, bolstered with programs and jobs that structure major portions of the inmate day, all serve to strengthen internal accountability.

Key control

Absolute and comprehensive key control is another cornerstone of successful institutional management. Every key and key ring in the institution must be accountable to a person or location at all times. Every lock and key must be a part of a rigorous inventory, accountability, and testing program that ensures that keys are where they are supposed to be, in the proper hands, and that they work as intended without fail. Effective methods must be in place for controlling and issuing emergency keys and certain restricted keys. Special issue, logging, and color-coding procedures should be used, and training should be constantly emphasized.

Good key handling practices on the part of staff are essential; if inmates obtain keys or impressions of them, serious security problems are sure to arise.

Tool control

Tool control is yet another area where staff cannot afford to let down even for a minute. Every tool in the facility must be issued to a specific department, and thereafter controlled by strict inventories using shadowboards and other functional control and storage methods. Division of tools into categories for high- and low-risk items, and strict enforcement of inmate access restrictions, are necessities. In particular, this involves control of knives, files, saw blades, grinders, and torch cutting tips, but needles, syringes, caustics, and poisonous and hazardous materials also need high-priority attention.

The agency bears the responsibility for setting down the requirements of such a program. Once that is done, a concerted effort must be made by local staff to adapt the agency policy and specify how it will be carried out—through local policy supplements as well as a set of comprehensive post orders and emergency plans tailored to each locality. Supervisory efforts in the policy enforcement area are paramount, and, as already mentioned, personal visibility is the best way to achieve them.

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Training

Lastly, staff training is the glue that holds everything in an institution together. It's great to have a well-developed body of policy in the agency's central office, or in the warden's office in the institution. But if staff are not familiar with that policy, and don't have local mechanisms for carrying it out, it is virtually worthless.

Introductory sessions for policies need to start in the training academy; needless to say, training academy staff should be respected professionals who are well versed in the policy basis for what they teach. There should also be local training in the specific application of policies in the institution. Refresher training is needed at least annually to keep everyone up to date. All of these systems should complement each other—the central office policy development process, staff training academy activities, and local training and refresher courses. The trained staff member who is familiar with policy and how it is carried out in his or her institution is the real asset in corrections. Training systems have to prepare employees for the basics, or nothing else done, said, or thought about will matter.

Making a difference

It's hard to overstate the importance of personal involvement and visibility, the need to maintain high standards of maintenance and sanitation, and the other accountability and control systems mentioned here. Sometimes staff lose sight of the fact that one person can make a difference. As an individual, each administrator and correctional worker can create the climate necessary to set high standards and expectations that will make his or her institution or agency function at its best. ■

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