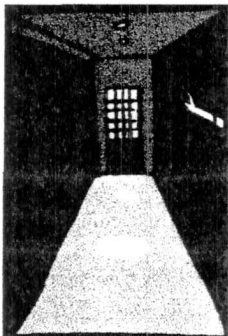


IDENTIFYING CURRICULUM CONTENT FOR SEGREGATION UNIT PERSONNEL TRAINING

By Chris Menton, Ed.D. & Michael Shively, Ph.D.

The training needs for correctional personnel who are assigned to high security segregation units at correction facilities in the Massachusetts Department of Correction are identified in this paper. The methods developed and used for identification of specific training needs are also discussed. The proper functioning of a segregation unit is dependent on personnel who are prepared for the assignment.

In 1992, training officers assigned to a complex of correctional institutions within the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) made a request. Their request was that the Department's Division of Staff Development conduct an investigation to determine what special training needs existed for security personnel working in Segregation Units. These units provide the highest levels of confinement in the DOC. Each of these units have particular name designations - some official and some slang. Within Massachusetts, some are known as: the Special Management Unit (the SMU), the R. B., Hollywood, Beacon Street, the Max section and Seg. Hollywood, Beacon Street and the cells at Framingham Correctional Institution have long been closed, either because of their antiquated condition or questions regarding the constitutionality of their use. In the vernacular these

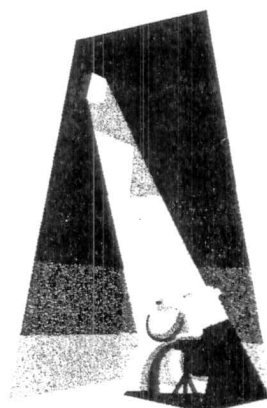


high security placements are called: Iso, Ice time, the hole, or seg. The process of an inmate being assigned and transported to one of these units is referred to as "being lugged." Being assigned to work in a Segregation Unit is a unique experience. It is thought to be more stressful than other correctional personnel assignments and require specialized skills beyond those of general correctional officers.

In response to this issue the DOC Division of Staff Development (Training Academy), with assistance and support of the DOC Division of Research, began to outline strategies for a training needs assessment for Segregation personnel training. The initial proposed time parameters were those asked for by the institution training officers, an annual 40-hour program, which was consistent with American Correctional Association's Accreditation standards at that time. More important than Accreditation standards, however, was the crucial function that Segregation Unit personnel play in DOC accomplishing its mission to protect the public. Within these units perhaps the most dangerous and most violent criminals within any correctional system must be managed and cared for in ways that are humane and effective. Keeping in mind the gravity of the responsibilities, these personnel have guided the development and execution of a training needs assessment.

The design of this needs assessment sought to develop information from the end user (officers assigned to segregation units) and up through management. The multiple phase design of this needs assessment reflects a bottom up approach. Initial fact finding and back-

ground investigations involved contacting DOC employees and managers who were responsible for the administration of different segregation units within the DOC. Consultation or review of DOC policies relative to Segregation Units and a literature search were also conducted. After this initial investigation, a preliminary design for the needs assessment was developed. The first phase of this was



site visits to the different Segregation Units within the DOC. Initial interviews with Segregation Unit personnel and managers site visits were set up. A decision was made to tour and interview staff at three different Special Management Units, one being the oldest in the state, another the newest, as well as a third unit.

The information gathered from telephone interviews with managers, review of policies and literature, and these site visits, constituted the material from which questionnaires were developed. The development and dissemination of questionnaires became the next phase of the needs assessment. The questionnaire was designed to collect a variety of information from Segregation Unit personnel. The first section of the questionnaire collected demographic information on the responding employee. Data such as rank, race, age, gender, and years of service were requested. Institution particulars were collected in the first section including the size of the unit. After this background section, a number of sections followed which all asked

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about specific job duties and tasks. A task was listed and the employee was asked to respond with two answers. First, how important was this task to being able to do the job? And second, to what degree would training improve the efficiency or effectiveness of performing this task? Ratings for both of these questions were from 1 to 5 in order from high to low and the sections included procedural issues, security procedures, security equipment, emergency response issues, inmate maintenance issues, staffing issues, and chain of command issues. A third section asked about the familiarity the employee had with DOC policies that related to Segregation Units. Twelve particular policies were identified and the question was asked, do you know how this policy was related to your job? The three responses were, 1) yes, 2) kind of, or 3) no.

Questionnaires were distributed to all correctional institutions within the DOC system that had Segregation or Special Management Units including the one female correctional institution. The number of questionnaires submitted to each institution was approximately equal to the number of correction officers working in the particular Special Man-



agement Unit. A cover letter asked the manager to disseminate the materials to the staff on all three shifts. Each packet contained an envelope with the Division of Staff Development DOC intra departmental mail system address on it. Each questionnaire had a cover letter asking for the cooperation of the individual correction officer and affirmed their importance in the process of training themselves and coworkers. A 76% return

rate was realized using this method. Out of 145 questionnaires sent out, 111 were returned. The results from one particular institution were lost, possibly in the interdepartmental mail system. The high return rate can be attributed to two factors. One is that personnel in the DOC are members of a paramilitary organization and as such are conditioned to follow directives. The second factor is that the correction officers surveyed generally felt that they were being asked their opinions and were happy to oblige. All data was recorded for evaluation in partnership with the Research Division. Particular attention was paid to the section containing specific duties and tasks and the ranking thereof. Ranking was on two bases: 1) importance, and 2) the need for training. Thus histograms were formed for each task in the survey. The sample average for each task regarding importance and need for training were individually plotted. There were 41 tasks with point values. Tasks which ranked high in both importance and the need for training were identified. Tasks which ranked low were collapsed into relevant groupings. The result was a group of 12 tasks for which curriculum should be developed and delivered to correction officers working in Special Management Units.

Validation of the Survey

In order to verify that these 12 tasks were, in fact, the items that curriculum should be developed for, a focus group exercise was arranged for managers of Special Segregation Units within the DOC. The 41 tasks questioned in the original survey were randomly organized on a list and each person was given a sheet with these



Teamwork is the key.

tasks and asked to put them in rank order of importance for both training and importance for the job itself. After this exercise was completed and during a coffee break, student interns tabulated the rank ordering of the supervisors and the scoring of each task was distributed to members of the focus group. The results of the ranking by the members of the focus group were consistent with the results of the survey. Again, low ranking tasks were collapsed with other low ranking tasks until it was felt that there was enough material to be covered in training.

Results of the survey validated by the focus group allowed the production of a list of topics for which curriculum should be developed in order to provide appropriate training for correction officers working in Segregation/Special Management Units within the DOC.

This list consisted of the following:

1. Restraint - special training in speed cuffing and the appropriate use of soft restraint materials.
2. Stress awareness.
3. Team building.
4. Fire evacuation.
5. Documentation techniques.
6. Cell searches.
7. Mental health issues.
8. Staff response techniques.
9. Locking mechanisms.
10. Communication skills.
11. Appropriate response to medical emergencies.
12. Inmate services.

These results became the basis of a 40-hour curriculum targeting correctional staff who were either working in Special Management Units, or were about to be assigned to those units. The approach used in this assessment provided credible content for proposed curriculum. It reflected needs identified by personnel doing the actual jobs.

As expected, personnel identified a number of skill-based topics such as restraints, locks fire and medical. This seemed to drive home the point that staff working in these units understand the importance of and the need for training in the more concrete duties of these assignments. What was more interesting and perhaps reassuring is that personnel assigned to these units recognized the importance of more abstract issues such as

stress, team building and inmate mental health. The recognition of the need for training on these types of issues seems counter to the image of the heartless correction officer. It reveals line level practitioners' general views of what is important when working in units where exercising the highest levels control of other humans is the mission.

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10 WAYS TO TURN YOUR MISTAKES INTO LESSONS

We all make them. It's what we do with and about our mistakes that really count. Here are 10 ways we can turn mistakes into successes:

1. **Accept the fact you'll always make mistakes.** No one is perfect. The sooner we accept mistakes as part of life, the better.
2. **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Little mistakes are common. It's when we make the same mistake over and over that we need to pay attention. Don't do the same thing repeatedly expecting different results. Find out what you need to do differently.
3. **Accept responsibility for your mistakes.** Acknowledge your part in making the mistake. Otherwise, you'll just set yourself up to make the mistake again. Ask yourself how you helped create or perpetuate the problem, how your behavior affected other people's actions, and how you can make it better the next time.
4. **Get support.** Meet with people who can constructively and honestly talk about your mistake. Verbalizing concerns and challenges can help us solve them.
5. **Air your mistakes and what you learned from them.** Don't air your mistakes to everybody you know, but to the appropriate people—including your supervisor or a family member. They may be able to provide additional suggestions on how to avoid the mistake the next time.
6. **Expect that you'll make mistakes even in your areas of expertise.** Being an expert in an area does not make you impervious to mistakes. The value of learning outweighs any immediate and temporary embarrassment and awkwardness.
7. **Be constructive with yourself.** Stop self-flagellation when things go wrong. Turn the nagging negativist in your head into a more constructive coach. Instead of saying, "I'm always messing things up," say, "I'm trying to do too much too quickly. Let me stop for a minute to collect myself and slow down."
8. **Don't get over-confident or over-anxious.** Both traits leave room for mistakes, which happen most often when things are actually going *well*. Strive for a balance of self-confidence, realism, and perspective to maintain forward momentum.
9. **The bigger the mistake, the more important lessons it contains.** Use the questions in item number three as a starting point. As painful as it is to examine a tough situation closely, the information it will yield is priceless.
10. **Put the lessons learned immediately to work.** Information without implementation is useless.