

# Making A Difference



January/February/March 2011

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## Staying Positive: It's Easier Than You Think

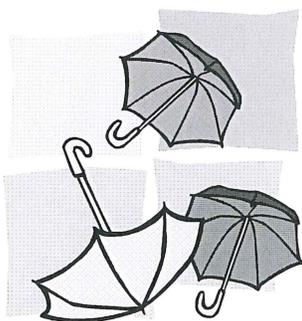
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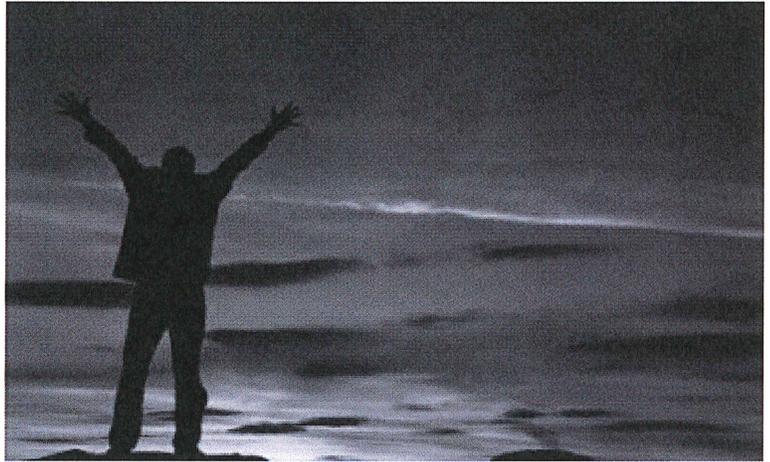
In these challenging times, I wanted to write an article for this quarter's newsletter about something positive. What better than how to stay positive?! I realize no one is able to control everything that happens to and around them. Whether we are at work, in our homes or in our community, we are impacted daily by that which we often can't change. However, we do have the ability to control how we react to what happens to us. Our reactions are strongly influenced by how positive we are! I came across so much material and information, it was difficult to decide what to include and focus on. I could include the medical and physical benefits of staying positive or perhaps talk about the mental and emotional benefits.

I came across a posting by Craig Harper (an Australian motivational speaker) and thought his tips for staying positive worth sharing. They are tips he has incorporated into his daily living. They are short, simple and easy to understand. We all can benefit by following his lead!

1. Hang out with like-minded people who energize you and avoid the energy vampires.
2. Learn from, and get inspired by, successful people.
3. Ask yourself the right kind of questions – the “what can I learn from this experience” questions, rather than the “why does this happen to me” questions.
4. Regularly get excited about possibilities – sometimes too excited!
5. Don't focus on negatives – invest your emotional energy where it will give you the best return.
6. Change the stuff you can and let go of the stuff you have no control over.
7. Constantly set goals -big and small.
8. Dedicate time every day to 'switching off' and having fun for fun's sake. Strategic silliness.
9. Express yourself creatively. It can make you happy.
10. Let yourself dream.
11. Invest time into others. People who are completely self-focused tend to have more downs than ups.
12. Whatever *most* people your age do, try and avoid.
13. Regularly take stock of your life and consciously appreciate everything in it and about it. Be aware that your life is great and that you are blessed to be where you are.

## Staying Positive: It's Easier Than You Think (Cont.)

14. Set high standards for yourself. You want to be exceptional and do exceptional things, and you will. Not because we're particularly talented, but because we are prepared to work harder than most. explore and push the boundary.
15. Sometimes swim against the tide and do what most people don't or won't. Be unconventional and throw 'logic' out the window (now and then). Sometimes *logic* is a synonym for fear and ignorance.
16. Look after yourself physically. Don't smoke, drink or use drugs. Being physically fit and healthy, helps you stay focused on a mental, emotional and creative level. It's very hard to be 'up' when you're physically unwell.
17. Use positive self-talk and don't beat yourself up. Don't feel sorry for yourself and don't indulge in 'pity parties'.
18. Get great feedback and support from lots of amazing people –
19. Keep stimulated and challenged by doing lots of different stuff!
20. Spend quiet time alone recharging your batteries. No phone, no internet, no TV, no people, no noise, no distractions. Sometimes the only person we don't listen to is ourselves.



So, if you feel stressed or feeling like things are going 'bad' around or to you, review these tips and I am confident that things will feel and look better!

## Inmate Evaluation and Classification at DEC

*Jerry Breazile, Business Manager —DEC*

*Steven J. Philson is a case manager at the Diagnostic and Evaluation Center (DEC), which is the reception, diagnostic, evaluation, assessment, classification and assignment facility for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS). As a case manager with over two decades of experience, Mr. Philson has a deep understanding of the evaluation process as it pertains to inmates in a correctional environment; I interviewed Mr. Philson on a November afternoon in 2010, and he provided much of the information in this article.*

All male inmates sentenced to the NDCS by county and district courts in Nebraska are initially received into the Diagnostic and Evaluation Center, as are "90-day evaluators" held for court assessment, county safe keepers, interstate transfers, and returned parolees and escapees. Incoming inmates are received with information detailing their offenses. Drug offenses and medical histories are noted, and if a pre-sentence investigation (PSI) was completed, it may accompany the new commitment.

## Inmate Evaluation and Classification (Cont.)

Each admitted inmate participates in medical, psychological, and social assessment processes that culminate in an individual classification study and specific programming recommendations for custody status and institutional placement. Varied program services are available, and family and community ties are encouraged through supervised visitation, mail, and telephone programs. Religious programming and other opportunities such as Alcoholics Anonymous are available for inmates.

All inmates entering DEC are evaluated. According to Mr. Philson, the type of evaluations they participate in depends upon the inmate's status. 90-day evaluators arrive from county and district courts after determination of guilt but prior to sentencing; sentenced inmates come to DEC for classification and evaluation. County safe keepers come to DEC from county facilities that lack sufficient resources or space to house them.

Case managers and psychology associates conduct evaluations at DEC. One case manager is located in the admissions area, and he/she conducts an initial screening to decide where to place the inmate within the institution.

DEC has nine housing units, and each one is designated for particular inmate types. One of these units, for example, houses repeat offenders with histories of violence. Another is for high-risk offenders that are younger or older than normal in the inmate population, or are sex offenders. The admissions case manager, after the initial screening evaluation, places incoming inmates in an appropriate housing unit. DEC uses three primary evaluation instruments for inmate evaluation, and the Revised Oregon Model is one of them.

The Revised Oregon Model is used for 90-day evaluators, and its use precedes Mr. Philson's tenure at DEC, perhaps originating from prior to 1980. It focuses on the seven criminal risk factors of associations, substance abuse, community functioning, education and employment, emotional and mental health, marital and family life, and attitudes.

Another evaluation instrument used by DEC for 90-day evaluators is the Wisconsin Assessment of Offender Risk. It identifies offender traits known to be accurate predictors of recidivism, and it was originally developed to assess problem and deficit areas of offenders under community-based supervision.

Sentenced inmates from county and district courts arrive at DEC for classification prior to moving to more permanent housing. Those inmates are scored using the Initial Classification Action Form. Similarly, the Reclassification Action Form evaluates offenders that have violated terms of work release or probation and return to custody.

The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003 is a Federal law established to prevent sexual assault and rape in correctional systems. It requires that institutions develop standards for detection, prevention, reduction, and punishment of prison rape, and DEC uses the Aggression/Predation Potential Risk Assessment and the Vulnerability Risk Assessment to address this issue during incarceration.

*Conducting Evaluations at DEC.* Inmate files are a primary source of information for case managers as they perform evaluations. The Presentence Investigation report (PSI) contains information from court dockets, plea agreements, outside agencies, previous probation records, pretrial services records, medical records, counseling and substance abuse treatment records, scholastic records, employment records, financial records, and others. When PSI's are not available, inmate interviews become increasingly important.

Inmates are interviewed in the case manager offices about issues covered in the evaluation instrument. When the inmate is the sole source of information, the case manager must use a variety of techniques to determine validity of inmate responses. "My preference would be that we didn't have to use anything that the inmates give us, as far as information," according to Mr. Philson. He looks for

## Inmate Evaluation and Classification (Cont.)

consistency in inmate responses and correlation with secondary sources.

Another source of information for case managers is the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS), which is the world's largest repository of criminal fingerprints and history records. The CJIS is managed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Similarly, the Nebraska Criminal Justice Information System (NCJIS) is used frequently by case managers; it provides information regarding records exclusively from Nebraska courts.

*The Evaluation Users.* Evaluations conducted for 90-day evaluators are provided to the sentencing judge prior to sentencing. The report can be used by the court to determine, for example, whether an offender should be committed as an inmate or given probation. The evaluation scores from the Oregon and Wisconsin instruments are provided to court judges in percentage formats.

Classification and evaluation of committed offenders is used by the NDCS to place inmates in settings that are appropriate in terms of custody level, programming, services, and threat levels. Gang affiliation can also affect placement. The case manager recommends placement and forwards the recommendation to the DEC Warden.

*Delivery and Use of Evaluation Results.* Evaluation instruments become part of the committed inmate's "permanent" institutional file; the file follows the inmate to his facility after he is classified and evaluated. County and district courts use DEC's evaluations of 90-day evaluators to make decisions regarding sentencing and placement of offenders. PREA evaluations using the Aggression/Predation Potential Risk Assessment and the Vulnerability Risk Assessment are used by facility wardens to eliminate sexual assault in prison facilities by identifying inmates exhibiting specific risk factors.

## Better Than We Deserve?

*Rich Brittenham, Investigative Captain—NSP*

These famous words uttered by Dave Ramsey on a daily basis should be words to live by. If we step back and look at what is going on we can appreciate all that we have. Stop and think about the recent economic woes, the state of the budgets both nationally and locally, and the fact that gas prices are on the rise. We are employed; we have the opportunity to have insurance if we choose as well as a 401k system that helps the employee of reaching their financial goal. We work in safe environments and the department has created many "extras" or opportunity for the employees to take part in if they choose. Yes, if you choose to you can have friendships form from working for the department that can last for a long time.

We hear the phrases "making a difference" and "do more with less." We can make this positive and look at what we have and what we have the opportunity to partake in or we can just dismiss this as catch phrases, the choice is ours and we do control our attitude and behavior. Next time you hear the evening news or read the paper compare yourself to some of the articles that you read or hear and say do you have it worse that the subject of the article or do you have it "better than I deserve." The best part of this is that this tiny action doesn't cost anything nor does it take a lot to achieve-give it a try.

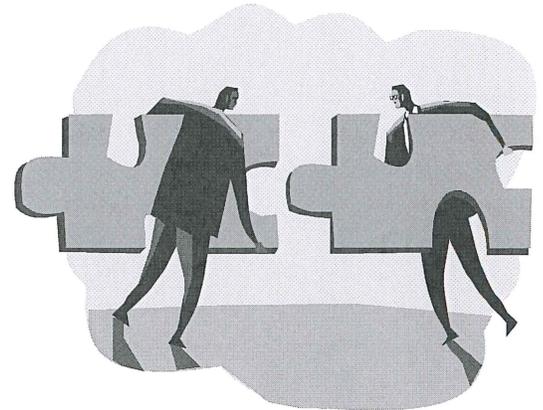
I have a co-worker whom I speak to everyday and part of the reply that I get from him when I ask how is doing, he replies "better than I deserve" this is refreshing and gives me a positive spin knowing that I could make my attitude and demeanor worse.

# Saluting Solutions

*Jared Kolarik, Corporal—CCC-L*

Effects of the recession have by now reached every echelon of both America's public and private employment sectors. The past few years have been a rocky ride on the tumultuous waters of financial instability, and it's unlikely that you the reader have been unaffected by the sting of it all. You may have had to trim spending habits, and you may even know someone who has lost their job because of dwindling budgets.

A joint program between the Department of Administrative Services Building Division and the Department of Corrections was piloted in late 2009 with a dual focus. The program, being custodial in nature, is rudimentarily designed to present the Nebraska State Office Building and its outlying offices as clean and orderly as possible. The second, and possibly more salient priority, is to save money. In its first year, from December of 2009 to December of 2010, the program saved tens of thousands of dollars in custodial costs over the previous year which, in turn, helped to offset increases in operational costs, such as gas and electricity rate hikes.



Under the supervision of Unit Manager Mousa Drammeh, and consisting of Corporal Dawn Hickmon, myself, and 6 inmate detail workers from CCCL, the program is responsible for the beautification of approximately 75,000 sq feet in the State Office Building alone. Our target areas mainly consist of common space such as lobbies, break rooms, restrooms, stairwells, and hallways. The building employs about 2600 people and another 1000 or so walk in every day to conduct business with various agencies. With 14 lavatories in the building available to employees and the public, we average a usage rate of approximately 257 people per bathroom. How daunting to the inmate who was previously a unit porter!

This large workload for the inmates has led to one of the biggest challenges I've faced thus far in my time with the department: it's no simple task to balance the role of supervisor and custody personnel while providing the positive reinforcement that motivates detail workers to perform at the level of service required. Because simply firing unruly workers at every bad turn undermines the provisions of the department's mission statement, it has been a steep learning curve indeed.

The program has met with huge success overall. We have had a myriad of praise over both the program and the people it is comprised of. We keep a record of all the written compliments received so detail workers and other interested parties can read about how pleased the employees in the building are with the program. We have had such a great reaction that plans to expand the program at the Omaha State Office Building have come to fruition and are being finalized at the time of this writing.

As budgets will continue to tighten, administrators and managers will continue to think of unique approaches to save money. Having the foresight to address problems before they arise requires clever and perhaps unorthodox methods of problem solving. I'm grateful and proud that I can be part of a solution.

## Quality at Community

*Iris Glaser, Records Manager and Quality Advisor—CCC-L*

After six years at the Nebraska State Penitentiary I transferred to the Community Corrections Center – Lincoln. While at the penitentiary inmates used to ask me frequently, “can you tell me when I will be transferred to community?” I never truly understood the reason they were so eager to transfer to CCC-L ... after all, it was just another prison, right?

One of the most important relationships people have in their lives is family. The time an inmate spends incarcerated, no matter how long or short, affects not only him or her but also their families. At the Community Center inmates are given additional opportunities to focus on rebuilding this relationship.

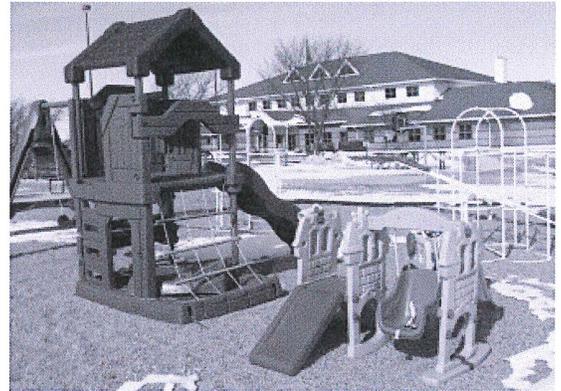
Some of the most valuable people inmate’s receive visits from are their children. Among the many extra benefits offered at the Community Center is a large playground in front of the Center where inmates are able to take their children outside and play.

Last summer one of the female inmates suggested that perhaps there could be equipment added that would be geared toward toddlers and younger children. It was agreed that this would be a great addition to the playground. The funds to purchase the new equipment came from the inmate welfare fund. Two of the inmate maintenance workers volunteered their time to assemble the equipment and set it in place. These two inmates worked in the heat for three days so that inmates with younger children would have a safe place to play.

People donating their time and money helping rebuild families truly demonstrates one of the goals of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services.

Is there anything more wonderful than seeing a child play with his or her mother or father? Anything more beautiful than the sound of children’s laughter as they play?

That’s **QUALITY** ... now I understand.



### “Making A Difference”

Nebraska Department of Correctional Services

If you have comments or suggestions, or would like to submit an article, please send them to:

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Please include your name, position, and work area.

“...secure life and prosperity and you need not give alms.”

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*