

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

BECAUSE ALL ROADS GO BACK TO STAFF WELLNESS

VOLUME: 21



IN THIS ISSUE:

- From The Director's Desk
- From Insignificant To Unforgettable
- Personal Review Of Desert Waters' Peer Supporter Training
- The Power Switch
- Book Review: Crossing That Line
- New Officer On The Block
- Quote Of The Month
- In Memoriam

A Desert Waters Publication

NOVEMBER 2024



DESERTWATERS.COM

A NON-PROFIT FOR THE HEALTH OF CORRECTIONAL & OTHER PUBLIC SAFETY AGENCIES, STAFF AND FAMILIES



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

The lead article in this issue by Lieutenant Bryan Hughes is not material you're likely to come across often. It's the perfect combination of vulnerability and strength, acceptance of what is painful and the use of the pain to advocate for positive action. On the one hand, it's the heart-rending lament, the outpouring of grief by a father who lost his beloved son. On the other, it is a testament of resilience that stems from cherishing precious moments and being grateful for the compassion received in the midst of tragedy. And it doesn't stop there. Lieutenant Hughes takes the opportunity to remind us once again to reach out for help when we're hurting, and for us to also offer support to those we know are hurting. He has given us this gift in spite of the deep wounds to his soul, because he still cares about others. His is a heart-rending, yet also beautifully inspiring testimony.

Caterina Spinaris

FROM INSIGNIFICANT TO UNFORGETTABLE

BY LT. BRYAN HUGHES

October 18, 2023 was a Wednesday. My wife had been having issues with a car tire slowly losing air. I'd procrastinated long enough and got tired of stopping every few days to add more air. My 24-year-old son Chase had moved back home several months earlier and wanted to fix his mom's tire for her.

We found one small hole with a wire coming out of it. Obviously, this wasn't good. Chase plugged that hole with no problem only to find another hole with another wire coming out of it. We started to have some laughs at the wife's expense for letting her tire get this bad. We surely didn't expect multiple holes with wires coming out.

Chase plugged the second hole only to realize it was still losing air. This hole was near the side wall, and we know they don't plug holes on the side wall. I just wanted the tire to hold air until morning so I could take it in to get repaired. Did I mention this was a new car and didn't come with a spare tire? A great lesson to learn AFTER you get a hole in the tire.

Chase decided to put a second plug in the same hole. We knew this wasn't right, but again, just needed it to hold up until morning. By this time we were laughing hysterically at this horrible job we were doing. I sprayed the plug with some soapy water only to find it was still losing air. As Chase decided to put a third plug in the same hole, we could barely catch our breath from laughing so hard.

By this time, I had accepted the fact I wasn't driving this car anywhere in the morning and would just take the tire into the shop. But this time with my son was so worth the laughs. It was a chest-hurting, not-being-able-to-breathe type laughing. Times don't get much better than that with one of your kids. We were butchering this tire, but the jokes and laughs were worth every second.

It's crazy how certain moments don't seem very significant while they are happening. But we were enjoying this father/son bonding time with lots of laughs and another memory we would laugh about for a long time. Or so I thought.

I would have never imagined in a million years we would find Chase dead in his bedroom three days later. An accidental overdose due to Fentanyl Intoxication. We knew Chase was battling addiction. That's the reason he moved back home. But we also knew he had been attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and had been clean for three weeks.

I won't go into details right now of that day we found Chase in his room, but it sure makes those days that originally seemed insignificant pretty important now. Losing my son has been the worst nightmare any parent can imagine. And unless you have lost a child, you truly can't know the pain it causes. I could have never imagined the amount of pain I feel all day, every day. Being awake can be a nightmare, because he is always on my mind. Going to bed is a nightmare because all I see is him lying in his bed the way we found him.

We often talk about mental health in corrections. We need to talk about it. We must talk about it. But I think sometimes people forget that we aren't machines or robots. Besides the stress, PTSD, and demons we fight from the many years on the job, we also have things at home to deal with. We have stressors and issues from life outside of work like everyone else, and this just compounds the stress, making the anxiety and/or depression that much worse.

If you are struggling in any way, please get help. Please reach out to someone. We have come too far and been through too much to give up now. Sure, I went through the thoughts of "I just want to be with my son," but it's not my time yet.

We tend to only see the negative in humanity. But the truth is that there are some amazing people in this world. When our friends were preparing the food for my son's memorial service, we told them there may be 100 people at most. When my wife and I got up to talk about our son at the memorial, we were looking out at over 400 people. My point is this: PEOPLE CARE. We don't think they do, but most people do care. But for them to care, they must know something is wrong. It's hard for people to be there for us if they don't know we are suffering. Please reach out if you are hurting.

Regardless of our beliefs that most people are bad, because we work in such a negative atmosphere, there are some amazing, caring people in this world that really want to be there for you. And if you ever get the chance, please be that good person for someone else that is hurting. You probably don't have to look far to find someone in need.

I don't know what lays beyond that iron curtain, but I sure hope I get to see my son again one day.

Lieutenant Bryan Hughes

Chase's dad – Forever 24

7-9-1999 to 10-21-2023

PERSONAL REVIEW OF DESERT WATERS’ PEER SUPPORTER TRAINING™

BY STEPHANIE RAWLINGS, MSC

As someone who has spent the better part of the last eight years implementing peer support teams in corrections and first responder agencies, I’ve seen various types of curricula that get the job done. However, I recently had the opportunity to experience Desert Waters’ 40-hour Peer Supporter Training™ from multiple perspectives—as an observer of a team completing it, an instructor delivering it, and a staff wellness program administrator always seeking ways to improve peer support team training.

What truly sets Desert Waters’ Peer Supporter Training™ (PST) apart is its comprehensive approach. It weaves together all the essential elements needed to effectively train a peer support team. No box is left unchecked. PST addresses policy, practice, skill-building, and engaging and realistic role-play scenarios and role plays. PST also includes a substantial focus on correctional staff mental health research data, and on the always anxiety-provoking and painful subject of staff being a threat to themselves and possibly also to others. The curriculum brings everything together through interactive discussions that allow agencies to think critically about building their programs, while also offering peer supporter teams ample opportunities to apply the skills in simulated environments.

Throughout the training, participants remain engaged and, in fact, often express a desire for the training to be extended. Most importantly, unlike other training programs, I didn’t leave this one asking, “Now what?” Instead, teams can start planning their next steps during the course itself, ensuring they leave with momentum and a clear path forward.

I highly recommend Desert Waters Peer Supporter Training™—even if your team has already gone through another program. This is truly next-level peer support for correctional agencies.



THE POWER SWITCH

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD

Being able to stay in control of ourselves regardless of what's happening around us is a tall order indeed. Control like that can be hard to imagine. Sure, when life is flowing smoothly, it's easy to feel like we're in charge. But when the going gets tough, even the tough begin to feel jerked around by circumstances.

In this article I describe how we can remain in charge of our behavior pretty much no matter what's happening around us. This can be accomplished by managing our attitude and our perspective. I dare say that applying these truths has the power to shape our destiny more than any other force within our control.

The Two Women



Can you see the two women?

Each of us has a “power switch.” This switch is our ability to control which way we choose to perceive, evaluate, and interpret every situation we face. In psychology books, authors write about the different ways two people can see the very same thing. To illustrate, they often reproduce an old “optical illusion” drawing that has been around for over one hundred years. “Can you see the woman?” they ask. Most people have no trouble immediately identifying a woman in the picture. But then comes some sort of trick question like: “What do you see?” Or, “Is she the bride or the mother-in-law?”

In truth, there are *two* women in the image. Depending upon which way a viewer looks at it—depending on the way the viewer “throws the switch” —the image can be seen as either a pretty young woman turning away or as a weathered older woman looking straight left.

Still hard to see them both? If you’re stuck, you’re not alone. Most people have a hard time flipping the “power switches” of their perspective back and forth. Here’s a hint: The young woman’s nose is the older woman’s nose wart, and the young woman’s necklace is the older woman’s smile.

Life is a lot like “the younger woman and the older lady” perspective test. We have to decide which way we’re going to view something, which way we’re going to throw our switch. Are we going to turn it OFF and be enveloped by the darkness of devastation and disaster, or are we going to throw it ON and be bathed in the light of solutions, opportunity and possibility? Due to how stress impacts and minds and bodies, our mental health and our health overall are critically dependent upon which way we throw the switch. On the one hand, we experience anxiety, despair, fear, resentment and the temptation to give up. On the other, we experience courage, perseverance, resourcefulness, hope, and the possibility of new beginnings.

How Can We Throw the Switch ON?

“But,” we protest, “*my* situation is *really* bad! You have no idea how bad it really is!” I do not doubt that you may be facing tough times. Corrections work is one of the most demanding professions in the U.S. today. And we must accept the reality that life is difficult, period, as Scott Peck wrote in his best seller *The Road Less Traveled*. Yet, as my ancient Greek ancestors said, we must equally accept that there is nothing bad without some good mixed in with it, without something good that can be mined from it. The question is, are we going to look for the good?

The key to throwing the power switch ON is found in what we choose to make our focus. Do we zero in on the loss or the opportunity? On the bottle being half empty or half full? Do we feel weary and resigned to a negative fate, or are we young at heart anticipating the possibilities a bright future awaiting us? Do we become overwhelmed by disappointment, or do we dig in to unearth the jewels buried below the mud? What we look for, we are likely to find sooner or later.

We have options. Someone told me that life's challenges can make us either bitter or better. The difference is in the "i" or in the "eye"—the way we see our situation.

One option is to get angry and resentful, or to become demoralized and give up. That'd be throwing our power switch OFF, reacting by "kicking and screaming," being thrown around by our circumstances. The situation would be controlling us, running the show and possibly ruining our lives.

A second option is to throw our power switch ON by choosing to look at the situation with new eyes, the eyes of positive expectancy and a type of trust. How can I come up with solutions to the challenges staring me in the face? How can I make this hardship work for me? How can I turn this pile of manure into fertilizer for my own personal growth and for the benefit of others?

Why Throw the Switch ON?

Throwing our power switch ON empowers us with hope and positive anticipation so we can hold on and persist in our efforts. It also opens up our eyes to see how hardship can be put to work for our own good and the good of others in ways we had not anticipated before. In other words, throwing our power switch ON both makes us resilient and also keeps us resilient, able to persevere in spite of opposition, and able to bounce back after failure, loss or rejection.

Everybody I know will testify that character development—our maturation as people—does not come about during easy times. Rather, character is usually forged in the fires of affliction. We might exclaim, "Who wants more character! I'm fine the way I am!" We may be just fine, but this hardship has just kicked our door down, and whether we like it or not, it's now in our face and in our space. What will we choose to do?

We do indeed have the power to make productive fertilizer out of the manure that has been dumped on our doorstep by developing qualities in ourselves that are in line with our highest values. For example, we may find that tough times provide us with opportunities to develop skills and launch endeavors that we would have never considered had the hardship we encountered not happened. We may find ourselves practicing compassion, patience, ingenuity, or courage in ways we never thought were possible for us. We may come to value our relationships with others, and to appreciate life more than ever before. Additionally, our experiences of adversity may become springboards for helping others with the life lessons we learn and the skills we acquire.

In choosing to throw our switch ON, we decide to no longer waste precious energy and time in fruitless resentments and exhausting fist pounding about situations or people. Grudges sap our strength and slowly poison us. Instead, we want to see past adversity to ways we can move to new methods of operating. We focus on problem-solving and personal growth. Doing so takes us out of a helpless victim position and brings us back to the controls again. History is full of stories of courageous individuals who inspire us because they

used the trials of life to reach new heights of love and service through self-control and by how they chose to respond to their circumstances.

In Conclusion

In short, what makes or breaks us is not what happens to us, but how we deal with it. Do we react, seeing only the negative, or do we thoughtfully examine the possibilities and chart a positive, perhaps “out of the box” course? What to one person becomes the end of the road to another is a whole fresh set of opportunities. Let us aspire to become people who bounce back after hard times, truly tougher, wiser and perhaps even more noble.



EMERGENCY
SHUT-OFF SWITCH



FROM CORRECTIONS FATIGUE TO FULFILMENT™

Online Instructor Training

Send your vetted staff to become certified CF2F instructors to offer **staff healthy, research-based, career-long coping skills.**

February 18-21 & 24-26, 2025

October 21-24 & 27-29, 2025

[MORE INFORMATION](#)



Click or scan the code to register.



BOOK REVIEW: “CROSSING THAT LINE”

BY SUSAN JONES, PHD

BY CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD

This book should be required reading for EVERYONE who works in a correctional setting, and we mean EVERYONE, including staff who work in prisons, jails, probation, parole, and other community-based settings.

The title, ***Crossing That Line: Boundary Violations between Corrections Staff and Inmates*** says it all about the intent of the book. The material aims to highlight the issue of professional boundary violations, exploring their potential causes, the harm they inflict on individuals and workplace culture, and strategies for preventing these violations and their negative consequences.

The author, Susan Jones, PhD, draws on her extensive experience in corrections—having spent 31 years in the field and retiring as a warden—to explore this topic. Her PhD dissertation serves as a foundation for the book, which includes accessible scholarly research and thoughtful discussions on policy, correctional practices, and culture.

The book is divided into three sections, and features a collection of scenarios highlighting boundary violations between corrections staff and inmates.

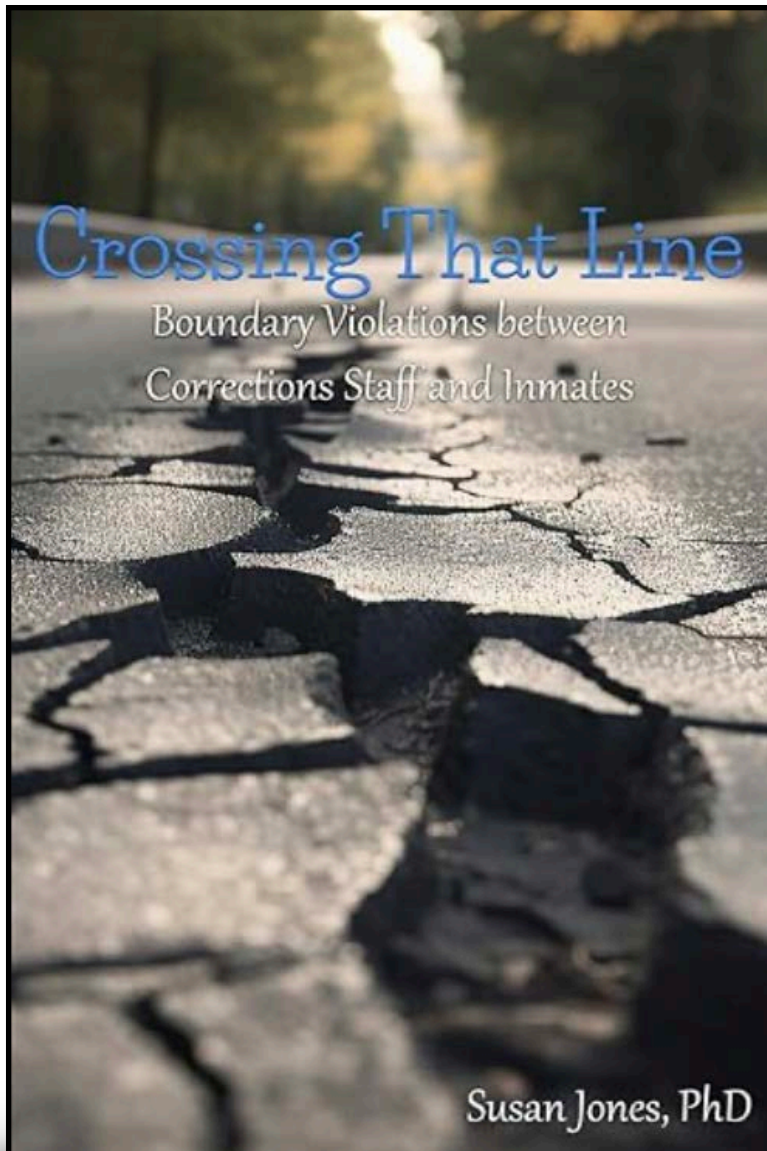
Section I, titled “What Is the Problem?”, covers topics like policy, laws, the corrections culture, PREA, boundary theory, and the author’s model of boundary violations.

Section II, titled “Agency Response to this Issue,” discusses policy, training, corrective actions, disciplinary measures, criminal repercussions, and inmate education regarding the issue.

Section III, titled “So, What Should Be Done?”, focuses on policy content, training materials, cultural change, staff conduct, and provides a comprehensive training outline that agencies can utilize to create effective staff training on the topic.

More than half of the book is comprised of engaging scenarios that even corrections employees who do not enjoy reading educational text would benefit greatly from reading. These stories read easily and provide realistic scenarios that can aid participants to more fully understand the many different facets of boundary violations. Written in the first person, the scenarios allow readers to follow the narrator’s thoughts and emotions. They are raw, gripping, shocking, and often tragic, showcasing various types of boundary violations between corrections staff and inmates. These examples vividly demonstrate how easily staff can slide down the “slippery slope” and the many different ways this can occur.

We strongly recommend you get your own copy and study it closely. Mark it up. Share it with your colleagues. Purchasing this book is a worthwhile investment and applying the tools will be a true offensive strategy in the corrections setting.



**You can get your copy on Amazon by
clicking the image above.**

This book review was written by Caterina Spinaris.

Towards Corrections Fulfillment: For New Staff™ (TCF)

Don't let your greatest asset
start out unprepared!

Help them make
corrections their career.

Give new staff keys to
success from the start.

Give them TCF!

January 13-17, 2025

Next live online training for Academy Instructors
to be certified to teach the 4-hr TCF course:

Register today!

\$1,395 per
Instructor Candidate



Instructor Candidate Comment

*"Useful for myself but will be very useful for new hires to try to prevent Fatigue,
or if it does happen, some ways to bounce back from it." Corr. Sgt.*



NEW OFFICER ON THE BLOCK

BY THE OLD SCREW

Being a new Officer in Corrections is something hard to tell anyone about. It stirs up all kinds of emotions:

- **Thrill**—knowing that not everyone can do our job.
- **A little fear**—knowing that in our line of work we might not go home someday.
- **Doubt**—not knowing if we will be able to handle our jobs and meet everyone’s requirements.
- **Hope**—that we will not let our loved ones or fellow Officers down.

Almost every new Officer wonders, “How do I treat the inmates? Do I let them know who is boss? Do I act as if I’m human?”

A few will try to be a good ol’ boys and act friendly toward the inmates. A few will try to show how big and bad they are. The smart ones will watch the experienced staff. Of course, sometimes that doesn't work because veteran staff may have their own problems. In the end it all boils down to training experience as you learn what to do, what not to do, and why.

So treat every assignment as a learning experience. If you make a mistake, tell someone before the inmates do or before they act as if they are protecting you. Inmates love it when new Officers make mistakes. What they love even more is when you try to cover up your mistake. I guarantee you, whatever you cover up, someday will come back to haunt you. When you make a mistake, it’d be best that you let your supervisor know right away, before inmates start working on you.

New staff look for approval, but they must not seek it from the inmates. If inmates tell new staff that they like it better when they are on duty, staff need to stop, step back, and review how they are handling things. When you hear this from an inmate, you can be sure of one thing: you are doing something wrong. Not every new Officer will mess up this way, but again not every new Officer will be there at the end of six months or a year. No one expects new staff to do everything correctly right off the bat. But if you are ready to learn, get ready to learn from your mistakes and others’.

If an inmate tells you, “I do this all the time when Officer so-and-so is on duty,” tell them you will check it out and see if it is OK. Until then, they must wait for that other officer to come back on duty. The more they protest, the more you know you have made the right decision by not giving in.

New Officers tend to overreact, and that is part of the learning curve. If you catch yourself getting uptight, stop, count to ten, take a deep breath, and continue. New staff must realize that the inmates will continue to check you out, and will try to push your buttons and manipulate you to see if it will work. If you lose it, they won.

New staff must also learn not to get caught up in the rumor mill. At times Corrections is a very boring job. Judge each staff member by the way they treat you, not by the bad word someone puts out on them. The Officer someone badmouthed may be the same Officer who puts his life on the line for you in a crisis. Yes, that old grouch that people put down may just be tired of all the cowboys and seeing so many staff come and go. If approached with respect, he may be only too happy to help you all he can. I've been there and I've seen it happen.

Take care,

The Old Screw

The Old Screw worked for over 35 years in corrections, most of them as a Corrections Officers at in three States—Missouri, Kansas, and Colorado. He retired as a Lieutenant.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

In ordinary life, we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer



IN MEMORIAM

Bradley McNew
Corrections Officer
Jacksonville Sheriff's Office
Florida



MEET THE CORRECTIONAL OASIS TEAM



CATERINA SPINARIS, PH.D., LPC
Founding Director

CONTENT CURATION, PRODUCTION & EDITING



STEPHANIE RAWLINGS, M.S.
Deputy Director

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT, EDITING



JUDY MYERS, B.SC.
Executive Assistant

EDITING



STEVEN MAYOTTE, B.DES., LEED AP
Operations & Systems Advisor

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in the Correctional Oasis are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views and opinions held by DWCO Board members, staff, and/or volunteers. DWCO is not responsible for accuracy of statements made by authors. If you have a complaint about something you have read in the Correctional Oasis, please contact us.

Mission

Advancing the well-being of correctional and other public safety staff and their families, and the health of correctional and other public safety agencies, through data-driven, skill-based training

admin@desertwaters.com
desertwaters.com
(719) 784-4727

Support Desert Waters Correctional Outreach

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the well-being of corrections staff and other public safety professionals, and to also assist their families. Contributions by individuals like you enable us to offer some services at no cost, and to keep our products affordable for agencies. Consider joining us in our mission by making a tax-deductible **donation** today. Thank you for your support!

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach is a non-profit corporation which helps correctional and other public safety agencies counter Corrections Fatigue in their staff by cultivating a healthier workplace climate and a more engaged workforce through targeted skill-based training and research.

All images are stock images or are presented with permission of the author.

