

The *Four C's* of Corrections: Breaking Down the Correctional Environment

By *Eddie Molina*

A correctional setting is arguably one of the most challenging environments anyone in law enforcement can work in. Everyday Correction Officers have to interact with convicted criminals that were charged with crimes ranging from receiving stolen property to murder. Officers are dealing



with master manipulators, liars and con-artists trying to fool them at every turn. It's no wonder why the life expectancy of the average correctional officer is only 59 years old (NIC- National Institute of Corrections). The daily stress of this environment can play a physical role in any Officer's health.

But that stress can be minimized. If you already work in a correctional setting or hope to do so in the future, there are steps you can take to mitigate the challenge and stress of working in a prison or jail. Most of these elements apply to how you, the Officer, can effectively interact with an inmate.

These tips are broken down into the *Four C's* of Corrections: Confidence, Complacency, Consistency and Consequence.

Confidence: Holding your head high, chest out and making solid eye contact and speaking clearly when communicating gives out an aura of confidence that humans recognize- both consciously and sub-consciously. Having a high level of confidence resonates with people and tells them that you know what you are doing (even if you don't). Inmates are less likely to play mind games with you or take chances around you if you show a high level of confidence in your everyday interaction. Not only will it help you in a correctional setting, it will certainly help you in every aspect of life.

Complacency: This is the top challenge of any correctional professional. Finding routine and predictability is human nature and it's only natural that people let their guard down when they know what to expect. Inmates take advantage of this by waiting for an officer to create a pattern. You are to be mindful of the complacency effect at all times throughout your career. It is when

you become too complacent that a serious incident will occur under your watch that you will have to answer for. So be conscious and alert about your patterns, behavior and actions so inmates cannot plan criminal activity around them.

Consistency: In order to earn the respect of inmates it is crucial that you remain consistent in your everyday interaction. If you decide to issue disciplinary charges against an inmate for breaking a rule, make sure you hold each inmate accountable for the same infraction. Otherwise if you pick and choose who gets punished then the inconsistency will manifest itself in the form of poor attitudes from inmates which lead to further misconduct. Additionally, be consistent with the rules you enforce. If one day a particular rule is important, but on another day it is not, that too will lead to inconsistency and its consequences. Being consistent will help control the mood and limit inmate outbursts, which can happen easily.

Consequence: Sometimes giving an initial verbal command to an inmate is enough to quell an issue. Sometimes it's not. Officers may have to take the next step by threatening additional disciplinary action, such as locking the inmate in, issuing institutional charges or even calling for a supervisor, whatever the case may be. Far too often an officer will restate the threats over and over again but don't follow through with the consequences. This can be a frustrating process because inmates start to believe there won't be consequences for their actions. This leads to undue stress which of course is the undesirable consequence. But by following through with your stated consequence, whatever it may be, will let the inmate population know that what you say you will do, you will actually do. Once your reputation is established, the need to repeat yourself to inmates reduces, leading to less stress for you as the officer.

Of course, these 4 C's of corrections isn't all there is to being successful as a correctional professional. But it is among the most important elements I have seen throughout my career. Remember the big picture goal of being a successful Correctional Officer is to be effective as an officer and not bring any of the stress that accompanies this environment home with you. If you do, that stress will manifest itself in other ways such as substance abuse, domestic violence, poor decision making, etc. So follow and remember these 4 C's so you can be successful, minimally stressed and highly effective. That is the key to becoming a true correctional professional.