

# Core Competencies **AND** Jail Leadership

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**What skills, knowledge, and abilities do jail leaders need in order to be a credible and successful?** Beginning with the July / August 2015 issue of *American Jails*, we are exploring the 22 core competencies as identified by jail administrators across the country. Welcome to the 10th installment on core competencies and jail leadership.

In this issue of *American Jails*, we take a closer look at the core competency identified as “teamwork through mentoring and coaching others” and recommend several valuable resources related to leadership.

## Mentoring and Coaching Others

**Description:** Work with staff to strengthen the team and its members, lead by example, and go beyond expectations to assure the success of all involved.

**Rationale:** Creating and nurturing a successful team takes thoughtful planning, time, energy, and ongoing attention. This includes building and maintaining teamwork through both formal and informal strategies, such as mentoring, role-modeling, and other approaches to uniting the talents of a diversified workforce. Great teams are not accidental, but rather the product of great proactive leadership.

### Knowledge:

- Team-building processes.
- Qualities of an effective team.
- Workforce characteristics (e.g., gender, age, race, special skills, etc.).
- Values of diversity.
- Stress associated with growth (dynamic tension).

### Skills:

- Analyze team members' strengths and weaknesses.
- Develop role models and mentors.
- Inspire and motivate subordinates.
- Correct those subordinate behaviors that are out of line with mission/vision.
- Understand needs (and utility) of a diverse workforce.
- Help yourself and others learn from their mistakes.
- Use adversity advantageously to contribute to your personal growth.
- Establish programs and processes to improve teamwork and the team's knowledge, skills, and abilities.

### Abilities:

- Be approachable to all employees and inmates.
- Help others succeed.
- Communicate effectively.
- Be a role model.
- Know your own strengths and weaknesses.

- Analyze people and situations.
- Be flexible.

Even with all your team members on the field and wearing the same color uniform, success is not guaranteed. Why is this core competency so important to jail operations? Many jail leaders claim they know how to build and maintain a team, but do they really? Often there is a "disconnect" between what are team-building "activities" and the fundamentals required for a successful team.

The exploration of this core competency asks:

- Why do we need teams?
- What are the traits of an effective and well-functioning team?
- How do I assess my team?
- How are mentoring and coaching part of the jail workforce environment?
- What are the steps to improve teamwork, coaching, and mentoring in your jail?

## 22 Core Competencies for Jail Leaders

- Anticipate, analyze, and resolve organizational challenges and conflicts.
- Assure organizational accountability.
- Build and maintain positive relationships with external stakeholders.
- **Build and maintain teamwork; mentor and coach others.**
- Communicate effectively, internally and externally.
- Comprehend, obtain, and manage fiscal resources.
- Develop and maintain a positive organizational culture that promotes respect for diverse staff.
- Develop and sustain organizational vision/mission.
- Engage in strategic planning.
- Enhance self-awareness; maintain proactive professional commitment.
- Establish organizational authority, roles, and responsibilities.
- Leverage the role of the jail in the criminal justice system.
- Make sound decisions.
- Manage change.
- Manage labor relations.
- Manage power and influence.
- Manage time.
- Obtain and manage human resources.
- Oversee inmate and facility management.
- Oversee physical plant management.
- Reduce jail-related liability risks.
- Understand and manage emerging technology.

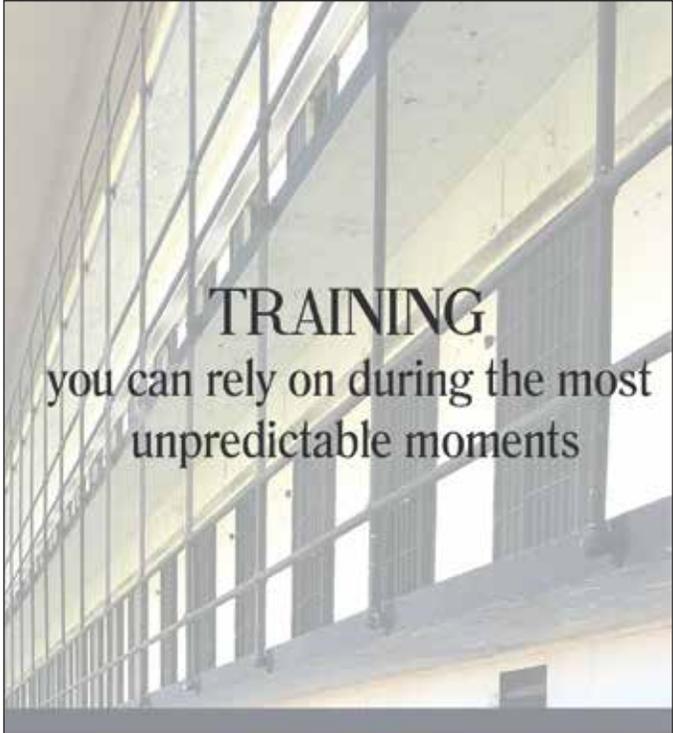
## The Need for Effective Teams

Before identifying the teamwork activities that you believe exist (or the ones you'd like to see implemented) on your shift and in your organization, let's enumerate why we need effective teams as part of the jail's workforce landscape. Then we can assess if what we are doing or planning as team-building activities are worth the time and expense.

Why teams? Here are what teams can do:

- **Achieve core mission/vision.** Without unity, how is the organization's mission and vision known and implemented? Pre-service training stresses the identification of the new employee's work family. There is a need to build loyalty to the agency. (For information on mission, vision, and values, see the Core Competency article in the March/April 2016 issue of *American Jails*.)
- **Affirm organizational values.** The team collectively acts in concert with the organization's values (for example, fairness, integrity, objectivity, inclusiveness, and professionalism). The expectations are set when highlighting these values. If a team member strays from the values, it is apparent. Affirming the values can also identify and defuse conflict, and the team can come to understand the need for accountability in their work.
- **Create and maintain a safe work place.** The team members are trained to know the rules and the basics of jail operations for the interests of their own personal safety, as well as for the inmates and the community. Consistency and expectations about how colleagues will act are fundamental. All employees have "ownership" in the jail—if for no other reasons than their personal wellness.
- **Improve productivity.** Working together to achieve the jail's basic functions, sharing work, supporting peers, improving coordination and collaboration among work groups, and looking for new ideas are all reasons for creating the team.
- **Communicate clearly.** Ideally, all the members of the team receive the same, unedited, message from the leader and then respond accordingly. This communication also energizes the important interactions with the community and the funding authority. If there is no clear message that is governed by the jail's mission/vision and *accurately* known by the team, how can those outside the jail hope to understand and collaborate with the facility?

We've all seen what happens when a team starts to disintegrate. Think of your favorite professional sports team. If they start to lose games, there may be a reshuffling of personnel, firing of coaches or the manager, trading of players, and/or blaming something or someone outside the organization for their woes. Was



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## What I Learned from My Mentor Or Do You Measure Up?

The inaugural class of the Jail Executive Development Program (JEDP) was asked: What was the most important lesson you learned from your mentor? See how you measure up to the advice given to these leaders.

- Be unbiased in your opinions.
- Clarify my personal and professional values, goals, and objectives.
- Develop critical thinking skills.
- Know that “he who angers you conquers you.”
- Be flexible.
- Don’t be afraid to make a mistake.
- Don’t expect to know everything; surround yourself by those who might.
- Bring out your subordinates’ strengths.
- Don’t micromanage.
- Be confident.
- Do the right thing—every time.
- Be yourself.
- Listen more.
- Be patient.
- Never pass up an opportunity to grow; they don’t come around often.
- Hold staff accountable.
- Put people first.
- Ask for what you want; the worse they can say is “no.”
- Listen first; speak last.
- Take criticism as an opportunity to improve.
- Learn how to traverse politics.
- Look for the other solutions.

*Note:* The majority of the JEDP reported that they had a mentor in their career.

the “Curse of the Bambino” really why the Boston Red Sox didn’t win a World Series for 86 years? In this environment, the reason for the sports team’s existence is more about the money the franchise can make or lose rather than the public image of the community. The goal is to win as many games as possible, but the consequences are not life or death.

For jails, however, when teams begin to go bad, the consequences are substantially more dangerous. What suffers is safety, morale, honor, community reputation and support, and funding, among a very long list. Given why we need *effective* teams, what separates an *effective* team from others?

### Effective and Well-Functioning Teams

What identifies your team as “effective?” For this discussion an effective team is:

- Achieving the core mission.
- Applying generally accepted correctional practice, case law, and standards.
- Being fiscally responsible.
- Respecting the workforce, inmates, and the community.

If you are engaged in accountability-based leadership, then your jail is tracking meaningful data, the results of which help determine alignment with the achieving the core mission. (For more information on accountability, see the Core Competency article in the July / August 2016 of *American Jails*.)

Can you say that your team is effective? Looking at your jail, consider the entire operation and then review your workgroup. Is there a difference in effectiveness? Do you have other measures you want to include? There are no rules to deter you, but consider that criteria need to be objectively measurable. For example, respecting the workforce is measurable in retention rates, employee discipline, and employee awards.

### Assessing Your Team

Often we are quicker to identify the characteristics of a team that is crashing: defeatist, negative, petty, demoralized, argumentative, unproductive, and—well, you can complete the list. We’ve all seen these “teams.” Your goal is to identify what you and your organization expect from the teams, and then determine if that vision is being met. If your team are already meeting that vision, congratulations. If not, action is needed.

To guide the assessment of your team, consider investing in Patrick Lencioni’s book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. An internet search can yield instruments to help you make a deeper dive into measuring your team. Although the tools are not complex, they may prove that your initial impression of your team is probably right!

Here are elements of what may constitute a well-functioning team from Lencioni and others to reach the definition of effective:

- **Competent and knowledgeable.** Employees know the jail’s mission/vision and are trained, encouraged, and supervised to perform their duties.
- **Trust each other.** Employees recognize that they are looking out for each other, and capitalizing on the talent. There is little gossip and almost no negative characteristics. Staff can ask questions and respectfully debate issues. Feedback is to enhance, not to beat down the employees’ work performance.
- **Focused on the core mission and the path to achieve it.** Leaders and employees don’t get sidetracked by the crisis of the day. There is continuity and steadiness in the organization.
- **Commitment to the vision and mission.** Managers and leaders exercise the judgment to reach the vision. The leadership “walks the talk.”
- **Accountable.** Staff don’t blame others. They pursue their jobs

enthusiastically, and accept the responsibilities for their work outcomes, even when there is a mistake. The organization is transparent: actions match words.

- **Enthusiastic, high energy, positive.** Employees are not cheerleaders, but genuinely committed to the organization. Everyone knows his or her role.

Other characteristics can also be added to the list. Perhaps that activity is an agenda item for a command staff or shift meeting. If your assessment of your team results in more subjective rather than objective words, then perhaps the expectations are not set clearly enough. For example, if there is gossip, perhaps the leaders don't walk the talk or the managers don't hold guilty staff accountable? If there is more negative speak during meetings, the expectations about shared vision may not be clear. Although some individuals in our workplaces would be negative and unhappy even if they won the lottery, your job is to prevent these attitudes from infecting others. If you don't inoculate the rest of the staff with the vision, mission, and values, the negative default culture will capture them and destroy the team.

When you have identified what you see as the positive and negative characteristics of your team, what is the next step? Deciding what is going well (or not going well) may require conversations with staff to understand what is contributing to the team's performance and what is derailing it. The use of "staying interviews"—anonymous or not—is one place to start. Many organizations use exit interviews, but to what end? If you want to retain the staff you worked so hard to hire and train, then it is better to focus on the issues before they walk out the door. Caution: Don't solicit opinions if you are not prepared for the results. If you ignore or seek to disprove the results of exit interviews, more organizational damage can occur and any existing trust will be eroded.

### The Staying Interview

The exit interview of the 21st century may well be the retention interview; that is, asking employees how their job is going *before* you have to do an exit interview.

The Gallup Organization proceeded with the Q-12 Employee Engagement Survey asking:

- Do I know what is expected of me at work?
- Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
- At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
- In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
- Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
- Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
- At work, do my opinions seem to count?
- Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
- Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
- Do I have a best friend at work?
- In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
- This last year, have I had the opportunity to learn and grow?

Pick any or none of these questions. Design your own survey. Consider how to solicit input anonymously, by third party, or through an on-line resource. Most importantly, don't start down this path if you (or the administrators in your organization) will not act on the results. Although the answers may be painful to read, ignoring input just because you don't agree does not help to improve the organization.

*Source:* Forbringer, L. R. (2002). Overview of the Gallup organization's Q-12 survey. O.E. Solutions. Retrieved from [http://daveatwood.com/uploads/2/8/4/4/2844368/overview\\_of\\_the\\_gallup\\_organization\\_s\\_q-12\\_survey.pdf](http://daveatwood.com/uploads/2/8/4/4/2844368/overview_of_the_gallup_organization_s_q-12_survey.pdf)

### Mentoring and Coaching

When asked during a survey if their jail had a leadership development program, only 17% of staff reported that they had a formal mentoring program, and 30% reported they had no initiatives to prepare the next generation of leaders. Even though there were efforts to identify these programs, there has not been much success in finding them (Stinchcomb, McCampbell, & Leip, 2009).

Mentorship seeks to capitalize on the knowledge and competence of the more senior staff to guide those with fewer years of experience. This is not a field training program—there are no grades or reports. This is an informal process that benefits both parties.

Although mentoring (and coaching) is considered informal, the initiative needs structure. Among the decisions to be considered are the agency's commitment to mentorship, a selection and orientation for mentors and mentees, some level of oversight, and a means to determine if the process is benefiting the jail. In other words, the ability to objectively answer the question: Did this mentorship program improve retention, job performance, and employee satisfaction? Whatever measures of success the organization agrees on must be identified before the program is launched, the baseline data captured, and the means to look at progress.

The skills to be a coach or mentor do not occur naturally. Providing

## Sources for Your Leadership Library

### The Stay Interview: A Manager's Guide to Keeping the Best and Brightest

Richard P. Finnegan, 2015  
American Management Association

### "Overview of the Gallup Organization's Q-12 Survey"

Louis, R. Forbringer, Ph.D., 2002

O.E. Solutions

[http://daveatwood.com/uploads/2/8/4/4/2844368/overview\\_of\\_the\\_gallup\\_organization\\_s\\_q-12\\_survey.pdf](http://daveatwood.com/uploads/2/8/4/4/2844368/overview_of_the_gallup_organization_s_q-12_survey.pdf)

### The Jail Leadership and Succession Planning Resource Center

[www.leadingjails.com](http://www.leadingjails.com)

### The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable

Patrick Lencioni, 2002  
Jossey-Bates

### The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork

John C. Maxwell, 2001  
Nelson Business

### The Future Is Now: Recruiting, Retaining and Developing the 21st Century Jail Workforce

Jeanne B. Stinchcomb, Susan W. McCampbell, and Leslie Leip, 2009  
Center for Innovative Public Policies, Inc. for the U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance  
[www.cipp.org/futureisnow.html](http://www.cipp.org/futureisnow.html)

### FutureForce: A Guide to Building the 21st Century Community Corrections Workplace

Jeanne B. Stinchcomb, Susan W. McCampbell, and Elizabeth P. Layman, 2006  
U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections  
<http://nicic.org/Downloads/PDF/Library/021799.pdf>

orientation to prospective mentors is essential to assuring that there is a similar experience for the mentees and that resources are identified, boundaries established, problem-solving attributes identified ... just to name a few. Clearly, if there are staff who are not modelling the agency's mission, vision and/or values, or if an employee is not competent in their job functions, they should be excluded from the mentor pool.

The good news is that information about mentoring programs is available online. Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, the information for implementing a mentor program can be found at [leadingjails.com](http://leadingjails.com). Developed with the American Jail Association, Correctional Management Institute of Texas, and the Center for Innovative Public Policies, Inc., the website includes administrative information and both handbooks for both the mentor and mentee.

Team-building through mentorship puts the agency's mission, vision, and values clearly on display. Either the jail is committed to leadership development and team-building or not. Transferring knowledge and values cannot be a haphazard process. This initiative provides benefits to both the mentor and mentee.

### Team-Building Activities

When jail leaders were asked about the team-building activities in their jails, the responses included:

- Using task forces, advisory teams, or committees to review operational policies.
- Organizing a golf tournament.
- Taking on an obstacle course.
- Scheduling practical incident exercises.
- Giving an annual appreciation dinner/luncheon for staff and their families.
- Naming internal teams to manage jail functions (medical, classification).

- Conducting annual training and "fun" activities.
- Providing quarterly team-building sessions.

Although almost all respondents indicated they were at least marginally knowledgeable in team-building, many could not articulate how that translated into specific strategies—what they had actually done or been part of.

When examining the range of possible team-building activities, the critical considerations are: (1) the reason your jail values and needs teams, and (2) the specific elements of a well-functioning team. If the team-building is not anchored to these, such activities may be a welcome diversion for a few hours, but they may not really benefit the employee or the organization.

The literature and the internet provide many examples of "team-building." Before considering options, ask yourself the purpose of this initiative. If it does not link to your mission, vision, and values, and provides a little or no projected return-on-investment to the organization, move to another strategy that does. Consider mentorship as one of the strategies for team-building and coaching.

### Conclusion

Team-building, coaching, and mentoring are on-going processes; therefore this core competency needs to be integrated into the daily life of your organization. A jail can start by looking at how teams are used, integrating employees' opinions, and examining how well the organization is effectively functioning. If it doesn't add up, consider capitalizing on the jail's most valuable resource: its employees. ■

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