

BLOG/JULY 2011

Please read the following ~~f~~ letters as they are some of the most powerful statements I have ever read regarding the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the state of our prisons today. Now, mind you I'm not a fool and this does not apply to all Inmates but I think the majority will benefit from something like this. I also know that this will not take place in my life time but we can at least lay the foundation.

Enjoy the reading and let me know what you think.

lovethrustruggle

Terra

For those who are interseted, Rehabilitation does not exist in the CDCR system unless the Inmate takes it upon himself to rehabilitate himself. If you think ~~that~~ the propaganda that is put out by the administration about prisons is true just look at the reasons why the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the release.

If an Inmate wants his Rehabilitation he must fight for it every step of the way...CDCR has tried to take away all Inmate self help programs including college. There are those of us that fight for our rehabilitation and will get it at any cost. What about those who are to frightened to fight?

IT IS TIME FOR A CHANGE...Yes we put ourselves here but once here why make it as hard as possible to rehabilitate? What a great way to ensure job security. CDRR recidivism rate is the highest in the world. 9 Billion dollar budget with no measurable results

THINK ABOUT IT!!!!!!

PRISONS AS CENTERS OF KINDNESS

[from Human Kindness Foundation newsletter, Fall 1988]

"If not you who? If not now, when?" Hillel

Kindness is one of the natural laws of the universe. Everybody would like to feel it; everyone likes being around it; living without it leads to unhappiness and even poor health. We award the Nobel Peace Prize to Mother Theresa for her kindness; we teach our children the virtues and benefits of it.

But when some of those children grow up and break our laws, we lock them up in places where kindness is rare and is considered naive, weak, or even impossible. Staff and inmates alike put on self-protective masks of toughness and cynicism, even though no one can really thrive in such an environment.

Wouldn't it seem more reasonable to put outlaws in a place which cherishes kindness, reminds them of how important it is, and affords them opportunities to develop and express it?

If a twenty-year-old idealist, or a bleeding-heart liberal, or a preacher who'd never been inside a joint, had said what I just said, we could dismiss him as somebody who doesn't understand the realities of life inside. But I do know how tough it is, how scary it is. I've been both an outlaw and a prison worker. I've been inside over 300 prisons, and know many thousands of prisoners personally, including a couple of cousins, an uncle, and a brother-in-law.

Knowing all the difficulties involved, I still say the time has come to take this next step toward being a more mature civilization. Each of us has a part to play in taking that step; we can't pass the buck to the other guy and say we have to wait for him or her. All of us -- prisoners, prison workers and the general public -- must begin, one by one, to see how crazy it is to attempt rehabilitation without valuing kindness above all other forms of training, education or therapy.

Conservatives and liberals alike have designed prisons to be narcissistic environments. Whether negative or positive -- from basic survival to getting a college degree -- an inmate's attention is focused intensely on himself. And in dealing with inmates, most of us tend to reinforce the narcissism.

After a while, it's easy for a prisoner to assume the role of always being the needy one, always the one on the receiving end, the assumption being that he or she isn't expected or able to give anything. Then the prisoner may get out, and we complain that he or she just can't seem to get along with people or be comfortable in a job or romantic relationship -- all of which require good "giving" skills, all of which require an element of kindness.

We tend to regard kindness as a "soft" issue, not a "hard" fact like the need for education or training. But kindness isn't just a corny moral or religious value; it's as scientifically verifiable as gravity. If you doubt this, then do some research: Go all over the world, correlating happiness and unhappiness with kindness and unkindness. The results will be overwhelming across all nations -- happy people value kindness; unkind people aren't happy.

As the 20th Century dawned, we left behind the notion of "insane asylums" and gradually acknowledged the need to treat mental illness with compassion, creativity, and hope. Now the 21st Century is dawning, and it's time for us to take the same step with criminal behavior -- leaving behind prisons-as-warehouses, and acknowledging the need for facilities which surround inmates with kindness, fairness, and encouragement to change for the better.

As my part in taking that step, I include the following "letters" written to the prison system, prisoners, and society.

Dear 20th-Century Prison System,

You can't "correct" prisoners or help them correct themselves by creating cold, impersonal environments which focus, at best, on skills or training rather than on basic, human-to-human interactions. When we put somebody back out on the street, we have to hope he or she is a more caring human being. You can't "train" or "educate" a sense of caring. It has to be shown in the environment itself, and in the way you do everything you do.

You say you want inmates to develop stronger social values, yet you forbid best friends from staying in touch with each other when one gets transferred or paroled. You claim to encourage sensible planning and reliability, yet you maintain an atmosphere in which a prisoner can be transferred to a new location without warning, or lose his job or all his prized possessions in a shakedown, with no explanations, apologies or negotiation.

You expect ex-cons to be responsible, yet while they're inside, a bell or whistle defines every moment of their day. You claim to encourage future social decency among your inmates, yet you maintain an environment in which it is dangerous to speak out, help a friend, or show one's true feelings about anything.

The thousands of prisoners I've known who truly changed their lives in prison seemed to do it, for the most part, *despite* your system rather than because of it. Why are you so resistant to change? Why do you remain so difficult? It's bad for you, bad for your staff and officers, and bad for the people you hope to "correct." If you won't change, then it's up to your staff people to wise up and make you change bit by bit, by expressing true kindness, more common sense, and abiding by the spirit of your rules rather than the letter of them.

And if they get fired for doing so, it's time for them to go to the media and let the public know what's going on behind the walls. It's time to let this era of incarceration fade into history.

There is absolutely no conflict between running a kind facility and running a secure one. Kindness is an attitude which can underlie even the strictest rules of custody. A facility expressing kindness, fairness and encouragement can also be a facility which maintains no-nonsense policies about escapes, contraband, and general inmate behavior.

The vast majority of prison inmates would love the opportunity to turn their lives around for the better. It's time you, the system, opened your heart to that yearning instead of treating your programs and program specialists like nuisances or token legal requirements. Change is inevitable, because the system doesn't work. Why be dragged into this change kicking and screaming, instead of being at the forefront of it?

Dear Prison Inmates,

What if the system doesn't change anytime soon? It would be easy to lay this all off on the prison systems and say, "look here, you've got to run our prisons with more kindness." People have been saying that for years, and we're still waiting for it to change.

But you too have a responsibility to help make the world a better place. As terrible as prisons are, your behavior toward each other is just as terrible. Even those of you who "do your own time" look the other way when a Brother or Sister gets ripped off, raped or even killed. This allegiance to the stupid "Convict Code" set down by a small number of 1940's petty gangsters, allows the tone of prison life to be set by a small minority of the most brutal convicts in the institution.

You must develop a new "Convict Code" based on respect, tolerance, and mutual support -- where a con can trust that cons watch out for each other and allow each other to live in peace and self-dignity; where if a gang of ten threatens you, you can count on a hundred -- of all races and creeds -- to stand with you and say "That kind of stuff doesn't fly here any more."

I know this isn't an easy task, and most of you just want to get out of prison alive. But if your prison life is "Hey man, I'm looking out for number one, and I just want to get out of here in one piece," then that's pretty much how your street life is going to be too. It's an empty way to live. Anywhere we ever are, there are going to be values like kindness to stand up for, sometimes to suffer or even die for. That's how we gain the self-respect which can hold up anywhere, under any circumstances.

I've talked with countless prisoners one-on-one, and every one of you wanted to treat others with respect and kindness and be treated the same way. But when you leave me and go back out into population, you cop your old attitude. It's sort of like, "Well, I ain't gonna be the first one to turn over that new leaf; I'd get stepped on."

I know cruel things have happened to each of you. But none of you has been beaten, scorned, punished or laughed at more than Jesus was. No one of you has given up his very life for the good of others, as did Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Yet those men, even in their humiliation and deaths, showed such greatness of the human spirit that they continue to inspire us long after they passed our way.

Whatever you've gone through, whatever you've suffered, however much suffering you've caused to others, none of it prevents you from caring about the people around you -- not only inmates, but guards, staff, etc. You have to break the circle of pain and selfishness or forever be lashed to it.

You tell me you really want to change your life for the better. Then do it. Don't rip anyone off. Stop lying. Trust somebody until they prove you can't. Cautiously open up your honest feelings with the people who seem like they want the same thing. Don't manipulate or lay guilt on your family, friends, and outside organizations. Don't harden yourself to suffering just because it's painful to deal with.

Put dope and booze behind you so you can pay clearer attention to the changes you want to go through. You and I have had enough dope and booze. Some of the experiences we had on drugs may even have been important for us, but there comes a time when you have to move on.

And look into this idea of kindness. Kindness is a great mystery. It heals so many old wounds and hurts we can't possibly count them all. Take up the challenge of how to become a truly kind person without being exploited or abused in a place like this.

Look around for ways to express a little kindness around the prison, the outside community, or the world. Discover the magic!

No one can ever do that part for you. And it's never going to be any easier wherever you are. People who wait, tend to wait forever and die waiting. Take responsibility instead. Then you'll begin to feel the self-respect and self-dignity you've been writing to me about for so long.

Dear Society,

Probably every community in the world has needs and problems which could be met by the involvement of prisoners in a nearby institution -- men and women who really need to experience the thrill of helping out. It's time now, in our social development, to begin recognizing this natural pool of volunteers rather than trying to forget they exist.

It's time to remind the authorities that prisons are part of the community, and to begin discussing ways prisoners can contribute to community life even while they're inside. We have to remember that every human being needs to feel useful, and therefore we need to present as many opportunities as possible for prisoners to experience their usefulness. In this way, the community becomes part of a person's rehabilitation, which is as it should be.

Many people feel that things won't get better until we tear all the prisons down. I say that's a cop-out. It's obviously going to be a long time, if ever, before such profound changes take place. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of human beings live in prisons as they are, and we can begin making a real change in their lives without waiting for such major breakthroughs.

Let's help prisoners to change their hearts, and people in the community to change their feelings toward prisoners. What better way to show the unnecessaryness of the present system?

Kindness toward prisoners isn't pity, and it's also not gullibility. Kind people sometimes have to lock people up, or refuse to let people out on bail or parole, or remove them even from the mainstream prison population if they continue to be dangerous. A great Indian sage once said, "Do whatever you must with people, but never shut anyone out of your heart."

Most prisoners have been shut out of society's heart for a long time. Many have never been in an environment of kindness and encouragement. Many have never experienced the satisfaction of helping others. This is what it will take to make us safer from crime. I don't know whether our prisons will ever be empty. But I know we could drop the recidivism rate from 70% to 10% if we dropped our "out of sight, out of mind" attitude and focused some creative attention on the humanity of the people we lock up.