Correctional Officers: Strategies to Improve Retention

MTC Institute

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Correctional Officers: Strategies to Improve Retention (2nd Edition)

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Management & Training Corporation (MTC) is an international corporation dedicated to helping people realize their learning potential. MTC creates nurturing environments in which education is encouraged and rehabilitation is recognized. MTC operates 16 contracted correctional facilities across the country with approximately 19,000 beds under contract. MTC also manages and operates 26 Job Corps centers in 19 states for the U.S. Department of Labor, preparing disadvantaged youth for meaningful careers. In addition, MTC has expanded its education and vocational expertise into the international arena, working in countries such as Iraq, Sudan, Tunisia, China and Mongolia. The MTC Institute is the research division of MTC, which is dedicated to promoting innovations and exemplary practices and projecting trends that are relevant to job training and corrections. The work of the Institute is geared toward a broad audience including policy makers, educators, researchers, practitioners, state and federal officials, workforce development entities, correctional agencies, and Job Corps centers.

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Correctional Officers: Strategies to Improve Retention

INTRODUCTION

Many corrections professionals refer to correctional officers (COs) as "the backbone of the prison system." If this common perception is accepted, COs must be considered the system's "most valuable employees." Unfortunately, the turnover of correctional officers nationwide is very high. Moreover, rapid turnover is making it nearly impossible for prison systems and correctional administrators to cost-effectively provide an experienced security workforce.

Review of material related to CO turnover uncovered several important issues. Perhaps most significant: CO turnover remains high, and the cost of replacing these critical employees is growing. In addition, prison populations are increasing, contributing to the problems associated with retention of prison staff. Despite current unemployment statistics, the labor market is getting tighter (i.e., more jobs are available for a shrinking skilled workforce). Furthermore, state and federal budgets are being squeezed tightly, and cannot be counted upon to resolve these issues any time soon.

Because significant CO pay increases are highly unlikely and recruitment incentives are not working as well as intended, managers need to implement proven employee retention strategies. Fortunately, some fundamental human resource practices that can help improve retention are available at little or no cost to correctional agencies and managers.

This report explores issues impacting correctional agencies and companies, such as changing workforce demands, a dynamic labor market, predictors of turnover, and various reasons for why COs leave their positions. Research presented in this study suggests strategies in a number of focus areas (e.g., applicant screening, new employee orientation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, supervisory relations, work environment, training and development, and salary and benefits) to improve retention of correctional officers.

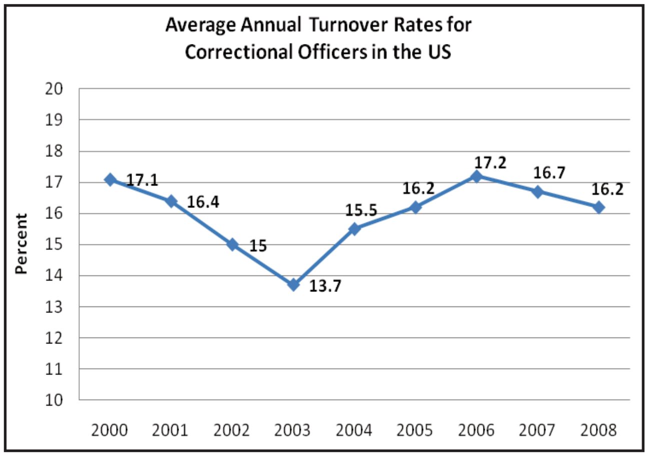
The average turnover rates for state correctional security staff from 2000 to 2008, while higher and costlier than agencies would want, were somewhat stable over the years, with a range from 33.5 percent in Nebraska to as low as 0 percent reported by New Jersey; the average sitting at 16.2 percent on September 30, 2008, as noted in Figure 1.[1]

In a dynamic and competitive global marketplace, corrections is a multibillion-dollar industry that brings a heavy tax burden. Its institutions are predominantly managed by public agencies, with only 8.0 percent of the industry managed by private companies at the end of year 2008.[2]

> **"America faces a future in which we have too few workers and especially, too few skilled workers."[3]**

Corrections professionals are aware that inmate populations are not only increasing, but are becoming more multicultural and multi-generational, which adds to the difficulty of the CO's role. This adds another dimension to the problem of turnover, but we have an even bigger issue looming; a bulge of staff retiring with fewer skilled workers entering the workforce. This situation necessitates a focused strategic plan to deal with the emerging demand for replacements. Therefore, it is very important for managers to understand the issues surrounding turnover and implement informed strategies which address how to effectively recruit and retain correctional staff. With the high cost associated with each newly hired correctional officer and shrinking budgets, the retention of COs is a critical issue for all elected officials, public policy makers, and correctional administrators.

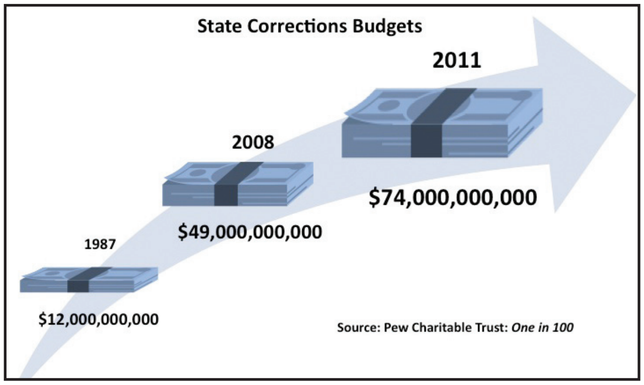
Figure 1



BUDGET CHALLENGES

After cutting nearly $73 billion to make up for gaps in funding Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 budgets and over $113 billion in FY 2010 budgets, states are being forced to cut even more to make future budgets balance.[4] As a consequence of lower revenue from state sales and income tax, many experts are predicting that there will be budget shortfalls of $55.5 billion in FY 2011 and $68.8 billion for FY 2012.[5] With about a third of annual state revenues coming from personal income taxes, states are expecting a more difficult time in the future as they observe a massive drop in revenue from a sustained loss of jobs and a corresponding decrease in personal income taxes paid, as well as Medicaid spending up almost eight percent in FY 2009.[6] Overall, revenues were down in the first two quarters of FY 2009 almost 12 percent and 17 percent respectively.[7] According to the report by the National Governors Association, "state revenues will likely not recover until 2014 or 2015" with some predictions that shortfalls could reach $350 billion.[8]

Figure 2



Source: Pew Charitable Trust: *One in 100*

With corrections budgets being the fifth largest state budget category, competition with other spending priorities, such as education, infrastructure, and health, is very tight.[9] In response, elected officials are calling for improved performance from corrections systems and specifically, reductions in recidivism.[10] Across 34 states, nearly 9 of 10 correctional dollars went to prisons in FY 2008, with the balance funding other correctional interests (i.e. parole, probation, electronic monitoring, etc).[11] During fiscal year 2009, correctional budgets were cut almost $700 million, much of it by eliminating staff and programming for inmates. [12] This approach has a long-term cost associated with the decision in terms of inmates, without rehabilitation, returning to prison.

State correctional budgets will likely continue to have minimal potential for growth in the area of staff funding. Diminished funding influences the correctional work environment beyond program reductions. An agency's organizational culture and its ability to market itself are often affected.

POPULATION AND WORKFORCE PROJECTIONS

Agencies are extremely challenged to meet the rising demand for staff with a diminishing U.S. workforce. "America faces a future in which we have too few workers and especially, too few skilled workers."[13]

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, total employment is expected to increase by 15.3 million, from 150.9 million in 2008 to 166.2 million in 2018. [14] Yet the 0.8 percent annual growth rate in the workforce needed to fill the jobs is lower than the 1.2 percent annual growth rate registered during the previous 10-year period; the civilian labor force is projected to increase only by about 13 million, reaching 164.2 million in 2016.[15] This means employers must satisfy increasing position requirements with a shrinking talent pool. A recent military report also noted that 75 percent of youth are unfit for military service due in part from low education levels and obesity, two areas that also impact screening for correctional personnel.[16] These issues point to a very competitive labor market.

The Bottom Line: With the current and impending retirement of many Baby Boomers, combined with a civilian labor force growth that is not adequate to keep up with the projected growth of jobs in the US by 2016, employers will be significantly challenged to find and keep a talented workforce.

CORRECTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Before narrowing in on employee turnover and strategies to improve retention of correctional officers, it is important to look at the broader context of the correctional environment. In understanding the larger system, the relationship between the correctional environment, turnover, and the strategies to retain correctional officers becomes clear. Considering the growing and changing prison population, increasing need for staff, and funding restrictions, it is very difficult, but necessary, to keep focused on a proactive means to recruit and keep trained staff.

Prison Populations

While the number of inmates entering the prisons slowed as a result of fewer new court commitments, the overall count of inmates coming to prison continues to rise; parole violators admitted to state prison continued to increase during 2008, while at a slower rate than during the previous two years.[17] The growth of the prison population since 2000 is 1.8 percent per year on average; it slowed to just 0.8 percent for state and federal prisons by yearend 2008, with state prisoners increasing to 1,409,166 and federal prisoners increasing to 201,280, up from 1,398,627 and 199,618 respectively.[18]

As prison population's rise, space to hold them continues to be scarce. Overcrowding causes many operational problems, such as inmates sleeping in dayrooms, classrooms, and tents. Rehabilitative program opportunities are reduced; limits are placed on inmates' out-of-cell time, recreation, meal times, visitation, and access to staff. This can often lead to strains in relations between inmates and staff, creating a more volatile workplace.

Unlike the inmate populations of the past, today's population is multicultural and multi-generational. Today's COs must possess better interpersonal skills and the ability to understand varied cultural aspects of diverse types of offenders. They need to be better trained, possess common sense, and be people savvy, engaged, and supportive.

Bureau of Labor Statistics Projections: Protective Services

The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects "protective service occupations" to add 400,000 jobs to meet population growth and to address continuing concerns about crime and security from 2008 to 2018. Overall however, total job openings due to growth and net replacements will exceed 1.3 million.[19] Security guards positions will account for nearly 40 percent of the additional jobs. Further, there is an 8.5 percent increase in the number of additional first line supervisory staff projected for corrections between 2008 and 2018 [20]

The combination of new jobs, impending retirements, and occupational mobility is expected to create 14,300 CO and jail detention officer job openings annually through 2018 (See Table 1).[22] The growth in the protective service occupational area and for correctional officers in particular, along with the observed turnover, speaks to the need for understanding employee turnover and effective retention strategies.

As of yearend 2005, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports there were an estimated 445,000 employees working in state and federal correctional facilities. About two-thirds of these employees were male. About 66 percent of those employees were correctional officers and custody staff working in direct contact with inmates, and men outnumbered women by a ratio of 3 to 1.[23]

Women in the Workforce

Not only is there a "war for talent" going on, but a war for talented women coming into the workforce is underway, especially in the so-called 'traditionally male' workplaces, such as construction, engineering, and corrections. More women are entering the workforce, bringing their strengths and attributes into formerly male-dominated environments.

Women represent a growing asset, not only to enter the jobs that are going unfilled, but in leadership positions in all sectors of business and government. The number of women in the workforce is projected to grow by 9 percent, compared to 7.5 percent for men through 2018; with women comprising 46.9 percent of the workforce. [24] Beyond these facts, women at

Projected Employment Increases for Selected Protective Service Occupations, 2008 to 2018 *(Table 1)*

Occupation	Average Annual Job Growth	Total Annualized Job Openings*
Bailiffs	.84%	620
Correctional Officers and Jailers	.94%	14,300
Security Guards	1.42%	37,300
Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	.87%	22,700
Private Detectives and Investigators	2.2%	1,900
*Includes new jobs and net replacements		

> **"The world has changed. If we look at corrections 20 to 30 years ago, the types of behaviors we rewarded and promoted people for, are the behaviors we sometimes discipline people for today. We value treating people the right way; that is not a function of gender." Patricia Caruso, Director, Michigan Department of Corrections**

present are receiving and will continue to receive more college and professional degrees than men. Women represent a large educated talent pool that, in times of increasing demand, should be viewed as an excellent source of skilled workers and leaders within the corrections profession. Women, not unlike men, get "hooked" on the challenges and problem solving demanded in corrections. These professionals seek to master the concepts, responsibilities, and tasks associated with their positions, being influenced to tackle ever greater responsibilities as a result of new professional challenges.[25]

There is an ongoing paradigm shift from a control/ punishment model to one that demands more engagement with the offender by staff. Various program models now have a focus on reentry. The strengths that women bring to the work of corrections complement this shift well, with inmates more likely to discuss medical and educational concerns with female officers.[26] The presence of women enhances not only the policy development but also the implementation of these approaches.

Multi-generational Workforce

In addition to increasing numbers of women in the correctional workforce, the workforce is comprised of four generational groups. Agencies and managers are dealing with the differences between the various generational groups in the workforce; Generation X (born between 1965–1983) will account for about 30 million, while the Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964), which account for about 77 million people, will be starting to retire in greater numbers, especially once the economy begins to recover. Generation Y (born between 1977-1994) are adequate in number, at about 70 million people, to fill the many of the vacancies created by the retirement of the Boomers. However, this group is not as well educated as the Boomers. Some researchers have set apart another group, called the Millennials (born between 1994-2002), and this group is not quite ready to enter the workforce in greater numbers. (See Appendix A for more detail on the various generational groups, interests and motivations)

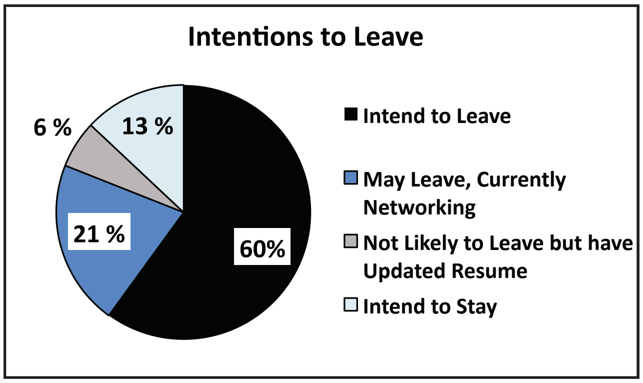
Retirement issues also loom large for agencies: There are 77 million baby boomers that will be retiring in the next few years.[27] This aging workforce, along with a reduction in U.S. population growth—0.9 percent annually, down from an annual average of 1.6 percent over the last 50 years—will exacerbate the staffing problem for corrections facilities.[28]

PREDICTORS OF TURNOVER

Many agencies define employee turnover differently. The definition used in this report supports an operational staff perspective; turnover is a separation of the employee from the agency/company.[29] High turnover is a potentially serious problem for all employers. Growing costs associated with turnover have led researchers to look towards predicting what circumstances or situations will likely result in an employee choosing to terminate. The predictors of turnover discussed below include:

- Turnover intention;
- Low organizational commitment;
- Lack of job satisfaction; and
- Poor supervisory relationships and lack of communication.

Figure 3



Focusing on turnover intention, Figure 3 depicts employee intentions to look for new jobs as the economy gets better in 2010. Right Management conducted the survey of more than 900 workers in North America from October 19 to November 5, 2009; the survey results clearly demonstrate that "many workers are unhappy with their present jobs."[30]

The Georgia Department of Corrections published the results of a study of COs which found that intention to quit is a better predictor of turnover than the actual turnover data.[31] Udechukwu et al. also found that organizational commitment has a significant, negative relationship to a correctional officer's intent to quit, meaning that as organizational commitment increases, intent to quit decreases.[32] A number of studies, as cited in Camp, found that "organizational commitment is more strongly related to turnover than is job satisfaction."[33]

> **"Psychological explanations for turnover posit that individual perception and attitudes about work conditions lead to behavioral outcomes."[34]**

However, Lambert et al. found that "raising worker [correctional staff] job satisfaction is seen as a fundamental way of decreasing turnover."[35] The Georgia Department of Corrections also tested job satisfaction in relation to intention to quit and found that they are significantly related.[36] It is incumbent on all managers and supervisors to monitor the level of staff satisfaction since, "only 45 percent of those surveyed are satisfied with their jobs."[37]

In a jail setting, Griffin found "that problematic relationships between line staff and their supervisors negatively influence job satisfaction."[38] Griffin also reports that line supervisors who actively engage employees and regularly communicate expectations are valued by their employees. "People don't leave organizations, they leave managers," according to Chambers, and other authors report that good managers, even in bad organizations, have a greater probability of keeping workers happy, productive, and on the job.[39]

WHY CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS LEAVE

Employees give many reasons for leaving correctional agencies or companies. In a study by Workforce Associates, Inc., for the American Correctional Association, correctional administrators and human resource managers in 47 states and the District of Columbia were surveyed about their difficulty retaining workers.[40] Lommel indicates that the four most prominent responses related to retention difficulty were:[41]

- Demanding hours and shift work;
- Inadequate pay and benefits;
- Stress and burnout; and
- Wrong initial selection; employee not suited to the job.

A study by Development Dimensions International found that employees consider an organization's ability to provide a good work/life balance, trust, a good relationship with the boss, and meaningful work as paramount in their decision to continue employment.[42] That same study found three quarters of the employees surveyed believed the quality of supervisory relations as very important for retention. A simple, cost effective, and evidence-based practice of first-line supervisors caring about CO's improves job satisfaction, which "is paramount in addressing retention."[43]

Table 2 shows the results of a Salary.com survey of human resource representatives and employees. It contains the top five reasons employers and employees think that employees might leave their jobs in 2008.□ As noted in a variety of circumstances, employers continue to believe that inadequate compensation is behind employees leaving, when the facts are that employees leave when they see limited career development opportunities. Though results from studies and surveys mention how employees

Reasons to Leave *(Table 2)*

Employer Reasons	Employer	Employee	Employee Reasons
Inadequate Compensation	**36%**	**30%**	**Lack of Career Development**
Lack of Career Development	**19%**	**27%**	**Inadequate Compensation**
Insufficient Recognition	**22%**	**17%**	**Insufficient Recognition**
Boredom	**7%**	**11%**	**Inadequate Professional Development Opportunity**
Inadequate Professional Development Opportunity	**12%**	**11%**	**Boredom**

value pay highly, not all groups of employees respond the same way. Workforce.com makes it clear in their research on best practices that "the key is that the policies are fair, consistently followed, controlled, and subject to review and oversight" and they also point out that retention can be improved by pay-for-performance by up to 27 percent.[45]McKeown points out that a fair compensation plan is important, but it does little to improve retention.[46]

In a survey of 1,000 employees, Kovach found that supervisors continue to think that employees rank good wages as their top expectation. [47] However, in the same survey employee's listed good wages at number five. The employees were more interested in interesting work, appreciation, involvement, and job security. In a study of over 1,000 employees conducted by Management & Training Corporation, salary was not identified in the top five items of value by security staff.[48]

Other research has identified a number of factors that hamper success in retaining staff, including correctional officers:[49]

- Supervisors fail to treat employees with respect, properly recognize, or show interest in them.
- Noncompetitive low pay.
- Inadequate work/life balance, worker overload, stress, and burnout.
- A mismatch in what people are looking for in a job and in growth opportunities.
- Inferior employee orientation.

Kaye and Jordan-Evans surveyed over 17,000 employees regarding why they stayed in any given position and 98 percent of participants listed at least one of these top three reasons. [50]

1) Exciting work and challenge;

2) Career growth, learning, and development; and

3) Working with great people.

In addition to job-related factors, generational factors also affect turnover rates. Each generation has distinctive values and beliefs that make their perceptions of the workplace and employers different, and that have an impact on whether they stay or leave an organization (See Appendix A). To be successful, retention initiatives need to take into account these various generational demographics.[51] Much research has been conducted regarding how to lead a multi-generational workforce. [52]

Given the costs, stress on the workforce and operational challenges, each agency should continue to monitor and seek to discover the main causes for turnover of their employees. It is important, based on agency findings, to create and implement a strategic employee retention plan that is best suited to their needs.

Addressing the #1 Employee Reason for Leaving: Lack of Career Development

A number of focus areas come into play when addressing *Career Development*, which is the most influential employee reason to leave. As talent becomes scarcer and more of the younger generation enters the workforce, the ability to recruit talented individuals and keep them will depend in part on the visibility of an organization's commitment to developing its staff. The traditional correctional work environment will change; employees will be able to exert more influence, securing accommodations from the workplace much more on their terms. Agencies will need to develop and then coach supervisors on new strategies designed to provide different work options for employees, including job sharing, part-time and flex-time. These options will necessarily permit increased access to post-secondary education and certifications required for advancement. Mentoring will help employees understand that supervisors care about them and the organization is willing to make a commitment to them. Most organizations currently make investments of time and resources in the supervisory, managerial and executive development of employees, but in the future these investments will be essential elements of recruitment and retention strategies.

RETENTION STRATEGY FOCUS AREAS

For the sake of this report, most of the turnover predictors and reasons staff give for leaving have been categorized into eight focus areas (See Table 3). Once an agency has identified the leading causes for staff voluntary separation, it can implement the corresponding strategies to better retain valued and productive employees.

In an effort to delve into the above mentioned predictors and reasons to leave, selected research in the sections that follow provide more information and strategies to address the issues.

Retention Strategy Focus Areas *(Table 3)*

Focus Area	Predictors	Reasons to Leave
Job Satisfaction	Lack of job satisfaction	Lack of job satisfaction
Organizational Commitment	Low organizational commitment	Negative perceptions of the organization
Applicant Screening	Lack of organizational values	Job not what they thought it was
New Employee Orientation	Non-employee focused	Inferior employee orientation
Supervisory Relations	Poor supervisory relationships and lack of communication. Problematic supervisory relationships. Attitude and behavior of management	Supervisors fail to treat employees with respect, properly recognize, or show interest in them. Insufficient organizational structure for staff recognition. Low levels of trust. Inferior quality of supervisory relations and inaccurate or ambiguous communication. A good relationship with the boss. Negative attitude about the boss
Work Environment	Work/life balance	Limited support from the organization. Demanding hours and shift work. Inadequate work/life balance, worker overload. Insufficient meaningful work
Training and Development	Inadequate opportunities to grow professionally	Stress and burnout. Lack of career development. Inadequate professional development opportunity
Pay and Benefits	Low organizational commitment	Inadequate pay and benefits . Inadequate compensation. Noncompetitive low pay

Job Satisfaction

Ronald L. Applbaum, Dean of the School of Humanities, California State University, Long Beach, defines job satisfaction simply as "the favorableness or unfavorableness with which employees view their work." [53] Others define it in part as the result of the employee's "comparison of actual outcomes with those that are expected, needed, wanted, desired, or perceived to be fair or just." [54] It could be said that job satisfaction is the cumulative effect of the employee's assessment of the other focus areas.

According to Griffin, individuals who find their job interesting and rewarding tend to be more satisfied.[56] The majority of empirical findings indicate a significant positive relationship between both participation in decision-making and job autonomy and job satisfaction.[57]Supervisors may consider implementing ideas that could foster job interest such as;

- Horizontal training,
- Temporarily expanding opportunities,
- Job shadowing experiences,
- Joining work/task groups, or
- Creating opportunities to learn project teamwork skills.

> **"Low job satisfaction is associated with higher levels of absenteeism, decreased productivity and increased turnover – three conditions that organizations can ill afford in today's highly competitive search for talent."[55]**

Surveys and discussions with correctional workers are especially useful on an ongoing basis and at separation. Much insightful and valuable information may be gleaned by surveying employees, although as a word of caution, it is better not to survey if the results are going to be ignored. Be prepared to take action based on the input your employees offer you.

The work of Cheeseman Dial et al. related to "care" about COs from immediate supervisors is particularly insightful. Care is defined "as interest in one's life outside of the scope of work. This would include such things as asking questions about family, activities outside of work and general concern for overall employee well-being." Further, "Employees who reported higher levels of care from immediate supervisors had higher levels of job satisfaction."[58]

Organizational Commitment

Historically companies hired people and kept them throughout their working life. However, those born from 1957 to 1964 held 10.8 jobs from ages 18 to 42 with about 60 percent of those jobs being held between the ages of 18 to 27.[59] This continues a process observed for Generation Y, those born between 1976 and 1994, who are also not concerned about having as many as six or seven different careers in their lifetime as they search for what they like and how they may contribute to the employer of the moment, an approach similar to that of a short-term contractor.[60]

Understanding organizational commitment is vital for the success of agencies today. The three components of organizational commitment are:[61]

- A strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values.
- A willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization.
- A strong desire to maintain membership in the organization.

Organizational commitment increases when employees view organizations as being fair and trustworthy.[62] Peter D. Hart Research Associates conducted a nationwide poll which found that just 33 percent of workers claimed to trust employers to treat their employees fairly.[63] Individual institutions must look at how their organization is viewed with respect to these issues and discuss means to increase positive perceptions. Further, leaders must "walk the talk" when it comes to goals and values.

Arthur suggests that employers let their current staff know that management wants to develop a mutually beneficial, long-term relationship. Management should frequently let employees know how much they mean to the agency and work to develop loyalty through training to enhance skill sets and by instituting policies that are employee friendly. Though this investment will not likely engender the life-long arrangement seen in past years; it is likely that the employee will not be so apt to move on for additional pay, benefits, and perks.[64]

Changes in the work environment to address stress management, improve job autonomy, and provide support play a role in employee commitment. Management surveys that assess quality of work life can provide insight into the feelings and commitment level of team members, as well as indicate burnout, stress, and job satisfaction.[65]

It may also be advantageous to have a frank discussion with employees about the future. Seeking information about their perception of what they can do to help the agency or unit sets the stage for a discussion about commitments. It may also be useful to talk more openly with employees about how long they plan to stay with the agency and what training the agency can provide to bolster their skills, as well as their specific job expectations. These activities create a middle ground and open communication and understanding, leading to a higher degree of commitment and level of retention.[66]

Applicant Screening[67]

Correctional administrators face many issues that impact employment screening programs and add complexities to how they are managed. Even in a downturned economy, there can be no tolerance for less than excellent candidates for CO positions. Employment background screening is a critical step in identifying the most suitable, qualified candidate for a position. By confirming an applicant's qualifications, education, previous employment, and relevant history, organizations can do their best to ensure that the right people are placed in key positions. Additionally, if the right selection is made initially, organizations can reduce employee turnover and hiring costs.

Another key priority in the war for talent is speed to hire, with electronic forms and automated processes providing a significant competitive advantage. Until recent years, background screening had been a slow process, sometimes taking weeks, increasing the risk that a competitor could snag an attractive candidate in the meantime. Using new technology to improve efficiency, eliminate redundancy, and reducing the potential for errors has greatly shortened the turnaround time on background checks, speeding up the hiring process for a competitive advantage.

Recently, a wide range of new legislation including those related to E-Verify checks has greatly impacted workforce background screening programs. Regulations can require organizations to conduct deeper searches, more of them, and a wider variety for different kinds of positions, introducing a greater variability in the screening program.

Comprehensive management reports and sensible periodic audits are a necessity for maintaining compliance. Organizations must remain abreast of changing regulatory and industry requirements that affect their workforce screening programs and make adjustments accordingly. In addition, new requirements must be effectively communicated to all hiring personnel, and enforcement procedures and systems must be put in place to ensure that the proper screenings are performed to prevent the risk of fines, penalties, and lawsuits.

Faced with these multi-dimensional hiring and screening challenges, making the right decision in the right way about future employees is critical for the Corrections industry. USIS, a national contractor conducting background investigations for private, state, and federal agencies, realized after interviews with leaders in the Corrections industry that a multi-faceted screening solution was required.

There are a number of screening contractors and about 27 percent of hiring entities use screening providers.[68] As noted above, the process is getting more complex and specialized, necessitating an integrated approach to reduce business risk, improve safety, and meet compliance requirements. USIS developed an automated/customizable platform, with applicant self-service portals and automatic E-Verify checks, which involves real-time dashboards to save time, as well as compliance and auditing tools. System management reports also unify information from all sources and solutions in user-configurable formatted reports. Regardless of approach or system used, screening of applicants needs to be comprehensive and quickly done.

New Employee Orientation

First impressions are very important, and new employee orientation is a critical opportunity for the organization to make a great and lasting impression on new employees. As a part of the orientation program, supervisors should conduct an entry interview to document why the employee joined the organization.[69]

Successful organizations today need to be aware of the diverse needs and learning styles that accompany a multigenerational workforce. Varied orientation options should be available such as online, video, one-on-one, group, or others.

New employees tend to identify their level of comfort within the first three weeks on the job.[70] Orientation should be separated from induction (e.g., filling out forms and training). Induction-related paperwork can be taken home, with the exception of necessary legal documents, for employees to review or complete, allowing more time to acclimate them to the agency. McKeown relates that the orientation program should center on certain key areas:[71]

- Employee expectations
- Bringing added value
- Communication with fellow employees
- Organizational teaming

In addition to orientation, many organizations have successfully added structured Field Training Officer (FTO) programs to assist new recruits in assimilating into the new work environment. Comprehensive orientation and FTO programs are a training investment that can be used successfully to coach and mentor less experienced workers, leading to an increase in knowledge and self-assurance on the job.[72] For example, the Arizona Department of Corrections Training Academy (C.O.T.A.), located on 40 acres in the western foothills of Tucson, Arizona, provides an orientation and all pre-service training for Correctional Officers as well as serving as a state-wide training facility.[73]

Supervisory Relations

A concerned correctional manager and good communication with employees can influence an employee's decision about whether to work somewhere else or to stay. The relationship between the supervisor and employee plays a key role in the employee's decision. Selecting and retaining supervisors who are subsequently trained in how to work with staff pays big dividends in retention. The Arizona Department of Corrections operates a Correctional Managers Academy, which was developed to enhance the supervisory skills of newly promoted Administrators, and help them adjust to their new role.[74]

Employees who reported higher levels of care from immediate supervisors had higher levels of job satisfaction.

A recent research study states the most significant predictor of job satisfaction is care from supervisors. Employees who reported higher levels of care from immediate supervisors had higher levels of job satisfaction. Encouraging first line supervisors to care about their employees may be a practical, inexpensive, and simple way of retaining staff.[75]

According to Aon, the number-one item on an employee's wish list is an understanding by supervisors about the need for personal and family time.[76] Communications between supervisors and line staff are one facet of the employee's job experience that supervisors can influence greatly. Time spent communicating formally and informally with COs will likely foster better work relationships. Managers can create a systematic interview schedule to visit with employee's one on one or in work groups, and should always be open to spontaneous opportunities to communicate with staff.

One way supervisors are showing they care is through awards; an excellent example is the B.G Robinson Award for Personal Excellence in Corrections, named after the former commissioner of B.C. Corrections from 1978 to 1988, Bernard G. Robinson. In 2008, the year this award was created, a total of 15 awards were presented to Corrections Branch staff.

The Corrections Branch and the Corrections and Community Justice Division (JIBC) jointly select recipients of these training oriented awards, with the financial support of the Justice Institute of B.C. Foundation, which provides recognition certificates and $100 cash awards.[77]

Another avenue corrections administrators may consider to improve supervisory relations is that of a mentoring program. One definition of mentoring is a relationship between a senior person and a junior person to provide advice, emotional support or other assistance to achieve career advancement for the novice as well as the leader.[78] Krause goes on to explain that one of the key benefits from a mentoring relationship is that the protégé can receive help in the topic of work/life balance.

A mentor may also be extremely helpful when a person is in the thick of a bad situation. One learns that even with disasters, there are those who have survived a similar situation who can suggest things to think through, or strategies that can be followed or adapted to fit the challenging circumstances.[79] Facility administrators should consider the value of training mentors similar to some educational organizations that have similar attrition and looming retirement concerns.

There are groups within the corrections profession that are helping develop corrections professionals. One such group is the Association of Women Executives in Corrections (AWEC), which actively works to assist women working in corrections with career development and management training.[80] They also offer peer support, mentoring, and research related to sound correctional practice.

> **"The Association of Women Executives in Corrections (AWEC) is a membership organization with a mission to provide leadership development for female executives, support the career advancement of women in corrections and promote informed discussion of correctional issues in an atmosphere of mutual respect, With an "Each One ... Teach One" philosophy**

Work Environment

Cuts in funding for prison programs is affecting the work environment and making the correctional officers' jobs more difficult. The changing prison population requires a staff that is not only diverse, but also knowledgeable. The growth in inmate population while resources are being reduced has resulted in overcrowded and volatile workplaces. Surveys have pointed to the need to reevaluate operational elements, such as work schedules and work life issues. Lommel, for example, noted correctional officers leave agencies and companies because of difficulty with demanding hours and shift work.[81] This report focuses on two important areas of the work environment: alternative shift options and employee support programs.

> **The work environment . . . has been identified as a significant predictor of job satisfaction.[82]**

A prison work setting must operate 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, and typically involves shifts and posts. However, there are a number of potential employees who are very capable of working, but who choose not to apply for full-time work. Managers of today need to embrace the opportunity to use part-time employees and alternative shifts that permit a better balance between work and personal life.

Likewise the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) is using a part-time CO position.[83] There is an option of temporarily switching to full-time employment once per year. This permits those who are working part time while in college to work full time during the summer break. With benefits and a flexible work schedule, the part-time CO employment program is an option available to many applicants who would not otherwise consider employment as a correctional officer.

The Oklahoma DOC has also designed a part-time position, the Temp-Cop program.[84] They have established a relationship with a local college, and are offering on-the-job training for veterans while they perform a job and earn wages, as well as receive GI Bill benefits.

Full-time employees who are becoming accustomed to longer workdays (i.e., 10 or 12 hours) can meet the challenging staff objective of a more balanced work-life relationship through the compressed workweek. Results of a study of city workers conducted by two professors at Brigham Young University found:[85]

- 60 percent of employees working a four-day work week reported higher productivity
- 12 percent of workers experienced inefficiencies due to other workers' absences on Fridays
- Workers reported more job satisfaction, less inclination to look for other jobs, less distraction from personal interests or family and friend time

The 12-hour shift and some derivatives of the long shift are popular in many jails and some prisons.[86] Some managers report that 12-hour shifts are problematic, resulting in employees who tend to be less invested in the job. Other jail managers report that employees like the longer shift, enjoying the extra time it affords them to spend with their family or secure a second job.

Besides the need for creative and flexible work shift options, the need for employee support programs exists and should be seriously considered. Recognizing the need to foster a better work-life balance, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) created three programs to help staff reach full potential. The first program they have is tuition reimbursement; the next is a mentor program. The last program offered for staff enrichment is Professional Alliance of Correctional Employees. (PACE) PACE is designed to help employees pick a field of work they feel they might be interested in, and then mentor with a person from that department. They work with that mentor for six months and then decide if they like the new line of work.[87]

Training and Development

Human resource managers with few exceptions believe that "training was perceived as more effective than increased salary or benefits," according to a survey at the American Management Association (AMA) Conference.[88] This includes attendance at conferences, tuition assistance, and managerial training, as well as technical and interpersonal skills development. The AMA report offers internal and external training strategies and ideas for career/professional development.

Texas agencies have reported the success of some internal training methods. According to Castlebury, TDCJ was able to reduce no-show rates by 11 percent at pre-service training academies when temporary academies were established in regional areas.[89]TDCJ Correctional Training and Development Director Michael Upshaw, noted that "in late November 2007, TDCJ had approximately 3,750 correctional officer positions vacant." However, "during fiscal year 2007, the agency held 27 special pre-service academy classes that produced 860 correctional officers over and above the 4,600 that graduated from the six regional academies. The special academies were held primarily at outlying units, including a number located in West Texas and the Panhandle. During the first five months of fiscal year 2008, the agency had graduated 17 special academy classes and had 20 more scheduled through August."[90]

Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC) offers a four-tiered Correctional Leadership Development program. The first portion of the program is a 21-hour session that is designed for first-line supervisors promoted within the last 12 months (CLD I). The next program (CLD II) is a 21-hour seminar designed for individuals who have been in a supervisory role for two or more years. The third part (CLD III) is a 21-hour program for supervisors who are preparing for an upper management position. The last section (CLD IV) is a 12-hour program with a continuation of CLD III.[91]

Another method being used to recruit and retain staff is the repayment of student loans. The federal student loan repayment program enables federal agencies to pay off federally insured student loans as a recruitment or retention incentive. In 2008, federal agencies (35) repaid more than $51 million in student loans for nearly 6,900 employees. This amount represented a 22 percent increase in the use of this benefit, when compared to 2007 with the average repayment being just over $7,500 each.[92]

Corrections professionals can choose training or certification from an external association. Certification programs, offering professional training and certification from entry-level to more advanced, represent an independent third party credential that is industry accepted, resulting from a process whereby an individual's knowledge is verified against a set of pre-determined standards. The American Correctional Association (ACA) Corrections Certification Program affords correctional professionals with training a self-study educational opportunities that can lead to attainment of a designation as a Certified Corrections Professional (CCP). Jail personnel, under the American Jail Association (AJA), can attain a parallel certification called Certified Jail Manager and Certified Jail Officer. The ACA began their certification program in August 2000. Four categories of CCPs are available:[93]

- Certified Corrections Officer (CCO)
- Certified Corrections Supervisor (CCS)
- Certified Corrections Manager (CCM)
- Certified Corrections Executive (CCE)

According to O'Brien, an ACA Professional Development Specialist, the CCP program is continuing to grow. As of June 2008 there were 1630 active program participants, with 924 achieved certifications. A breakout of those who have achieved CCO certification was 39.7 percent.[94]

To discover the training and development needs of correctional staff, administrators may find a 360-degree feedback tool useful. These employee assessments incorporate feedback from subordinates, peers, and supervisors, which can enlighten the employee and identify potential issues or areas in need of training.

Many correctional trainers are also exploring the use of distance learning and social networking technology to enhance the effectiveness of training. These training modalities link well with younger employees who are accustomed to various technology applications. Concurrent Technologies Corporation developed an excellent Distance Learning Reference Guide (Version 1.0) under a grant through the National Institute of Corrections for training directors.[95] The guide describes distance learning topics as well as resources, links and tools to aid in the application of technology within the corrections environment.

Salary and Benefits

Pay is surely not the primary draw to the CO position and may not be the determining factor in whether an employee will stay; however, managers of incarceration facilities should periodically survey their employees to determine the extent to which pay dissatisfaction is common. If it proves to be a widespread problem, then some of the strategies herein may be helpful.

The first step is to discover what fair compensation is for the area. Determining fair compensation can include a number of factors. McKeown advises that compensation should be within 15 percent of the industry standard, as determined from surveys conducted; adjustments should then be made to remain competitive. [96] If pay is between 5 to 15 percent below market, then adjustment would be required only if other elements of the package do not compensate in some manner. Keeping top employees requires a competitive employee package (e.g., pay, compensation, tuition assistance and work environment, etc.).

The national average compensation for COs is not going to make these employees rich. The mean hourly wage for correctional officers and jailers as of May 2007 was $19.22; the median wage was $17.78. [97]

If an agency's wages are not in the range, administrators should gather data in support of a request for additional funding to supplement salaries. As government budgets do not allow a great deal of flexibility or timely change, creating an attractive benefits package may be part of the solution to becoming more competitive in the battle for great and lasting employees.

Agencies may need to consider using discretionary funds from their budgets as sign-on bonuses. The Texas Board of Criminal Justice has approved a $1,500 recruiting bonus for Correctional Officers hired (or in the Academy) on or after April 1, 2008, who accept assignment to one of the designated understaffed correctional facilities.[98]

Arizona Department of Corrections has created a geographical stipend to attract new COs to work in selected facilities which experience difficulty in attracting and retaining employees. New CO recruits earn an additional 10 percent and $100 per pay period to work in the Florence and Lewis complexes and those hired to work for the Winslow complex or Apache Unit receive an additional $2,600 annually.[99]

A number of older, usually rural, correctional facilities offer staff housing as a part of a competitive package. This is an excellent way for an organization to support staff, creating a unique bond between the organization, unit, and employee. Some states have created special bond programs or grants for builders willing to construct housing for correctional staff in communities with prison facilities. Agencies and employees can mutually benefit if agencies are able to consider nontraditional methods of providing accommodations for employees that reduce commute times and supply affordable living arrangements.

The human resource professionals at the local institution can also serve as a guide to jobs in the immediate area for spouses. Those working in the corrections field that have spouses may need the ability to earn more than what is paid at the institution. This may include a job at the prison, where the partners work different shifts to accommodate parental responsibilities. In any event, correctional agencies or companies should plan how they can help structure a menu of possibilities for the many working partners who consider joining the organization.

Some agencies and companies are offering exercise rooms and workout equipment, which coincidently helps with lowering health care costs. Other approaches to engaging employees include company/agency-sponsored family picnics or structured tours of the facility. Many employees will be looking at the opportunities that a robust job market creates. Benefits must appeal to the immediate needs of applicants.[100]

CONCLUSION

The cost of turnover is dramatic. Those who have responsibility for controlling costs and improving operational efficiency need to know that they can positively affect retention. Identifying and implementing key practices, within the control of supervisors and managers, will improve the work environment. Surveying staff and taking action to improve working conditions will likely have a positive impact on retention.

As administrators and managers discover and confront the causes of employee turnover in their facilities, they begin the never-ending process of improving job satisfaction for their staff. The effectiveness of current systems should be scrutinized, evaluated, and modified as necessary. New methods should be carefully created with input from stakeholders and implemented by supervisors and managers to address the needs and desires of the employee in order to foster a higher sense of organizational commitment.

Effective human resource managers will take steps to streamline and improve the screening and orientation dimensions of hiring COs. Better screening methods can lead to a candidate best fitted for the job–one who may have a good skill match, enjoy the work, and desire to stay with the agency or company for a longer period. Employee orientation is a unique opportunity to make a first impression with lasting effects. Orientation procedures should be reassessed and remodeled if necessary so they work well with many classifications of employees.

Communication between CO and supervisor about the future and the overall job experience can lead to a better understanding about the ideas and feelings the CO holds about the organization. Helping supervisors understand the vital role they play in caring about employees and improving staff retention can improve the fiscal picture and promote greater operational efficiency.

There are also several proven options to improve retention in the work environment area. Organizational executives need to consider variations in the workplace to improve work/personal life balance (e.g., flextime, part time, 12-hour shifts, etc.). Employee assistance programs are another important and valuable addition to the work environment. These may have a positive impact on worker satisfaction and commitment, which ultimately improves retention.

To create and sustain a quality workforce today, corrections managers must look to training to develop their staff. Internal and external methods of technical training including professional certifications are often perceived as more valuable to employees than are pay and benefits. Professional development plans for employees can provide a means to show interest in the employees and aid them in achieving personal and professional growth.

Pay and benefits may be the focus area that will require the most creative power. Since budgets are very tight and will be into the foreseeable future, funding for staff is limited. Therefore managers need to remain flexible and assess the array of benefits which will have maximum impact that they can offer to employees to remain competitive in today's dynamic labor market.

Elected officials and corrections leaders know that there is only so much funding that is available for corrections systems. This raises significant issues for legislators who want to appear tough on crime. The inmate populations continue to escalate, while there are growing public expectations that programs that reduce recidivism be employed to stem the tide of offenders returning through the revolving door to the correctional facilities. In the case of correctional administrators, the ability to improve staff retention exists within the purview of prison management. Operational systems work more efficiently with experienced staff. Besides developing training systems, agency heads must show leadership in the area of succession planning, providing leaders for the future. In addition, prison administrators can and should be held accountable, as part of a performance bound measurement system, for the creation of a retention improvement plan that addresses employee needs for a safe environment and quality work life that promotes job satisfaction.

Appendix A:

AN UNDERSTANDING OF WORKGROUP CHARACTERISTICS PLAYS A ROLE IN RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND RETENTION.

General Characteristics

	TRADITIONALIST (1900-1945)[1]	BABY BOOMER (1946-1964)[2]	GENERATION X (1965-1975)[3]	GENERATION Y (1976-1994)[4]
Compensation	Expected to build a lifetime career with one employer, so long-term compensation is acceptable.	Long-term compensation is satisfactory because of long-term focus and loyalty to job and company.	Impatient for rewards. Don't believe in job security, so want rewards immediately.	Prefer flexible hours over many other benefits; expect a competitive salary based on market value and according to performance.
Technology	Unfamiliar with new technology; must be taught how to facilitate new processes.	Unaccustomed to relying on technology; somewhat resistant to adopting innovative practices.	Techno savvy. Desire to know and use latest technology.	Primary vehicle for communication is the web; accustomed to interactive capabilities.
View of Job Hopping	Viewed as evidence of disloyalty and poor work ethic.	Afraid switching jobs will drop them down in seniority, hurting chances for future opportunities.	Seen as essential in building a competitive resume.	Allows them to pursue more than one career at a time.
Firm/ Structure	Prefer an authoritarian structure with designated lines of authority based on tenure.	Accepting of an authoritarian managerial style and hierarchical structure. Generally comfortable with a more static, closed work environment.	Non-hierarchical, participatory, and democratic structure is preferred.	Team-focused. Do not need close supervision; are able to work independently. Involvement in decision-making process is important.
Relationship with Management	Not free with praise, but feedback is meant when given.	Submissive to authority and deferential to management.	Less likely to approach management. Question authority; do not believe in accepting decisions made by superiors. Self-reliant.	Respectful of authority, but will approach management to work out disagreements. Don't want to be micro-managed, as they need space to implement their tasks.
Orientation To Learning	Wait to be told what to do.	Don't actively seek learning on own, but seek instruction from others first.	Oriented to learning and new skill development. Interaction is primary method of learning.	Dedication to knowledge and learning. At work, impatient, always hunting for information.
Loyalty	Loyal to a fault; loyalty and duty to job and company take precedence over pleasure; see the task or job through at all cost.	Loyal to job and company. Work driven; use to long hours at work and subordinating personal needs to those of their career.	Don't believe in longevity, so mainly loyal to themselves. In work, loyal to the team rather than the organization.	Loyal to themselves as well as family, friends, and community; tend to customize/prioritize lives by creating a work life attuned to personal needs.
Orientation To Change	Because of strong affiliation with traditions, change is disruptive and undesirable.	Less flexible; resistant to change.	Change is good.	Adaptable and flexible workers; embrace new challenges.
Orientation To Job	Disciplined. Fiscally conservative. Uphold company culture and traditions.	Product and skill/task oriented; focused on specific, delineated outcomes. Strong team concept.	Process more important than product. Have strong sense of perseverance and belief in clear and consistent expectations. Realistic/pragmatic; have low expectations of what work can offer.	Achievement-oriented. Need clear and consistent expectations to ensure productivity.

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Resources

The Institute is the research division of MTC and is dedicated to promoting innovations, exemplary practices, and projecting trends. The focus of our work addresses practical issues facing those who work with youth within Job Corps and offenders in correctional environments.

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