Core Competencies AND Jail Leadership

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JAIL'S ROLE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

What skills, knowledge, and abilities do jail leaders need in order to be 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 14th installment on core competencies and jail leadership.

In this issue of *American Jails,* we take a closer look at the core competency identified as "the role of the jail in the criminal justice system" and recommend several valuable resources related to leadership.

Asserting the Jail's Role in Your Community

Description: Maintain outcome-focused interaction with other components of the justice system to identify and resolve problems and advance the vision/mission of the jail.

Rationale: Because jails are profoundly affected by the operations of other agencies throughout the criminal justice system, their leaders cannot afford to engage in autonomous policy development or decision-making. Yet all too often, local jails operate as an island, trying to independently solve system-created problems. Local jail leaders need to take the initiative to establish a system-wide collaboration. This calls for understanding the interdependent relationships between components of the justice system and developing working relationships that minimize the negative impact of other agencies' actions while maximizing creative synergy among them.

Knowledge of:
- Local, State, and Federal justice systems, community attitudes, and public perceptions.
- Local jail stakeholders.
- Effective partnerships/collaborations to benefit the jail.
- How the jail impacts—and is impacted by—other components of the local, State, and Federal justice systems.

Skills to:
- Gather relevant information.
- Analyze interrelationships of policy, law, and case law developments.
- Measure the "pulse" of the community.
- Analyze how system-wide interactions reciprocally affect the jail.
- Educate peers and subordinates in their roles to develop, participate, and nurture partnerships.
- Develop and maintain productive, collegial working relationships across disciplines with relevant community organizations.

- Create a supportive community network to support jail and justice system operations.
- Negotiate and build consensus with relevant stakeholders.
- Collect and use evidence-based data and information.

Abilities to:
- View the justice system and related agencies from a comprehensive, community-wide perspective.
- Work collaboratively; be a good partner.
- Understand the local, State, and Federal political environment.
- Be flexible and compromise.
- Remain tenacious in pursing justice initiatives.
- Think critically and analytically.
- Know when to ask for help.

Public Support Dilemma

Jail leaders often despair of both the invisibility of their facility and the gross misunderstanding about the jail's role and functions. Unfortunately, this invisibility may

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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.

affect interactions with the community and local decision-makers. The symptoms of this status are the:

- Struggle for funding.
- Need to defend the jail from negative media reports.
- Inability to generate positive stories about the good programs and people working in the jail.
- Unproductive competition for funding with other justice agencies.

The difference between a "prison" and a "jail"—while known to us—is an uninteresting fact to most those in our communities. It seems every TV news report about a crime ends with "and the criminals are now behind bars…." As if many jails still used "bars" anymore! Just as frustrating is the attitude of some jail leaders, including a few sheriffs, that the more invisible the jail the better.

The absence of public knowledge and support are two factors identified by jail leaders that cripple their attempts to move forward (Stinchcomb & McCampbell, 2008). Because the operations of other local government agencies and the criminal justice system can profoundly impact jail operations, we can no longer afford to engage in autonomous policy development or decision-making. Unfortunately, local jails try to operate as an island, attempting to independently solve their system-created problems. Now is the time for local jail leaders to take the initiative to establish and maintain system-wide meaningful collaboration. This article is a call for jail administrators to understand and embrace the interdependent relationships between the various components of the justice system and with other government agencies to minimize the negative impact of their actions while maximizing creative synergy among them.

This discussion focuses on what jail leadership can do to resolve this public-support dilemma: accepting responsibility, rather than waiting for someone to address the fact that without leveraging the jail as part of the justice system we will be slowed and ignored.

Perceptions of Jails

As a major component of the criminal-justice system, jails are often understudied and misunderstood (Seiter, 1999). In instances where jails have been examined, research suggests the public's perception of a jail's environment is closely aligned with its theory of "punitiveness" (Enns, 2014). Unfortunately, this punishment philosophy is influenced by misinformation about penal institutions and those who reside therein, presenting a quagmire that if not countered, could prove detrimental for a jail administrator (Picket, Mancini, Mears, & Gertz, 2015).

The public's negative perception of jails may be linked to certain media portrayals and other inaccurate labels perpetuated by individuals who are, or have been, justice-involved (Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016). To clarify, it can be reasonably contended that circumstances resulting in an individual's arrest are negative; consequently, it should stand to reason that any

thoughts or discussions associated with these circumstances would be exaggerated toward the antipathetic. Regrettably, the media help to preserve these characterizations when they employ the practice of "worst first;" that is, opening the evening news with stories on issues associated with jails. In this age of YouTube and instantaneous transmittal of images, information (most often negative) about jails is in the public arena before we even know the incident happened.

Without question, jails are not always positive places. This often negative image notwithstanding, it is important for jail leaders to provide communication about their operations to all stakeholders and influencers of public opinion in the community—with an emphasis placed on reaching civic leaders. Without accurate and timely information, the public-perception of jails will continue to be inaccurate, and public-support will continue to be elusive.

A community with no knowledge about their local jail—or one that holds a negative public perception—often does not provide support, adversely affecting jails from a budgetary standpoint. The jail's budget is overseen by individuals

who are elected by the community in which they and the jail serve. The significance of this is critical, because jails require funding to perform functions that align with constitutional and other legislative dictates. As such, jail leaders know that local politicians and influencers must make tough fiscal decisions, which often result in funds being diverted to agencies with a high level of public support, such as schools, animal shelters, and libraries.

Competing with agencies that focus on "desirable public services" is challenging; mainly as the public and those who use these services consider them essential to the values of their community. Conversely, inmates and our employees in a jail setting—for whatever reason—are

not valued as much by the community until, of course, a loved one is incarcerated. This viewpoint of *not* valuing the jail is misguided, but absent a counter argument by jail leaders, this narrative prevails. (For more information about gathering public perception of jails, see the Leader's Library.)

Time for Jail Leaders To Act!

To leverage the role of the jail in the local community and justice system, it is time for jail leaders to take the initiative by conducting a consistent campaign on behalf of their jail, including the staff and the inmates they serve (McCampbell, 2015). We must create opportunities to educate our communities about the jail's fundamental responsibilities. What might that message include?

- Of the individuals held in the local jail, 95% will return to the community (Gibbons & Katzenbach, 2011).

- If jails are unsuccessful in performing their legal responsibilities, there are legal implications and costs.

- Inmates who are released to the same circumstances as when they entered the jail are a threat to the community's safety. (The Leader's Library contains two websites to counter this.)

- Jails are the largest mental health facilities in the United States.

- The staff of jails is hardworking and dedicated.

The jail's leaders can craft a message that targets the issues of their community. Failing to have any message at all allows those who want to control the negative message to succeed.

Community Capital

To counter a negative public perception, jail leaders must acknowledge the concept of *community capital,* which is the trust offered by the public (Ansari, 2013). That is to say, community capital, also known as social capital, results

when collaborations between entities are mediated by the presence of trust, reciprocity, and cooperation (Kreuter & Lezin, 2002). As it relates to a jail, this capital is gained when administrators are proactive and transparent in their communications with external stakeholders about their institutions (Rose & Clear, 2003). As we know, many citizens in our community are unaware of what happens in detention centers. Rule of thumb: If there is a vacuum of information, people create their own stories. Therefore, jail administrators must fill this void (or replace misinformation) with pertinent and relevant information and decisive, inclusive and transparent actions.

Establishing Rapport

An example of establishing community capital and its benefits happened in a sizable urban county in the Midwest. The jail system experienced an increase in use-of-force incidents, characterized by some members of the community as deliberate acts of brutality. After media outlets perpetuated this narrative, the administrator decided to step down to allow the agency to take a different course.

When the new administrator was appointed, he participated in a "community listening tour" along with other internal government stakeholders. With the help of the mayor's office, the agency coordinated community meetings where citizens could express their concerns regarding the use-of-force issues, as well as other challenges they believed the department faced. During these exchanges, the administrator and the government stakeholder group demonstrated professionalism by soliciting input and allowing time for uninterrupted responses. The group also took copious notes and prioritized the areas of concern, which exhibited their commitment to address the concerns.

At the end of this "tour," the group distributed summaries of the meetings. Included in the information was a plan to establish oversight committees, all of which included a member of the community. In addition, the meetings were open to the public, and held in places that were easily accessible by public transportation. These efforts demonstrated a legitimate and sincere regard for community members. By default, the jail leader and the supporting government officials established community capital. Soon after these actions, they received additional support for the budget increases deemed necessary to incorporate the ideas that the agency and the community developed together.

Reflecting on this experience, we note that the jail leader doesn't need to wait for a crisis to initiate these sound practices. By developing a jail advisory council that is routinely available to community and business groups and encouraging staff to be part of community groups, jail leaders have created two effective outreach measures.

Working Together

In another example is found in Minnesota, where collaboration is currently underway among the Minnesota Sheriff's Association, the Association of Minnesota Counties, and the University of Minnesota (S. Skinner, personal communication, Mar 23, 2017). Researchers and practitioners are working together to improve the jail-visiting experience for children in order to reduce the impact of the adverse childhood experience (ACE). To create an environment that reduces anxiety and to possibly create a pleasant experience for children, these ideas are currently being implemented:

- Directed and easy-to-understand web content for caregivers.
- Special visiting hours.
- Child-friendly activities.
- Placement of vinyl decals that depict Sesame Street characters in the lobby and visiting areas at a child's eye level. (For more information on the Sesame Street incarceration initiative, see *www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/incarceration*.)

Staff education about ACE created support for the initiatives. Jail administrators from 69 adult local facilities simultaneously surveyed inmates across the State to collect information from incarcerated parents. This data will be used to establish protocols designed not only to enhance the familial contact for the inmate and their families, but also to aid participating jails in assuming their roles as an important member of the community. Operating under the objectives of strengthening families with the intention to decrease the probability of inmates offending or re-offending, the members of this project are addressing the issue of recidivism in a less than traditional way.

This is a gain of community capital by accurately identifying, addressing, and then resolving issues of concern to the community.

The Next Steps

To effectively leverage the role of the jail in the local justice system and

The Leader's Library: Data About Jails

Bureau of Justice Statistics
- Correctional Populations in the United States—*www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus15.pdf*
- Jail Inmates in 2015—*www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ji15.pdf*
- Jails in Indian Country, 2015—*www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/jic15.pdf*

Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Occupational Outlook Handbook: Correctional Offices and Bailiffs—*www.bls.gov/ooh/protective-service/correctional-officers.htm*
- Unemployment and Employment Data by Community—*https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000*

Criminal Justice Data
- Federal Bureau of Investigation: Uniform Crime Reporting homepage—*https://ucr.fbi.gov*

National Archive of Criminal Justice Data
- Homepage—*www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/index.jsp*

Public Attitudes/News Aggregators:
- Pew Research Center (information about public polling re: attitudes about criminal justice)—*www.pewresearch.org/topics/criminal-justice/*
- The Marshall Project: News aggregator for justice system (free service)—*www.themarshallproject.org/#.qkEAIGbBY*
- Gallup (public attitudes about justice)—*www.gallup.com/Search/Default.aspx?s=&p=1&q=criminal+justice&b=Go*

Research Resources
- Bureau of Justice Assistance—*www.bja.gov*
- Foundation Center (corporate/private funding opportunities)—*http://foundationcenter.org*
- National Criminal Justice Reference Service—*www.ncjrs.gov*

Advocacy Groups
- Amnesty International—*www.amnestyusa.org*
- Prison Policy Initiative—*www.prisonpolicy.org/about.html*
- Just Detention International—*https://justdetention.org*
- Vera Institute of Justice—*www.vera.org*
- List of social justice/advocacy organizations—*www.startguide.org/orgs/orgs06.html*

Justice Reinvestment and Reentry
- Lessons from the States: Reducing Recidivism and Curbing Corrections Costs Through Justice Reinvestment—*https://csgjustice center.org/jr/publications/lessons-from-the-states/*
- Life after Lockup: Improving Reentry from Jail to the Community—*www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/bja/220095.pdf*

Other Resources
- *Guidelines for Developing a Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee*
  Robert C. Cushman
  U.S. Dept. of Justice, National Institute of Corrections (January, 2002)
  http://static.nicic.gov/Library/017232.pdf

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community, the jail leader must be a knowledgeable partner. While jails can wait for justice partners to come to their doors, administration may be waiting a long time—to the detriment of the jail.

Jail leaders must be able to identify the "influencers" in their community—the informal and formal leaders. Engaging staff in a brain-storming exercise to name the stakeholders and rate their influence is an effective way to broaden the staff's view of how the jail can be a more effective component in the community.

What do leaders need in order to be a "player" in the dialogue and decisions in their communities? Here are examples of basic information that should be at their fingertips and updated regularly:

- The name of the U.S. Attorney in the Federal district.
- The name of the Special Agent in Charge, local office of the FBI.
- The name and contact information of the person(s) who heads the local association of clergy.
- The name of the person on the governor's staff working with criminal justice issues.
- The name and contact information of U. S. Senators and U.S Representatives.
- The name of the president of the local chamber of commerce.
- The names of *all* the members of the governmental body who funds the jail.
- The names and contact information of the State legislators who serve the community.
- The name of the president of the local community college(s) and other institutions of higher education.
- The name and contact information of the president of the local NAACP, GLBTI organizations, and Latino and Hispanic community groups.
- The name of the president of the local chapter of both the Mental

Health Association and Alliance for the Mentally ill, and related support organizations.

- The name of the person who runs the local homeless shelter(s).
- The names of the five largest employers in the community and their current economic condition.
- The current unemployment rate in the county/community, including the unemployment trends in your community over the last five years.
- The names and contact information for media representatives in the community, including local newspapers and community newspapers.
- The number of Part I arrests in the community and the crime trends.
- The current state of the economy in the community including housing costs, rental costs, the unemployment rate, tax rates, business bankruptcy filings, and the annual reports of the local chambers of commences.
- The total approved budget for the county in the current fiscal year and the trends in the total amount of the county's approved budget for the last five years.
- The name of the chair of the local police chief's association.
- Educational data such as the high school dropout rate in the county, Title I schools, and the number of students accessing free or reduced lunches.
- Emerging public health trends (drug abuse, mental illness, HIV, opioid dependency).

Why are these names and contact information important? Because these people and their organizations impact the jail's operation one way or another, either as competitors for funding or as someone who can support or derail the jail's program and initiatives. If they don't know you and your jail, learn how they can help and how to legitimately ask for help. The jail's visibility is essential to leveraging the role of the jail in the justice system.

These are just examples of the information and contacts that jail leaders need to know; clearly there are more influencers. Your mission is to identify how to become perceptible to the most important formal and informal stakeholders and influencers. Delegate your staff to the role of attending meetings, providing information, circulating information about the jail, and becoming value contributors to the community dialogue. Consider establishing a jail advisory board that involves interested citizens in furthering the agenda (Cushman, 2002).

Conclusion

Just as the American Jail Association advocates for the professionals who work in the Nation's 3,200-plus jails, administrators must advocate for their own jails. Although this is not one of their traditional roles, we must change what we are doing now. Otherwise, we'll continue to have low visibility for jails, continued struggles, and under appreciation. ∎

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