



Role of Prison officers & Correctional Philosophy

An Important Public Service

- In any democratic society, work in prison is a **public service**.
- Prisons are places, like schools and hospitals, which should be run by the civil power with the objective of contributing to the **public good**.
- Prison authorities should have some **accountability** to an elected parliament



Philosophy of Correctional Administration





Ethical Basis

- Prison management needs to operate within an **ethical framework**.
- Without a strong ethical context, the situation where one group of people is given considerable power over another can easily become an **abuse of power**.
- The ethical context is not just a matter of the behaviour of individual staff towards prisoners.
- A sense of the ethical basis of imprisonment needs to pervade the management process from the top down.



Staff/Prisoner relationships are the key

- When people think of prisons they tend to consider their **physical aspect**: walls, fences, a building with locked doors and windows with bars.
- In reality the most important aspect of a prison is the **human dimension**, since prisons are primarily concerned with people.
- The **two most important groups** of people in a prison are the prisoners and the staff who look after them.
- The key to a well managed prison is **the nature of the relationship between these two groups**.



The inherent dignity of all human beings

- In democratic societies the law underpins and **protects the fundamental values of society.**
- The most important of these is respect for the inherent dignity of all human beings, whatever their personal or social status.
- One of the greatest tests of this respect for humanity lies in the way in which a society treats those who have broken, or are accused of having broken, the criminal law.
- **Prison staff have a special role** on behalf of the rest of society in respecting their dignity, despite any crime which they may have committed.



“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside the jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

(Nelson Mandela)

This is the basis for placing prison management, above all else, within an ethical framework.

This imperative must never be lost sight of by senior administrators, by prison management or by first line prison staff.

Without an ethical context, managerial efficiency in prisons can take a path that leads ultimately to the barbarism of the concentration camp.



PERSONAL QUALITIES OF STAFF

Working in prison requires a unique combination of personal qualities and technical skills.

Prison staff need personal qualities which enable them to deal with all prisoners, including the difficult and the dangerous, in an even-handed, humane and just manner.

This means that there should be strict recruitment and selection processes so that only persons with the right qualities are taken into the organisation.

Only when these are in place, will it be possible to describe work in prisons as a profession.



Good leadership is vital

- Those with responsibility for prisons and prison systems need to look beyond technical and managerial considerations.
- They also have **to be leaders** who are capable of enthusing the staff for whom they are responsible with a sense of value in the way they carry out their difficult daily tasks.
- They **need to have a clear vision** and a determination to **maintain the highest standards** in the difficult work of prison management



The need for good staff

- Prisons usually cannot select their prisoners; they have to accept whoever is sent to them by the court or the legal authority. They can, however, choose their staff.
- It is essential that the staff should be carefully selected, properly trained, supervised and supported

Prison work is difficult and demanding

- Prison work is demanding.
- It involves working with men and women who have been deprived of their liberty, many of whom are likely to be mentally disturbed, suffer from addictions, have poor social and educational skills and come from marginalised groups in society.
- Some will be a threat to the public; some will be dangerous and aggressive; others will try very hard to escape.
- None of them wants to be in prison. Each of them is an individual person.



The Role of Prison staff

The role of staff is:-

- to treat prisoners in a manner which is decent, humane and just;
- to ensure that all prisoners are safe;
- to make sure that dangerous prisoners do not escape;
- to make sure that there is good order and control in prisons;
- to provide prisoners with the opportunity to use their time in prison positively so that they will be able to resettle into society when they are released.



Personal integrity

- It requires great skill and personal integrity to carry out this work in a professional manner.
- This means first of all that men and women who are to work in prisons need to be carefully chosen to make sure that they have the appropriate personal qualities and educational background.
- They then need to be given proper training in the principles that should underlie their work and in the human and technical skills that are required.