

CorrectTech

FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS

THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS



Contents

1. Thou shalt never forget who your Client is (and isn't)	3
2. Thou shalt never forget what your Goal is (and isn't)	5
3. Community corrections is about people	7
4. You control processes, not results. Focus on what you control	9
5. Culture matters! Fight for it	10
6. You have a story to tell. Tell it	12
7. Thou shalt leverage technology	14



1 Thou shalt never forget who your Client is (and isn't).

*“It’s not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.”
- Roy Disney*

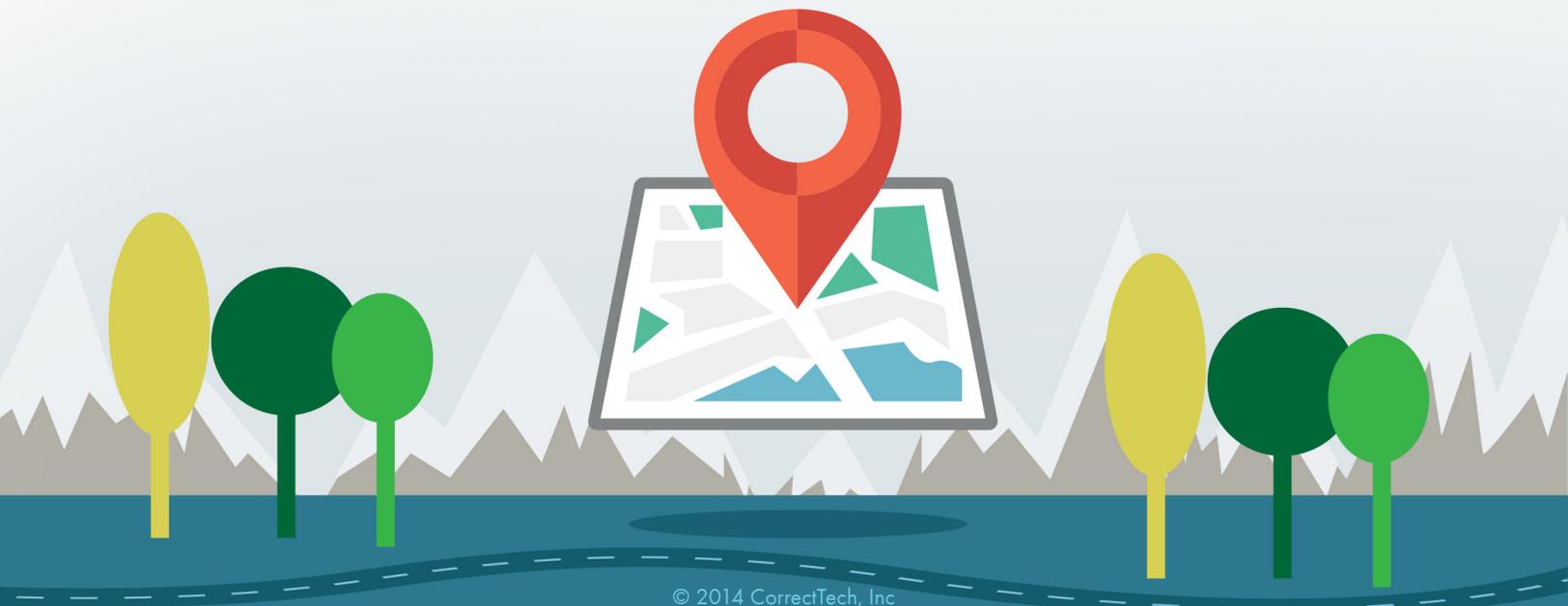
My grandfather used to tell me that if you are lost in the forest, you will ultimately walk in a circle. I assumed it was an old Southern myth, but a recent study demonstrates its veracity. Jan Souman, a German psychologist, instructed nine people (presumably college sophomores or white rats that looked like people) to walk as straight as possible in one direction for several hours in a forest or the desert. Some of the study participants walked in a relatively straight line. Others literally walked in circles without realizing that they were crossing their previously traveled path. The difference? The weather. Yes, the weather predicted the straight line or the circular path. Walkers who could see the moon or the sun walked in a straight line. Those without the benefit of celestial landmarks walked in circles.

Other than confirming that psychologists are sadistic, so what? Well, it demonstrates that without a steady focal point, people lose direction, dramatically and quickly (in some cases the



circles were as small as 20 meters in diameter!). Community corrections professionals work in a complex system with many subsystems, branches, and decision makers. Part of the system refers an offender to us. Who is our Client (with a capital “C” to mean primary)? The judge? The district attorney? The victim? The parole board? The offender (little “c” client)? No. Wrong. Try again and thanks for playing. Each of these players are important stakeholders, but you only have one Client: The Community.

The Community is made up of employers, children, the elderly, and all of our “next door” neighbors. Each of the above players represents part of the community, but none of them represent the community as a whole. That is your job. Believe that clients can change and allow them to earn greater community freedom, but do not hesitate to put on the brakes if there is reason to believe that the community will suffer harm. It is not an easy balance, and you do not get points for overreacting or being ultra conservative. Still, “Your freedom stops where my nose begins,” as my father is fond of exclaiming.



2 Thou shalt never forget what your Goal is (and isn't).

*“What keeps me going is goals.”
- Muhammad Ali*

You have your focal point of your Client, the Community. Now what? What does the Community want? While value for their tax dollars matters, their request of you is simple: enhance public safety. That is it. Make the Community more safe. The Community is realistic. They fully understand that you are not going to reach every client and change their trajectory. They also want you to be realistic. Idealism is admirable until it leads to poor decisions about public safety.

Before we define public safety, let's look at what our goal is not. Increased self-esteem is not our goal. More relaxed clients is not our goal. Greater insight is nice, but not the goal. Increased remorse is not the goal. Each of these may be nice side effects of our interventions, but unless we are producing behavior change that leads to greater public safety, we are failing.

What is public safety? In brief, there is short-term public safety (i.e., risk containment) and



long-term public safety (i.e, risk reduction). Short term public safety usually trumps long-term attempts to reduce recidivism. Obviously, it is a balancing act. Can you focus on both at the same time? You not only can, you must. Attempting to provide effective treatment (i.e., EBP interventions) without behavioral monitoring (e.g., drug testing), is like trying to sharpen an ax without holding it against a turning stone. While you can choose to focus on only short-term public safety, monitoring alone has not proven to result in longer term behavioral change. The Goal is to improve the world, but that must start with a non-negotiable of “no new victims.”

We will not always be successful. We will make mistakes. Our clients will make poor choices, even with the best of programming and treatment. However, if we get the goal wrong, the entire enterprise is missing the mark.



3 Community corrections is about people.

“I think there’s just one kind of folks. Folks.”
- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

In the day to day operations of risk assessment, treatment, endless documentation, meetings, violations, talk about “EBP”, strategic planning, and emails, it can be easy to forget that community corrections is always about one thing: People. Risk management, recidivism reduction, offender reentry, transition planning and regulatory compliance are all part of our work, but they are also means to an end. Your annual report includes data, trends and numbers. All represent people. People who have made bad choices (i.e., clients). The people directly impacted by those choices (i.e., victims). The people who are, at times, temporarily without a parent (i.e., children). The people working endlessly to help clients (i.e., employees). The people giving clients a second chance (i.e., employers). The people nervous about the zoning of a community corrections program near their residence (i.e., community members). The list can go on and on.

When something bad goes down, it makes headlines (you check them daily for your clients’ names!). It’s unfortunate that, we rarely get to see the impact we have had on people. In our





renewed effort to raise the bar in community corrections, let us not forget that our clients, employees, victims, and community supporters are sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters. They have computer problems, relationship issues, financial problems, deaths in the family, and a crappy golf game. In other words, they are a lot like us.

Like a stone tossed in still water, the ripple effects are wide. The cause often goes unnoticed, but when you help a client, you help countless other people too.



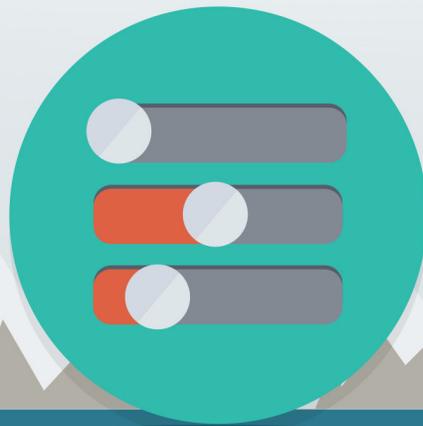


4 You control processes, not results. Focus on what you control.

“If you can’t describe what you are doing as a process, you don’t know what you’re doing.”
- W. Edwards Deming

If your head is spinning with all of the talk about Evidence Based Principles (EBP) and focus on outcomes, you are not alone. It is a daunting task to develop systems, policies, and practices around the principles of effective intervention and truly impact recidivism rates. When attempting to influence behavior change of another person, your realm of direct influence is narrow and shallow. Most clients have greater forces supporting the status quo than change. Yet, we are being held accountable for what happens several years down the road. It seems hopeless, impossible and frankly, ridiculous. At least it is if you get obsessed with the end results. You cannot control people or the future so attempting to control both is like bluffing with a pair of 2s. You know you are going to lose, but it drags out the game.

Why is implementing the principles of effective intervention so difficult? In part because it requires a great deal of expertise, organizational change, and resources. More importantly, you cannot implement principles and outcomes. You implement processes. Those processes should be based on sound, proven principles. Processes are performed by people - supported by systems and operational practices. If you have quality people performing quality processes, the results will follow. Focus on the process!



5 Culture matters! Fight for it.

“Culture drives great results.”

- Jack Welch

Culture is a collection of behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular group. It determines expectations, roles and boundaries. Your family has a culture (ever have Thanksgiving dinner at a friend’s house...weird, eh?). Your neighborhood has a culture (it determines whether you grill out together or even wave at each other). There is an offender culture (if you never admit guilt, there will always be doubt). Environment is part of culture. Customs and rituals are too. Your community corrections program has a culture. It is dynamic. Positive leaders make your goal much easier because they create positive peer pressure to adhere to the group norms per the culture.

“One bad apple can destroy the whole bunch” (client or staff). Are staff burned out? Going through the motions? Passionate? Harsh? Pushovers? Do staff like each other? Do they like the clients? Is there a belief that people can change? Do staff admit mistakes?





Does cleanliness matter? Do emotions run high? Do staff believe they are lucky or better than clients? It is difficult sometimes to identify your own culture. Invite someone to spend the day observing your operations. They will notice things you do not and you will have a heightened sense of awareness (and pride and embarrassment).

Culture is a key ingredient to enabling transformative change in an organization, its missions, and goals. A culture of embracing and enabling change comes and goes. Believe that it matters. Fight for it. It leads to better results and makes your life easier.



6 You have a story to tell. Tell it.

“But how could you live and have no story to tell?”
- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *White Nights*

What do myths, comic books, fables, The Holy Bible, and fairy tales have in common? They are passed down from generation to generation and inform us about values, adventures, history, and relationships. Jesus often used parables. Moviegoers camp out for the release of the new Hunger Games adventure. What child has not heard the story of the three little pigs? We love stories. They capture us, teach us, scare us, and thrill us.

We may live in the age of Big Data and Powerpoints, but even those mediums must tell a story. Business proposals tell stories. A good wedding toast includes a funny story. Want to give a successful Ted talk? Relate a funny, meaningful story. We are quickly bored with facts. Numbers make our head spin. Tables make our eyes cross. Unless you are telling a story, your audience is not listening.

Fortunately, we spend our day with individuals who are characters in a compelling plot of crises, survival, and redemption. There should be no shortage of storytelling in community





corrections. We are changing lives but that will go unnoticed unless we weave a tale that instructs and impassions. A lasting story has a beginning, a middle and an end. Our treatment process does too. When you communicate effectively with judges and community critics you are telling a story.

Your discharge summary is a story. Treat it as such. You are taking a journey with your clients. You are keeping a journal of the events and characters. Your documentation matters - a lot! It is easy to fall into the trap of treating documentation like busy work or a necessary evil. I have certainly been guilty of that. We all have the privilege of working with some very interesting clients on a pilgrimage of self-change. We have the obligation to tell the story of what interventions provided hope for change and what unforeseen forces led to self-betrayal and moral failure.

Future treatment providers, judges, probation officers, and case managers need to understand the beginning of the story in order to continue on the journey with this client in a manner that leads out of the forest rather than walking in circles hopelessly lost. Document your journey!



7Thou shalt leverage technology.

“Man is a slow, sloppy, and brilliant thinker; computers are fast, accurate, and stupid.”

- John Pfeiffer

Evidence Based Principles (EBP) require evidence. Evidence comes from data. Data comes from bits and pieces of information. Information comes from you. We have a wealth of information at our disposal. We must capture and organize it. Analyze it. Use it. I am a big fan of professors and researchers who have dedicated their lives to turning data into evidence and demonstrating what does and does not work with clients. They have contributed greatly to society. However, like communities often (wrongly) think it is someone else’s job to help clients, we tend to watch like teammates observing LeBron James pull out another thrilling NBA victory. We are not simply dispassionate observers, we are in the game. We have information about what correlates with success and failure. Under our nose lies the answer to age old questions about human behavior, and, we are wasting our chance to use the information available to us.

People are the greatest asset of community corrections. They can motivate clients and computers cannot. They can identify a change in emotion and computers cannot.



People can creatively problem solve with a client and computers cannot. Ultimately, most change that takes place in community corrections is directly linked to a group of persons with the same mission.

These probation officers, judges, and case managers need tools to increase efficiency. Computers cannot do what humans can do. People should not be allowed to do what computers can do. Their energy and expertise is too valuable. Computers are great at organizing, tracking and analyzing data. Humans must ask the right questions, but often the answers are going to be provided by a computer digesting trends and correlations.

The corrections field tends to lag behind the business world by about a decade in the implementation of technological advances. While there are multiple complicated reasons for this latency, the time for advancement is now. We have our Client's attention, EBP is a solid foundation of research, and our stakeholders have coalesced around the combination of effective treatment and monitoring. Let your people invest their energies and creativity in people. Let computers manage the data. Empower your people by providing them with effective systems and data. You do not have to be a Ph.D. or a grant recipient in order to contribute mightily to the field. Let's turn that data into information, and then into knowledge that helps us all advance our field.

