

CHANGING THE CULTURE, CHANGING THE FUTURE: STAFF WELLNESS IN CORRECTIONS



v.2025.Sep.11

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WELLNESS CULTURE IN CORRECTIONS

- Organizational culture shapes wellness from Day 1
- Leadership at all levels influences staff health
- Staff wellness is MISSION CRITICAL
 - **Q: Why is staff wellness MISSION CRITICAL?**



WHAT IS WORKPLACE CULTURE?

- “Customary and traditional way of thinking and doing...shared by all members, which new members must learn to be accepted.” (Jaques, 1951)
 - Culture = Shared values, beliefs, behaviors
 - Learned through observation and interaction
 - New staff adapt quickly to “how things are done”
 - Culture becomes “invisible” to long-term staff
- **Q: Why does culture become “invisible” to long-term staff?**



WHY CULTURE MATTERS

- “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” – Peter Drucker
- Supportive cultures enable success
- Toxic cultures block progress and fuel Corrections Fatigue

CORRECTIONS CULTURE

- Paramilitary: Rank, toughness, hierarchy
- Admitting struggles = weakness
- Mental health stigma → low help-seeking
- Fear of judgment from peers and managers

LEARNING CULTURE ON DAY 1

- Culture “absorbed” through observational/incidental learning (Bandura, 1971)
- Examples:
 - Negative: Jokes about weight gain, exclusion of new staff, disrespect
 - Positive: Fitness center, salad bar, peer support, decompression room

DEFINING WELLNESS CULTURE

- Wellness culture = Unspoken expectations around staff wellbeing
- New staff notice whether wellness is supported or ignored
 - **Q: What unspoken messages might new hires absorb in your agency?**

LEADERSHIP + CULTURE

- Every employee = a leader, formally or informally
 - Leadership is 24/7/365
 - Informal leaders strongly shape culture by role-modeling
- **Q: Do different shifts or workdays have different cultures at your facility?**

TRAINING-TO-LIFE TRANSFER

- Beyond “training-to-job” → Wellness training applies on and off duty
- Culture influences whether training is lived out or dismissed
 - **Q1: Is training content supported by leaders’ words and actions?**
 - **Q2: If not, who/what can bridge the gap?**

FRONTLINE STAFF INFLUENCE

- Does the “boots on the ground” culture promote “Forget what you learned in training...?”
 - Or does it support healthy habits (healthy nutrition, exercise, stress management, sufficient sleep)?
 - Informal leaders matter most
 - Career-minded staff = positive influencers
- **Q: Do different shifts or workdays have different cultures?**

FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS

- Direct bridge between frontline staff and managers
- Must understand, apply, coach wellness principles
- One dismissive reaction can derail training
- Wellness champions = ideal pilot leaders



MID-LEVEL MANAGERS

- Ensure first-line supervisors support wellness
- Policy + resource decisions reflect values
- Alignment with values drive credibility: “Staff are our greatest resource”
- Can serve as adjunct trainers to reinforce culture
 - **Q: Is Employee Wellness as strong a cultural value as Security Procedures?**

ADMINISTRATIVE & EXECUTIVE STAFF

- Must understand and endorse training content
 - Demonstrating commitment = credibility
 - **Wellness must reach policy-level priority status like safety and security**
 - Long-term commitment prevents “flavor of the month” effect
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- **Q: Is Employee Wellness a mandatory part of your policy reviews?**



RECRUITMENT

- Staff = informal recruiters
- Healthy staff = attract applicants
- Staff treatment makes or breaks an agency's reputation



RETENTION

- Retention is affected by components of healthy workplace cultures:
 - Examples:
 - Psychological safety
 - Respect
 - Toxic cultures → high turnover
- **Q1: Have you built support of Employee Wellness into the promotional process?**
Q2: What might that look like?

CULTURE ACROSS LEVELS

- **New Employees:** May be able to identify culture faster than anyone else
- **Frontline Staff:** Role modeling, peer influence
- **Supervisors:** Coaching, reinforcing training
- **Managers:** Resources + policy decisions reflect values
- **Executives:** Vision, long-term commitment



CORE TAKEAWAYS

- Wellness is “baked into” culture from Day 1
 - Leadership at all levels shapes culture
 - Training must transfer into everyday life
 - Wellness = key to recruitment & retention
 - Staff wellness is MISSION CRITICAL
- **Q: What can YOU do to bolster the wellness culture at your facility/agency?**



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THANK YOU!

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