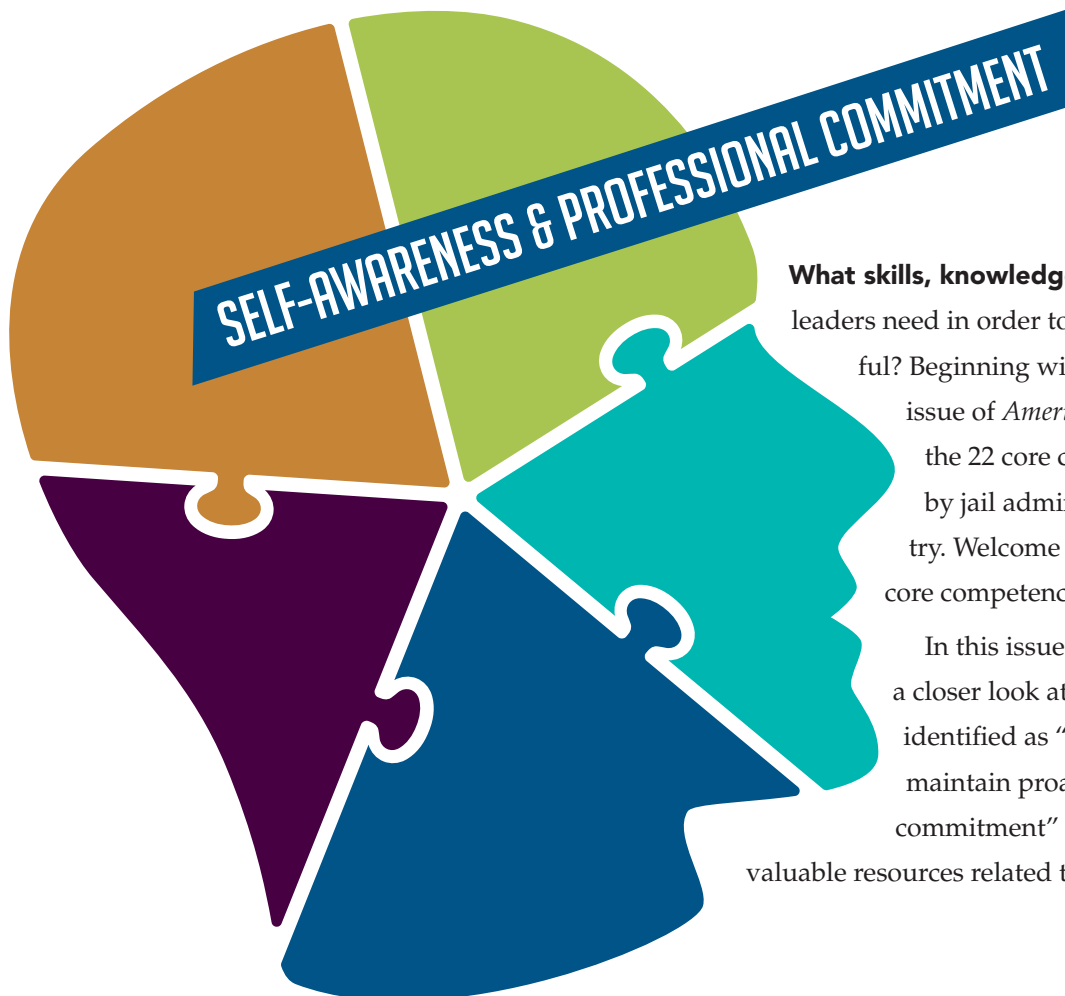


Core Competencies **AND** Jail Leadership

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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 18th installment on core competencies and jail leadership.

In this issue of *American Jails*, we take a closer look at the core competency identified as “enhance self-awareness; maintain proactive professional commitment” and recommend several valuable resources related to leadership.

Enhance Self-Awareness and Maintain Proactive Professional Commitment

Description: Identify personal strengths and weaknesses, and make use of professional resources (e.g., technical assistance, research reports, professional organizations, peer reviews, networking, etc.).

Rationale: Before anyone can effectively lead others, he or she must have sufficient insight into his or her own strengths and weaknesses, especially in terms of how they potentially impact staff. Leaders must be willing to take an objective and in-depth look at themselves and be willing to change.

Knowledge of:

- Theories of human behavior; organizational dynamics.
- One's own strengths and weaknesses.
- How to engage in personal professional development.

Skills to:

- Obtain and use objective feedback about your leadership from peers and subordinates.
- Engage in introspection and self-insight; knowing yourself.
- Be able to see yourself and your actions from the perspective of others.
- Build on personal strengths and address weaknesses.
- Assess personal biases.
- Maintain personal integrity.
- Actively engage in self-improvement.
- Keep current with changes in the field.
- Network with peers, stakeholders, community.

Abilities to:

- Be insightful about personal strengths and weaknesses.
- Analyze personal behavior.
- Personally change; commit to grow.

- Avoid behaving defensively.
- Participate in activities that enhance self-awareness.
- Possess the courage to admit being wrong.
- Adhere to values.
- Maintain humility.

You Are the One in Charge of Your Career

Core Competency 10 is about *you* as a member of the corrections profession. The criminal justice system is built upon the dedication, compassion, skills, knowledge, and integrity of thousands of individuals who work alongside us every day. Yet, it only takes the misdeeds of a handful of our colleagues to cast a bad light on each of us. However unfair, the wrong actions of one or two people can result in allegations of misconduct and outright corruption—with the potential to be splashed nationally across our 24/7 news engines.

Therefore, what are your obligations to the profession? This article explores:

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.

“DO YOU CARE ENOUGH TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE VIEWS ABOUT YOUR LEADERSHIP?”

- Professional strengths and weaknesses—how to identify these and what to do about them.
- Personal biases you bring to work each day.
- Self-improvement activities.
- Personal integrity and how to keep it.
- A road map to achieving your goals.

Striving to be a better professional and meeting your personal goals doesn't happen by accident, but if you look away for just a second—or if you fail to define your personal boundaries—your integrity can disappear in that same second. Helping you to take charge of your career is the objective of this article.

My Professional Strengths and Weaknesses

This is *not* about annual performance appraisals. Most of the core competencies already discussed in *American Jails* are not about how knowledgeable you are in jail operations, but about your *leadership* abilities. (For a complete listing of the 17 core competencies published in *American Jails*, visit <http://cipp.org/index1.html>.)

How does your leadership—objectively—compare to the requirements of each competency? What is your leadership IQ?

No one is looking over your shoulder as you assess your personal strengths and weaknesses; this exercise starts and ends with you. If you want to involve others, then do so. However, don't solicit input only from those who will tell you what you want to hear. Some organizations use “360” evaluations, in which subordinates, peers, and supervisors rate you on how well you are per-

forming your job and your contributions to the organization. The results of a 360 evaluation can be brutal for your self-esteem, but compelling in terms of giving you a road map of where you need to improve. Even if you aren't receiving a formal 360 evaluation, you receive feedback hourly. The questions are: Do you pay attention? Do you care enough to consider alternative views about your leadership? Are you growing?

We are assuming you know jail operations; however, we want to urge you to explore how well you lead. For one of the best sources to assess your leadership abilities, we highly recommend *The Leadership Challenge* by James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2017). (This is one resource that needs to be in your bookcase and can serve as a source of daily inspiration.) The practices in the book that have proved effective for corrections leaders are:

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart

While only intended to provide a very cursory review of this essential leadership book, we highlight the questions you need to ask yourself.

Model the Way. “...to be the most effective, every leader must learn to find the voice that represents who he or she is.”

- What do you stand for? Have you clarified your personal values—for the workplace and beyond?
- Can your subordinates identify your values and beliefs?
- Do your daily deeds match what you preach?

- Are you the example of how to lead, even on tough days?
- Have you asked for feedback? And did you take any of the input?

Inspire a Shared Vision. “People commit to causes, not to plans.”

- Do you have a vision of where your organization is [or should be] headed—one that is vivid and capable of moving people to action?
- Do you look forward and not in the rear-view mirror?
- Do you know the organization's common ideals, and are you aligned with those?
- Even if you are not able to influence the organization, are you inspiring those on your team, shift, or bureau?
- Do you believe in the vision for the future? If you don't believe, people will not be inclined to join you.

Challenge the Process. “Change is the work of leaders. It's what they do.”

- Identify the last time you were the leader of or part of a change initiative in your organization?
- Why was it a success and what were the obstacles?
- Are you part of the communication continuum in your organization?
- Do you ask “why” and then seek to understand the answer?
- Are you resilient in the face of barriers?
- Do you take calculated risks to improve operations, or are you mired in the consequences of errors?

Enable Others to Act. “Leaders develop in others the competence, as well as the confidence, to act and to excel.”

- Are you working to make those around you the next leaders of your organization?
- Do you assure that those around you are part of the collaborative process to bring about change, provide tools, and promote individual growth?
- Is there an environment of accountability aimed at success, rather than blame?
- Does your feedback to colleagues result in positive vibes and noticeable changes in behaviors?
- What do you do to foster a climate of respect among your colleagues?

Encourage the Heart. Leaders “make people feel like heroes.”

- How many times a day do you, genuinely, thank those who contribute to the mission of the organization?
- How have you contributed to the self-confidence of those on whom you count to get the work done?
- Have you focused on identifying the strengths and challenges of subordinates with an eye toward helping them improve?



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- Is your passion for what you do seen by those around you?
- Do you celebrate the small and large accomplishments of those around you?

This “yes and no” quiz from Kouzes’ and Posner’s book on leadership is intended to urge you to think beyond the performance appraisal ratings of your job knowledge to answering the question of *how well you lead*. Consider writing a summary of what you want to accomplish in your leadership journey over the year based on your responses. Create a list for how you plan to improve.

Professional Development: Assessing Personal Challenges

As leaders, we experience adversity not only in our personal lives, but also in our work lives. At mid-career, we may have been written up several times, faced or served a suspension, or been required to defend ourselves in an internal affairs complaint. There is nothing worse than feeling isolated, hopeless, and without motivation. These circumstances can deflate our sense of motivation and steer us into a jaded or anti-progressive style of management. After one of these adverse experiences, those who are great leaders step back and reassess their commitment to themselves, the agency, and the community they serve.

Maturity is responding appropriately to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. This is also the key to successfully navigating the tough times—including what you see as unfairness to you or your colleagues, favoritism in the workplace, or even corruption. As General Colin Powell (2014) wrote, “Get mad, and get over it.” Maturity requires that we assess our own biases and learn how to improve rather than focus on being treated differently.

As leaders, we must always welcome feedback and criticism, and allow others to tell us about ourselves without behaving defensively. We need to carefully note the patterns of our behavior and listen to the observations of others without judging their motives. A supervisor once told me that if you listen enough, even the devil may give you good information. What I have found is that most people instinctively defend themselves rather than listen for their own self-improvement.

There are many ways we can choose to respond in adverse circumstances: silence, tantrums, complaining, retaliation, or sabotage. We must ask ourselves, “What are we really trying to accomplish?” and “What will be the outcome?” Maintaining a professional commitment and responding with maturity sometimes results in sacrificing a short-term loss for a long-term gain.

You Are in Charge of Your Self-Improvement

How do we as leaders overcome obstacles to ensure that we maintain a proactive professional commitment?

This is when the term “proactive” really takes meaning.

Finish your formal education.

Consider pursuing post-graduate education, even if it’s not directly related to corrections. By investing in yourself, you are adding value to you and your organization. There are few excuses in today’s world for not obtaining a degree, especially given the opportunities for online education from credible institutions of higher learning. By continuing your education, you give credibility to yourself by demonstrating your commitment to self-improvement and showing that you’re setting the groundwork for your future.

Education also provides you with different perspectives and expands your world to the bigger picture. Another bonus of pursuing your educational goals is networking and collaborating with your peers. A word to the wise: Formal education is not the gatekeeper to good and effective leadership, nor does it mean that you are smarter than everyone else. Having a lot of letters after your name is meaningless if you don’t have the skills, knowledge, and abilities to be a good leader.

Use the self-help resources available on the internet. With an internet search, we can find the most current resources that will provide insight into ourselves and give us ideas for self-improvement. The articles on the core competencies in *American Jails* include suggestions for relevant materials to read.

Set specific goals. Identify readings, articles, and books that are about leadership, then make a list and commit to reading one a month. Start a reading group with interested peers. Push each other. If you are stagnant in your professional world, you are in effect moving backward.

Solicit feedback. There are several thoughts to keep in mind about the

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psychological implications of criticisms (Garner, 2010). Criticism can:

- Challenge our competency.
- Impact our self-esteem.
- Question our character.
- Threaten our reputation.
- Cause us to retreat.
- Elicit defensiveness.

Criticism is uncomfortable; however, if we appraise it on its merits rather than on emotion, it can be one of a leader’s most useful tools. The 360 evaluation, mentioned earlier in this article, provides a system or process in which employees receive confidential, anonymous feedback from the people who work above them and below them in the organization.

Treat yourself well. What we read about stress and motivation appears to come back to two self-maintenance basics: *exercise* and treating yourself as you would treat a family member! Aerobic exercise provides a great escape, and with the right music in your ears, duration may be relative. Not only does exercise keep your heart strong, but your body stays in shape—and once the endorphins get flowing, it helps you maintain a positive attitude. There are plenty of apps for your phone that can track your progress and get you off the couch (not that correctional officers need that!). And if none of these resources is available in your agency (an onsite gym or a wellness program), why not be the leader that starts one of these initiatives?

Denise Austin (2013) writes in her book: “Research shows that incentives such as onsite gyms, work/life balance programs, stress management classes, mindfulness training, and nutrition coaching promote cognitive health and produce vibrant workplaces and thriving employees. At least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise two or three times per week, plus some strength training, will provide a cognitive benefit.”

Bloom where you are planted.

There is an entire chapter in Colin Powell’s book, *It Worked for Me: In Life and Leadership*, dedicated to doing your best. “Always do your best, someone is watching,” writes Gen. Powell. He often was assigned jobs that he didn’t like, but always performed his best and remained loyal to his superiors and the mission (Powell, 2014).

Ask for challenges. We should avoid personal complacency at all costs! Once our motivation and commitment are lost, we no longer strive to improve, and therefore we get comfortable and stagnant. When this happens, try a new assignment such as booking or inmate transport.

In the corrections profession, there are so many different opportunities to learn. If your agency has multiple facilities, transfer to a different facility. You may find a new sense of rejuvenation in yourself and can provide the agency with a new and fresh eye in a different area. If your agency values leadership, this

Leader's Library

Constructing Effective Criticism

Randy Garner
Prescient Publishing (2011)

It Worked for Me: In Life and Leadership

Colin Powell
Harper Collins Publishers
(2012)

The Leadership Challenge

James Kouzes and Barry Posner
Jossey-Bates (2012)

is a great opportunity to give your input and improve your agency. Remember, we are still talking about enhancing self-awareness and maintaining a proactive professional commitment.

Find a mentor. Identify a respected peer who can keep you on track with your professionalism and leadership journey. Give that person permission to nag you, push you, critique you, and counsel you.

Join. Find a local or national organization that can use your gifts and talents, as well as give you an opportunity for growth in return. This is the way to role model community involvement for those around you, and to give you rewards that have more than monetary value—service.

Personal and Professional Integrity

If you are currently struggling with how to define and maintain your personal and professional integrity, there is not much advice we can offer you. By now, your moral compass should already be well-defined (Model the Way). You should not be conflicted about your role in fairness, respect, and assuring impartiality in the conduct of your duties. Nor should you be conflicted about holding yourself and your peers to the requirements of the job.

For example, you should not be part of the wall of silence.

In politically charged organizations, the boundaries between what is right and what is expedient may be blurry. You must define in your own mind what you will and will not do, and stick to your values. There may be a real cost for honoring what you know to be right versus what the people around you do, don't do, or cover up. This is most likely worn-out advice: If you can't justify your actions to your grandmother or mother, then why are you doing it?

Regarding their interactions with inmates, jails need to review the emerging strategies in law enforcement that address "bias-free policing" and "implicit bias." According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "implicit bias" describes the automatic association people make between groups of people and stereotypes about those groups. This strategy to address bias in the justice system—driven by serious and damaging confrontations in our communities and focusing on the need for fair and impartial interactions by citizens and representatives of the justice system—may soon be coming to your jail. (For example, see Fair and Impartial Policing at www.fairimpartialpolicing.com, and the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice at <https://trustandjustice.org/resources/intervention/implicit-bias>.)

Consider the jail as another neighborhood in your county or city, then evaluate how interaction with inmates by the jail staff has implications not only for security inside the walls, but for the inmate's future interactions with citizens and law enforcement representatives outside the jail. Check your own biases about inmates and staff.

Road Map to Achieving Your Goals

Now that we have identified the barriers, biases, strengths and weaknesses, where do you go from here? The first step is to

make a self-improvement plan that acknowledges your strengths and weaknesses, and then commits you to making changes or adjustments in your professional life.

Find a mentor—someone whom you respect to give you guidance and advice, and who will make sure you stay on course. Choose a mentor who is genuinely honest and will provide the feedback to help you grow. And then read, study, understand, and incorporate into your professional work the 22 core competencies identified by jail leaders as the critical skills, knowledge, and abilities to be an effective leader. ■

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