

# CORRECTIONS OFFICER BOOKLET



# GUARDIAN WITHIN THE WALLS



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**MY FATHER** died when he was in prison for child molestation. Before he died, I was able to go to the hospital's prison ward. My father had liver cancer, so his body had bloated while the shackles were on his wrists and ankles. There were open red wounds where the shackles had been. I was told that child molesters were treated as less than human by both correctional officers and inmates. They were subject to beatings and isolation. But my father was still my father to me.

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE PROTECTOR

Alone in the room with the officer, my father in a coma, I stood trembling, sobbing. I couldn't stop shaking. The officer stood in the corner, stoic, formal. I could sense he was watching me. I looked up. I watched him struggle for a moment. He clearly wanted to say something, but he was bound by something invisible, something I discovered was a protocol that blocked his humanity—a protocol that his willingness to break changed the course of the entire experience for me.

"He was a good man," the correctional officer said, looking at my father. My eyes widened. More tears poured. No one, much less a correctional officer, could say that about him after what he had been convicted of. I froze in disbelief as the officer continued, "I asked for this detail. He's funny. As bad as it is in there, he would always try to make me laugh. We became as close as you can be in that situation." For one moment, the officer let me see that his heart was breaking too. He let me see that he too was hurting.

In that place of aloneness, because of what that man did, we were not alone. My guess is that the officer was saving himself as well on that day. All cruelty begins with withheld love. He did the equation and chose to do what was honorable, rather than what was right. Thanks to him, my father died with dignity, something every human deserves, the lack of which is a contagion that fosters the sickness that creates the need for the hospitals we call prisons in the first place.

Not only the incarcerated are in prison. Many spend their lives inside a prison without bars, pleasing others, subverting their dreams and desires. And what about those people who are so honorable, they willingly go into institutions and put their lives on the line in order to provide safety for society in general?

Recognizing that reality is made up of relationships, and understanding that in a prison it isn't only the inmates but also the correctional officers who experience the realities of incarceration, we want to build freedom for everyone in the prison system and we want to do this by honoring the noble heart of the protectors. We want to do this by being honest, and by admitting that as a culture we have abandoned the correctional officers as well as the prisoners.

I want to say to the correctional officers, “Because you are so strong and stoic in your job, we have made assumptions and failed to lift your burden. Who will make you feel safe while you ensure that we feel safe? Who will pay attention to the burden and the stress you carry in the name of the kind of duty that goes beyond what humans are meant to hold alone? Who tends to your humanity, so that our world can become a more humane place?”

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE PROTECTOR

I want to add that, for this reason, I feel you, the beating heart that lies beneath the body armor. I want to give back what that one correctional officer gave to me and to my father.

In a world of smartphone videos, we are now aware of what can happen when our guardians are overburdened, when they have to dismiss their own humanity, their own heartbreak at what they witness. Pressure blows and people are harmed, and now those acts mark an entire class of protectors.

When what we do to the incarcerated is done to you, where an incident, rather than marking the failure of a culture to carry the burden together, has us turn against you instead, we abandon our soldier on the field. We abandon you. How, then, are any of us—and yes, you must be included in this—to feel safe?

You are forced to abandon your humanity in order to protect, not for your own safety and good, but because people who abandon their humanity see the world with a cold heart. Problems occur and mistakes are made. This is the difficulty with America’s prison system. You did not cause it and you can’t control it. The system has become a punishment, where change is compelled and behavior is driven underground, only to reappear when no one is watching.

We want to change this. We want human beings in the prison system to uncover the desire to participate and contribute to society, to join, to become part of an imperative that lies in our DNA as human beings. But first we need to recognize the need to show you how you are capable of doing this, then provide you with the needed resources to achieve such a purpose. ■

“...people who abandon their humanity  
see the world with a cold heart.”



## OUR MISSION

Transforming how we perceive our experiences changes everything. You can view your work as overseeing “housed” offenders, or you can see the prison wire as the walls of a monastery where human beings are sent to change. We want to reclaim the prison environment and, without upsetting the balance, only to weave in these practices so that prison may become a new type of monastery.

Since time immemorial, we have known that contemplation, self-examination, and self-inquiry are the tools for the spiritual health of the individual. We have known that spiritual health is the means to healthy behavior and expression. Yet we have failed to make available the tools for self-inquiry to certain populations. The original intent of the penitentiary was just this, an environment where a person contemplated the nature of their actions and concluded they desired change. This is how you achieve sustainable, self-accountable transformation.

In this spirit, the original keepers of the penitentiary—the correctional officers, the support staff—were charged with maintaining this sacred space of penance. For anyone who believes in the possibility of redemption, there is no higher or more noble role than this.

This program aims to recover this original intent that has been lost not just in the system, but in the individuals like you who maintain the system. Because of what you face every single day, the original driving force that wanted to help, that wanted to see a better world before you witnessed the ugliness first-hand, might be lost. You were subjected to experiences that pushed you beyond what a human nervous system can take. You were then abandoned when you proved mortal.

This program is our thank you and our apology for what we left you to hold. ■

## WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

Our experience is that our life's purpose and our consciousness work together. We are all here to make our unique contribution to society. We say "consciousness," because there is a way of living that's "in your life" and a way of living that's "out of your life." When a person meditates, they can lose track of their breath. Or while driving, we can lose track of the road. So it is in life also. We can be living, though not on track.

The good news is that there is a way for our purpose and our consciousness to both be on track anywhere, anytime. This is never dependent on who we are with, our circumstances, or where we live.

Living "in your life" is living with a purpose. It means we are emotionally available. We live in an interchange with the people around us, where we are enriched by our environment as we also enrich our environment. Life deepens over time. Living "out of our life" looks like denial, self-consciousness, distraction, and refusing to digest the emotional content of our life. "In" is heaven, whereas "out" is hell.

"In" can happen working in a jail or prison, just as easily as "out" can happen in a cathedral. Our environment doesn't dictate our life.

True healing in the world will arise not from winning any battle against an enemy, but rather from a group of people who agree to live their lives together. ■

### *One Acre of Land*

To paraphrase writer Anne Lamott, imagine that every newborn is given an acre of land. This acre is your soul. It represents what you will grow and nurture in your life. You can grow what you love, such as tomatoes, watermelons, spinach, and apples. Or you can allow weeds to choke out the body-building foods, leaving you nothing but bitter leaves and poisonous berries.

## PRACTICES FOR THE MIND & BODY

There is a gate on one side of your acre. You get to choose who is able to enter the gate and who must stay out. That is a huge part of life. Who are you letting inside? Once in, what do they do? Are they creators or destroyers? This choice is as important as the plants you put in your dirt.

Tend your acre with great care. Touch the soil with your hands. Is it hydrated? Is it well-tilled? Does it feel dry and deserted? Either way, this is your plot. You only have one. Value, self-satisfaction, and purpose grow from this acre. In the end, that is what you cultivate.

We hope this program helps you cultivate what nourishes you, what helps you heal and grow with the dignity and self-respect you deserve.

### *How to Work Your Acre*

The gift of a constant morning practice is to create a centered body, mind, soul, and spirit from which to go forth and meet each day. This practice begins with yoga, followed by writing a Daily Journal, and finally meditation.

### *Yoga*

Said Jason Crandell, “The nature of yoga is to shine the light of awareness into the darkest corners of the body.”

The main thing about yoga is to remember to listen to your body above all else. If something is painful, ease up. If something feels great and you want to go deeper, feel free. The body often opens when we relax and constricts when we push.

One round of Sun Salutations is a series of twelve yoga poses that flow together in coordination with the breath. Their purpose is to warm up the body before practicing individual poses. Beginning students typically take ten minutes to do three rounds of Sun Salutations, which leaves ten minutes for relaxation at the end. The final relaxation is as important as the Sun Salutations. The instructions for performing the Sun Salutations are included in Appendix 1.



## Daily Journal

After performing the Sun Salutations, take out a pad of paper and spend twenty minutes writing. Since what you write is for you and you alone, nothing is off limits. This is the place where you begin to meet yourself. This is a conversation that will continue your entire life. This is you speaking to your soul, and your soul speaking back to you.

## PRACTICES FOR THE MIND & BODY

The practice of writing is not about receiving guidance from “on high,” but about sinking in, encountering the animal inside yourself. Let the writing guide you as you express what your inner being needs to say to you.

As you sit down to write, ideas, emotions, and memories will come to you seemingly from nowhere. Write them all down. As your inner castle forms, its shape become clearer. Each day when you take up your writing, you meet your soul again in a never-ending conversation. As your journey goes deeper, you can revisit your younger “soul self” and feel how far you’ve come, as well as how far you’d like to go.

Your one acre of land, your soul, the very dirt that makes you who you are, is turned over and aerated each day as you write your inventory. In this way, you see and more importantly feel yourself, your energy, your desires, your dreams. You can care for the abandoned spaces within yourself and release what no longer serves you. Day by day, you will move toward unconditional freedom, no matter the circumstances in which you find yourself.

On the following pages are different soul exercises that will help you mine the gold inside yourself. You can choose to use some and not others. This is about what is most effective for you. Sit down and start with this simple question, “What wants to be heard and what wants to be said?” ■

### *The Way It Is*

There’s a thread you follow. It goes among  
Things that change. But it doesn’t change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can’t get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
Or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding.  
You don’t ever let go of the thread.

– William Stafford



# How to Hear Your Soul

### **1. Dreams**

A dream can be tricky, but the key is to pay attention to the different types of dreams you have. Some have messages, lessons, memories, premonitions, themes, or abstractions, and others may be a random expression of your subconscious. The more you pay attention, the more interesting you will find them.

If you relive a certain memory, note it and how it may change in your mind as you dream it. Repetitive dreams of falling often represent fear. Dreams of forgetting to wear clothes can represent insecurity. If you have a feeling upon waking, note that as well.

### **2. Automatic Writing**

According to Aletheia Luna, automatic writing is “the practice of writing words in a trance-like state that originates from outside conscious awareness.”

She explains, “The whole purpose of automatic writing is to access guidance from your soul, especially if you struggle to hear it in daily life.”

Sit comfortably with your pen and paper. Your eyes can be open or closed, whichever helps you focus. Some days stories will push up through your pen, as will thoughts and feelings you may or may not know you harbored. Ask a question of the universe or ask for help. If this doesn't work for you the first time, try it again.

### **3. Body Sensations**

It may seem that body pain and pleasure are circumstantial experiences. That's a limited view of the body and its relationship to the soul. In truth, your body's feelings often reflect your psyche's needs, as do sensations in the body. Because your body contains both good and uncomfortable memories and secrets, feelings in the body are meant to alert you to the deeper state of your being. Awareness about your body is a wake-up call to regain contact with the inner self and reach beyond your self-consciousness toward a seamless immersion in the purpose of your life.

Say you're reading a book you love, such that there is no space between you and the story. When you are focused on the story, the world falls away and you are at one with the experience. That's what you aim for, being in the zone, and living in a state where your insides match your outsides. You want to be where the story and the reader become one.

When do you last remember having no sense of time? Perhaps you were involved in a story or a conversation. Perhaps you were writing or drawing. Write about what feels timeless to you.

## How to Hear Your Soul

### 4. Community Reflection

Sometimes it's hard to see ourselves clearly, so it helps to surround ourselves with people we trust who can remind us of who we really are and are able to help interpret our experiences when we are bogged down and can't see our way forward.

The Himba tribe of southern Africa has a unique method of reminding tribe members of who they are. They sing the person's song back to them. The Himba are one of the few tribes who count the birthdate of a child not from the day they are born or conceived, but the day the mother decides to have the child.

The mother goes off and sits under a tree by herself, listening until she can hear the song of the child who wants to come. And after she's heard the song of this child, she comes back to the man who will be the child's father and teaches him the song. When they make love to physically conceive the child, they sing the song of the child as a way of inviting him or her into the world.

When she becomes pregnant, the mother teaches that child's song to the midwives and the old women of the village, so that when the child is born, the old women and the family gather around the child and sing their song to welcome them. As the child grows up, other villagers are taught the child's song. If the child falls, or gets hurt, someone picks them up and sings them their song. When the child does something wonderful or passes through the rites of puberty, the people of the village honor the child by singing their song.

One other occasion calls for the "child's song" to be sung. If a tribesman or tribeswoman commits a crime or something that is against the Himba social norms, the villagers call them into the center of the village and the community forms a circle around them. Then they sing their birth song to them.

The Himba views this moment as a correction, not as a punishment, but as love and remembrance of identity. For when you recognize your own song, you have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another. In marriage, the songs of the man and the woman are sung together. And finally, when the Himba tribesman or tribeswoman is lying in their bed, ready to die, all the villagers who know their song come and sing for the last time that person's song.

Do you have a song? What is it? How does it tell us who you are? Does your friend have a song? What is it? Have you ever sung each other's song by way of greeting?

# How to Hear Your Soul

### **5. Stress**

“Feeling stressed” is a catch-all term that means nothing except that you cannot express how and what you feel. You are imprisoned by walls of anger and exhaustion. Your soul is on lockdown and you feel almost nothing but a free-floating unsourced anger. Your physical being is screaming at you, and if you don’t listen, injury to your body, mind, and spirit will result. One of the reasons for Morning Practice is that it creates a sense of relaxation and peace to start your day. It’s like money in the bank for when stress hits.

If you feel “stressed,” what exactly are the feelings? What do you believe to be the underlying reason? Write about this.

### **6. Writing and Drawing**

Writing and drawing are essential tools in exploring the soul. We dive down and allow what comes to us to emerge, then we rise refreshed, rejuvenated, and renewed. Renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung asked his patients to make their own books, drawing, journaling, and scribbling down ideas and random thoughts. A person might think of their mother as The Destroyer or The Rescuer, while the father might be The Punisher or The Runner.

### **7. Visions During Meditation**

Meditating is a powerful way to experience what has been referred to as the mystical experience. One common mystical experience involves tuning into visions or spontaneous names while we are meditating. During meditation, an entire scene drops into our mind, seemingly out of nowhere, or we might hear words or names.

Jung said, “I should advise you to put it all down as beautifully as you can. It will seem as if you were making the visions banal—but then you need to do that—then you are freed from the power of them... Then when these things are in some precious book you can go to the book and turn over the pages and for you it will be your church—your cathedral—the silent places of your spirit where you will find renewal. If anyone tells you that it is morbid or neurotic and you listen to them—then you will lose your soul—for in that book is your soul.” (Analysis Notebooks, C. G. Jung, quoted in *The Red Book, Liber Novus*.)

Mother Teresa understood this. She said, “God speaks in the silence of the heart, and we listen. And then we speak to God from the fullness of our heart and God listens. And this listening and this speaking is what prayer is meant to be.” When Mother Teresa prayed, she spoke and she listened.

### **8. Desire**

Desires are your soul speaking to you, telling you what it wants. You may crave intimacy or chocolate cake. Desires in and of themselves are beyond “good” and “bad.” They just are. Accepting you have a desire is not the same as acting on it. Only you know what’s good or bad for your soul. It’s your acre of land, remember?

If you feel a specific desire, write about it. “If it’ll keep my heart soft,” said Warsan Shire, “break my heart every day.” Don’t be afraid to write whatever comes to you. ■

## MEDITATION

As great a gift as it is to be able to think as human beings do, thinking alone cannot make a person whole. In truth, thinking often gets in the way of knowing who we truly are. At its worst, thinking can feel like sheer torture.

To counteract this, long ago people developed the skill of meditation. As far as we know, meditation has been practiced for at least two 2500 years. The simplest reason to meditate is that sometimes we need a break from our thoughts. No matter how hard we try, many of us just can't just stop thinking. Our thoughts can't be willed away any more than we can will away breathing.

Instead of trying to quiet our thoughts, meditation involves learning to watch our thoughts without getting ourselves tangled up in them. By sitting quietly, breathing, and simply observing, when we are ready a change occur. It may start slowly as the river of thoughts slows. Then it may become clearer that while we have been watching the mud, the rocks, and the debris wash by, we have been missing something else in the stream of thoughts that can only be seen as the waters become calm. It glitters like gold at the bottom of the stream. Meditation is a way of help us see clearly that the gold in the river is our true self.

John Tarrant explained, "Meditation does not itself accomplish the tasks of life but provides spaciousness, bringing the great background near, so that whatever we do, rising in the quiet, has force and beauty. In meditation, we take time, sit down, watch, while the silence accumulates—which is how the spirit gathers to a vessel the soul has prepared.

If you can't find a quiet place to watch as the silence accumulates, find the quietest place you

can. Sit on a chair with your feet flat on the floor, or get a pillow and find a place on the floor or even on a bed where you can sit cross-legged. Once you're sitting, you probably want to close your eyes so you won't be distracted.

Observe what's really happening with your body, not what you think should be happening. Turn your attention to your breathing. You don't have to do anything about it, just watch it. Can you watch your breath without trying to change it in any way at all? It may change itself, but see if you can watch for that to happen.

This is the soft wild animal of yourself you are watching. Keep watching your breath. To keep the thinking part of yourself occupied, you might try counting your breath from one to ten. That's all. You reach ten and start over. Sometimes this is enough to satisfy your thinking mind. Sometimes you'll find it wanders off somewhere else and you lose track of the breath you were counting. Just start over. Try to sit for ten minutes at first.

You may find this relaxing, or you may find it dull as dirt. If you make a firm decision to keep sitting, no matter what your thoughts say, you may find at some point that you're learning to grow taller and quieter inside. You may sense that your mind is like one of those little snow globes. As you sit, it will be like watching the snow settle to the floor.

When the ten minutes becomes easier, increase your sitting to fifteen minutes. When that becomes comfortable, try sitting twenty minutes. Don't skip straight to fifteen or twenty minutes. You want to notice the differences along the way.

***The gold is inside. You are reaching down to your authentic self. ■***

In order to understand the psychological challenges a correctional officer faces, we need to take a look at the human psyche and how it causes us to react, respond, and behave when it's out of equilibrium.

To be an effective correctional officer is only possible to the degree that we know ourselves. It's about whether we've come to terms with our tendency to react to people and have discovered a more mature sense of ourselves.

We all share a part of our brain with reptiles. This is the part of us that reacts without thinking. We react like alligators, crocodiles, and snakes when they are disturbed. Our reactions aren't who we are. We are so much more!

Beneath our reactive exterior lies our essence, the core of who we are, or what's sometimes referred to as our soul or spirit. To the degree that we know who we are in our inner being, we become capable of mature behavior even when provoked or are in a distressing situation. We learn to control our reptilian reactions. As a correctional officer, this allows you to connect with those you officer in a meaningful and redemptive way.

To be good at any job, especially one where in which you have been entrusted with guarding those who are incarcerated, requires that you become a person you have never been, your authentic self.

Let's be clear what we mean when we speak of an authentic self. We're talking about something much deeper than pop culture has in mind when it insists "I gotta be me." When people assert "I gotta be me," they may not be in touch with their deeper self at all. The "me" they are referring to is no more substantial than the way they have learned to think of themselves, the way they picture yourself, the way they learned to feel about themselves while growing up. It's a shallow sense of self that follows the crowd and the latest fad. Or it may do just the opposite, forcefully asserting its "independence," which isn't being true to themselves at all. It's just a declaration of resistance to what someone expects.

Being ourselves is a question of being the wonderful, joyous, peaceful person we are at our core, which has mostly been hidden by all of our reactive behavior. Our true self encompasses more than our genes, more than the person our family groomed us to be, and more than the kind of individual society shaped us to be. It's the person we are when all the spokes of our daily lives connect to the hub at our center—the person behind the masks, behind the facade we've each learned to present to the world as if that facade is who we really are. Our true self is who we are when we are being real, open, and above board.

## THE HUMAN PSYCHE

Most people want to improve their self-image. Our goal is to have a good self-image instead of a poor one. But do you realize that our self-image isn't who we really are? It's an identity we borrowed from others to cover up the fact we don't know who we really are.

A good self-image isn't any more authentic than a poor self-image. It's simply a more comfortable mask. It may enable us to become successful in our work, raise a family, and be well respected in the community. But it also means that we never really connect.

Like most of society, many officers borrow their identity from others, rarely being truly who they are. How about you? Are you actually the person you think of yourself as? When you relate to prisoners, are you truly who you are? Or do you put on the "front" of the tough correctional officer?

Who we really are may be quite different from how we've lived our life so far. When what we do is different from what we really want to do, or what we say doesn't line up with how we actually feel, we are bound to feel fragmented. Life lacks a focus that's heartfelt, and the people around us quickly pick up on this, those we guard in particular.

On the other hand, when our whole being works together in a manner that's true to every part of us, we feel in sync. We are at peace with ourselves. Everything about our lives resonates. Our authentic self is who we are when we aren't thinking about ourselves but are simply spontaneously being ourselves. There's a sense of flow to our lives. People can feel the difference, just like a horse can spot a nervous rider before the individual ever mounts the swaddle.

As correctional officers, growing up with a self-image as an identity doesn't equip a person to connect with people they serve. You may do your job, but you can't touch a prisoner's soul because your own soul remains in embryo form. If you hope to bring change to the lives of those you guard, it will come from discovering your own center. You will become a truly rehabilitative correctional officer as you model what it means to live from your own essence.

At this point, you may be wondering how you can find your true self. I suggest this is the wrong question. We don't actually have to find anything. What's needed is to pay attention to what we already sense deep within ourselves. This book provides the tools for doing this. ■

### *Integration Exercises*

1. What called you to be a corrections officer?
2. What does duty mean to you?
3. What about being a corrections officer is fulfilling for you?
4. What about being a corrections officer is hard?
5. What do you serve?



## THE GUARDIAN OF THE PSYCHE: SUPEREGO

When our ego, the false sense of self we grew up with is fighting who we are at our core, we feel tormented on the inside, which leads to being aggressive toward those we are around each day. The ego, our false self, is the part that does drugs, yells, kicks the cat, or eat the whole pie to suppress what we really feel. This aspect of ourselves is also projected onto women and people of color. We become like the bully who whispers insults on the playground and then, when the other kid finally lashes out, acts innocent while the other is in trouble. This is all part of the “show” our ego puts on to hide our real self.

When we ask our correctional officers to operate only from the fortified ego all day long, we put them in a precarious position that leads to imbalance, exhaustion, and burnout, both emotionally and physically. It also diminishes their capacity to act humanely. Add to this the perpetual state of being watched that is a correctional officer’s world, with cameras everywhere documenting their every move. It’s easy to see how a correctional officer’s humanity becomes compromised.

### *Integration Exercises*

1. Are there parts of your life have you had to tuck away?
2. What is the hardest part of your job?
3. Through the course of your career are there parts of yourself you have forgotten?
4. Where does your sense of duty run into conflict with your humanity?
5. Do you ever find yourself acting strong when you don’t feel strong, and what is that like?
6. Do you ever feel like you can relate to those who are incarcerated?





## THE GUARDIAN OF THE PSYCHE: SUPEREGO

### **The Superego and Fight, Flight, or Freeze Response**

When there is a threat such as a loose hungry tiger, the brain sends an alarm to the whole body. This activates either the flight, fight, or freeze response. The body's systems switch into high gear to help us survive. Among other things, adrenaline is emitted, increasing oxygen in the blood so it's easier for us to address the threat. Although we need the ability to respond to a threat, we were never meant to stay on high alert all of the time.

What we have asked of you, our guardians, requires the ability to respond to a threatening situation. You are required to stay switched on in, so that you are forever in a state of hyper-arousal and hyper-vigilance. Doctors call this "stress," which sounds mild, but it isn't. In fact, it is a killer. Unrelenting stress brings health issues that include heart disease, high blood pressure, and relationship problems. When we are stressed out, the ego says, "Don't be weak and emotional. You have a job to do."

People in a stressed state also feel isolated. They live with an ongoing sense of internal discomfort that causes them to explode easily. The internal atmosphere is so pressurized that something's got to give, so we seek food, alcohol and drugs, or end up getting angry. Therapy, exercise, meditation, and support groups are so essential in dissipating this pent-up energy.

We all naturally wish to connect with others and enjoy life. Society asks our guardians to live in a

way that requires them to turn away from the other aspects of living. We ask this of all our protectors, including soldiers and often the police. Our world requires such individuals to be "hard" for a certain number of hours a day, then expects us to shutter this aspect of ourselves and go home to a normal life.

We call this compartmentalization, which is a defense mechanism to protect us against the mental dissonance that comes with going from a violent world to a peaceful one. To make sense of the radical line that divides your work and personal life, notice whether you set up a wall between the two, never bringing your whole self to any aspect of your life whether at work or in your home. Who an officer is on the job can quickly become the way the person is the rest of the time.

When you are on high alert all the time, who protects you from the stress this generates? How do you protect the parts of yourself that you may have had to turn away from?

### *Integration Exercises*

1. How do you cope with being on high alert for so much of your life?
2. Who have you become, and are you happy with this person?
3. When do you let your guard down?
4. Do you feel emotionally fulfilled?
5. Who truly knows you?
6. Of those who know you best, what would they say about you?

## THE GUARDIAN OF THE PSYCHE: SUPEREGO

### Restoring Balance and the Locus of Control

It is easy to confuse control with caring for someone. There is a fine line between supervising others and letting this become an ego-driven act that doesn't serve the people who are under your protection.

Many of us have a hard time detaching from our need to control. We are unused to giving others the gift of being themselves, of having their own dignity and the ability to control their own actions. We see our role as an officer. Without this, we believe we will lack any sort of identity.

On the other hand, we experience cognitive dissonance because what we are doing isn't working, yet we keep doing it, thinking perhaps it will result in a different outcome. To surrender control implies defeat, weakness, failure.

Surrendering control is none of those things and can free us to be more humane and compassionate to ourselves and others. Once we understand that by repeatedly attempting to control others, we deprive them of the ability to learn to control themselves, we realize we are enabling and harming, stripping both ourselves as officers and the prisoners of their dignity and autonomy. We don't help when we impose our self onto others, each of whom has their own self.

We may develop coping mechanisms because of this survival-based need to control. This is in direct opposition to what we need to do to recover and live in our humanity, which is to feel what we need to feel. We harden up when we could stay softer and more receptive.

Sometimes we actually look for conflict as a way to feel as though we count. We pick fights because fighting is a devil we know. The chaos may be more comfortable to us than working through the conflict. This results in a constant state of fear, chaos, and ultimately a total lack of control because we never actually face the problem.

Correctional officers deal every day with the need to keep others from harming themselves or harming those around them. We believe that only total control of the prisoners can "fix" them and keep everyone safe and sound. The current prison system is evidence that this doesn't work.

Change can only be found when we stop thinking of "them" as something "we" must control, and instead restore a state of dignity that inspires and restores self-empowerment and self-control to the prisoner, as well as to the correctional officer.

### *Integration Exercises*

1. Do you ever feel out of control, and what's that like?
2. In what ways are you different from those you protect who are incarcerated?
3. In what ways are you the same?
4. What does authority over another's liberty mean to you?
5. Are there ways you feel you are better than those you protect?
6. Are there ways you feel those incarcerated are better than you?

## THE GUARDIAN OF THE PSYCHE: SUPEREGO

### Getting to The Root

We are each set up to play a particular role based on a script passed down to us from our lineage. This script is an aspect of our self-image, our ego. Growing up, children need to be encouraged to be true to themselves. Childhood should be a time for detecting and cultivating our unique interests and discovering within ourselves the resources to develop our potential.

These should also be years for developing the emotional maturity we'll need as an adult. It's important to grow up to be someone who isn't knocked off center by other people, but who can relate as a fully ripened individual. To not be blown back and forth by the statements and actions of others requires a thorough understanding of the script we were handed, as well as a solid sense of ourselves.

When our image of ourselves is largely based on the expectations of others, we see yourself through their eyes. By the time we become an adult, this mental picture of ourselves is ingrained. It's all we have ever known ourselves to be. We think we are being ourselves, when what you are really doing is covering up the fact that we don't honestly know who we are. Our script emanates from how we think of ourselves, the person our ego believes us to be. Where there ought to be an authentic person, there's only a mental picture of the person we think we are supposed to be. In the role of a correctional officer in a prison environment, to have such a script puts us at risk. The correctional officer functioning from a script relates to prisoners not on a one-on-one basis, on a moment-by-moment, but from a fixed concept.

For the correctional officer, our script may include those of Persecutor and Rescuer. These can be called "starting gate" positions on the Victim Triangle. Each role on this triangle (the third being Victim) moves around the three sides in its own unique way. This becomes evident in three possible setup scenarios that culminate in the correctional officer's mentality. All of these are based on core beliefs the correctional officer inherited and played out in their family of origin long before they became employed and then began playing similar roles with the prisoners behind the bars. Prisoners play the roles they learned from childhood back at the correctional officers.

## THE GUARDIAN OF THE PSYCHE: SUPEREGO

### Victim Consciousness

Victimhood snakes through the consciousness of many, squeezing the life out of them. The head of this snake is fear, the fear we won't survive either physically or mentally. As a victim, we can simmer with anger and plot revenge, but remember there is no villain without us, the victim. The good news, and there is a little, is that being a victim implies that within each of us is the potential of a victor.

The Victim Triangle (pictured right) is where the unhappy story of victim consciousness gets played out. Taken from Dr. Stephen Karpman's Drama Triangle, the Victim Triangle explains how our various defense strategies of victim, persecutor, and rescuer interact. We learn that we perpetuate our unhappy story when we believe our thoughts. In so doing, we go round and round on the Victim Triangle.

Each position has its own particular way of seeing and reacting to the world. To help us better understand the three roles, below is a story from the perspective of rescuer, persecutor, and victim.

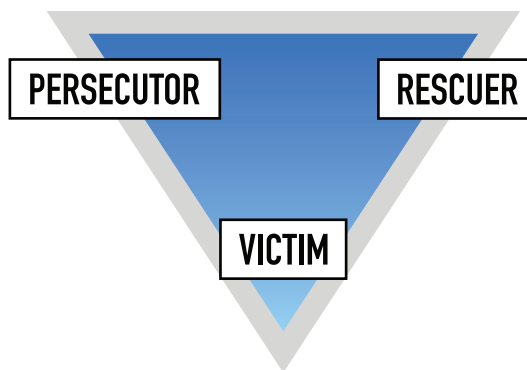


Image credit: Lynne Forrest

## THE GUARDIAN OF THE PSYCHE: SUPEREGO

### Rescuer

John's mother was physically disabled and addicted to prescription drugs. From John's earliest memory, he reported feeling ultimately responsible for his mother. Instead of getting appropriate care from a parent who was concerned for his wellbeing, he became the "little parent" of a mother who played the part of a helpless child. This childhood scenario set John up with a script that predisposed him to become a rescuer. Care-taking others became his primary way of relating to other human beings.

Rescuers like John have an unconscious core belief. "My needs are not important," they tell themselves. "I am only valued for what I can do for others." Of course, believing these ideas requires him to have a victim in his life who he can rescue. How else can someone like John feel valuable?

John would never admit to being a victim. In his mind, he is the one who must have the answers. Nonetheless, he does in fact rotate through the victim position on the triangle on a regular basis. A rescuer in the victim role becomes a martyr, complaining loudly, "After all I've done for you, this is the thanks I get!"

### Persecutor

Bob is a doctor who often justified hurting others. Attack was his primary way of dealing with inconvenience, frustration, or pain. Once, for instance, he mentioned running into a patient on the golf course. "Can you believe that patient had the nerve to ask me to treat his bad knee right then and there? This was my only day off." Bob handled it by taking his patient to his office and "giving him a steroid shot he'll never forget!"

In other words, Bob rescued his inconsiderate patient in a way that punished him for daring to be so bold. To Bob, his action seemed justified. His patient had infringed on his free time, therefore he believed his patient deserved rough treatment. He didn't realize that he could have just said no to his patient's request for treatment. He didn't have to feel victimized by his patient. Setting boundaries never occurred to Bob. In his mind he had been treated unjustly and therefore he had the right, even the obligation, to get even.

## THE GUARDIAN OF THE PSYCHE: SUPEREGO

### Victim

Jackie sees herself as consistently unable to handle regular life. She is a masterful correctional officer, but is always messing up simple things like where she left her car keys or when to pick up the laundry. She constantly complains of exhaustion, to the point that her colleagues are tired of listening. She feels bad about herself and her inner dialogue is just plain mean. She thinks her harsh critical voice just might be right about how incapable and incompetent she is.

You can enter the victim triangle from any point, but the movement and resolution you seek will never come as you drain your energy on this merry-go-round. Childhood programming runs deep, and we see it as a fixed part of who we are, incapable and therefore unworthy, when it isn't this at all. Upon close and honest examination, we can see that as a child we did the best we could by taking on a role that didn't belong to us to begin with. ■

### *Integration Exercises*

1. What role did you play as a child in your family?
2. Do you still identify with the child in you, and in what ways?
3. What ghosts of your past that still haunt how you do your job today?
4. Have you ever felt unsafe on the job?
5. Do you believe you can change someone's life for the better? If yes, what is it about you that makes that possible?
6. What is your vision for yourself as a correction officer?

## FORCE VERSUS POWER

Few professions call forth ideas of force and power like law enforcement. Force requires an object to push against. Someone shoves you, and you shove back. It must act against. Force is unable to feed, generate, or integrate. It expends energy rather than creating it. Even the great metaphor for prison, the slamming door, conjures images of force as people enter the small spaces of the closed prison world. People do not speak of the door flying open.

*“Water can flow or it can crash.  
Be like water,”*

- Bruce Lee, martial artist

Power is a whole other beast. Power is an emanation, an unassailable knowledge of who we are and what we will and will not do. Power is the ability to change the feeling in the room just by walking into it. Power invites, whereas force repels.

Power encourages another to awaken by inviting the inherent power in him or her to activate, to become conscious. In that way, it primes the environment to release more energy via the input from the other person, and this evolves into connection.

Power is not a response. It is called forth in relationship to others and to life. To the extent that anything is received, integrated, and released, power is generated by exercising power.

Holocaust survivor Elie Weisel was right when he said, “Ultimately, the only power to which man should aspire is that which he exercises over himself.” When we talk about “abuse of power,” we are in fact talking about the antithesis of power, which is force. Force by its very nature—causes harm to both the person acting and the person being acted upon. This is because it is action from the rational mind that is disconnected from the whole. As an activity of disconnection, it carries out further disconnection.

Power is the way to honor your own wholeness and the dignity of the other. Power makes for greater possibility and connection, charging the entire environment with energy and meaning.

The martial arts make for a beautiful lens to view the differences between force and power. Power is aikido, a Japanese technique developed to cause as little injury to the attacker as possible. Aikido is a study in deflecting force and shaping the situation through our own power. On the other hand, force is krav magna, an Israeli invention. Krav magna seeks to destroy the opponent in the most efficient way possible using a classic set of moves. In krav magna, you hit a body part.

Power, in equal parts, is the ability to go and stop. We can go when we are called, stop when we might crash, and sense the difference between the two. When the mind is disconnected from the body and thus disconnected from the environment—in this case ourselves, our loved ones, and the people around us—one of two things occurs. We experience lack of power or powerlessness, and to counter this we use force. That’s why we include the essential tools of yoga and meditation in this book. They equip us to drop down into our body and reconnect to our power. ■



## WE ARE MADE OF STORIES

The little girl who said goodbye to her father—not a serial sex offender, but her father—and the dignity the officer extended to her led to her now serving marginalized populations, helping them rise. The story of her terror and the officer's kindness changed the course of a life as well as everyone she told the story to. She drew many to her with her work and now they help as well. That's the power of the story you tell.

While you work out of view as a correctional officer, we feel the power of what you do as you keep inmates, fellow officers, and the town safe. Your actions reverberate outwardly, touching all of us and changing many stories in positive ways.

We are human beings who are learning as we go. Understanding certain aspects of mind and consciousness bolsters confidence and settles the body into its center. Meditation provides the stillness in which to hear. The goal is to slow our thinking so that what's underneath the noise rises.

Those are the stories that will serve you best, and those are the stories we long to hear. Please write to us and tell us about your experiences.

## MY STORY



### CHRIS BOWSER

**Bio:**

*Chris Bowser joined the U.S. Army Reserves in 2008 at the age of 23. He spent ten years at this and left due to a severe neck injury that made it to where he was unable to perform basic soldier tasks and drills.*

*While exiting he was hired by the Department of The Army as Civilian Law Enforcement, during this time he also went back to school.*

*After leaving all forms of Law Enforcement for good, he went into restaurant management. After spending 3 years in that field, he was fired due to the Covid-19 pandemic. He was soon hired by the non-profit The Living Room to be the Director of Operations. This is where he currently works. He loves hiking, cooking, collecting records, and his three children.*

### I HAD WANTED TO BE A POLICE OFFICER

since I was in 3rd grade, but I was not able to get any traction in my adult life. I made the decision to join the army in 2008. I was 23. When I signed up, I wanted to be in Law and Order Military Police. These are the ones that most echo the real-life police officers. However, I didn't know the difference between job codes at the time, and I ended up accepting the job code for an Interment Resettlement Specialist, which is a way to say Correctional Officer. I was still an MP, just not a "real" MP. I was shipped out to South Carolina for my initial Basic Training. After completion I was bussed to Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri for my Advanced Individual Training.

Training was intense. The job had recently been created because of a few scandals in overseas facilities. Highly trained Military Police officers had conducted inhumane acts against prisoners of war (P.O.W's). The three that were referenced and taught most were Camp Bucca, Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. However we were shown various pictures of other oversea camps that were experiencing similar issues as well as a fairly in-depth explanation about the "Torture Memo's". As such, the Correction position was put into place to offer additional and more specialized training in the realm of human rights, cultural awareness and interpersonal communication skills (IPC skills).

I was a part of the second class to go through the program. They had not worked out all of the issues yet, however it was overall good training. We learned how to

## MY STORY

use all manner of less than lethal weapons. First, we would learn and then we were shown what it was like to have it happen to us. We were tased, pepper sprayed and had various grapples and strikes used on us. These were all attempts to teach of the severity of our actions when we use them on those in captivity. We also learned restraints, riot formations and basic first aid. There were issues still, the dichotomy of learning how to talk to prisoners like people while maintaining a strong outward appearance was difficult, more so if you factor in that at 23, I was one of the oldest people in my class.

Upon graduation I returned home and was sent to assist on a mission not within my job code. I was going to work as a real MP conducting Area Security operations. I was very disappointed when I learned what an area security MP did. It wasn't much. I was attached to a federal police station along with 3 other soldiers, later expended to 6 total. My job consisted of sitting in a police vehicle and checking fence lines and working the gates. The department was small, only 18 officers. Of those 18, one was female. I believe that because of the lack of actual policing to do, the department often experienced infighting, squabbling and personal fights. I was shocked that fully grown and professional men would act like this. Going from training to this real-world situation was difficult. Professionalism is a hard trait to qualify, but noticing the lack of it is easy.

After I had completed that mission, I was sent to Guantanamo Bay. This was the first time I had worked inside of a prison proper and had the opportunity to use the training I received. I was sent to a camp that had various high-end detainees in it, people that were from the Taliban and Saddam Hussein's personal advisors. When I first arrived, I was trained by the outgoing unit. They had a level of closeness to the detainees that I was immediately uncomfortable with. They had developed nicknames for the prisoners and refused to use their numbers to identify them. The detainees would not respond to their numbers either.

We were informed that this camp was different than other camps. As such our training would not be as useful. We watched them shake the detainees hands, give them items that were on the contraband list, share personal stories and treat them like equals in many ways. This shocked us and our leadership. We trained for one week before the other unit left to demobilize. Our leadership put an end to this lack of boundaries right away. A memo was drafted explaining that they would be enforcing the Standard Operating Procedures to the letter. Speaking with the detainees about anything personal, using names on either side (we had badge numbers), lack of restraints while moving detainees would all be punishable offenses.

The Army has an interesting approach to leadership and who writes the rules for inside the jails. My commander was not a trained correctional officer, and no officer had that job specific experience. Instead, they went through a general leadership for Military Police.

## MY STORY

I don't know much about this course, but I do know they have some training in all aspects within the five functions of the Military Police Corps. Also, whereas the lower ranker officers would work in the jails, mostly as the final say in situations, unit commanders did not.

There was a building several miles away with offices and secretaries that was for the unit. I can count on one hand the amount of times I saw our commander inside our walls. They drafted the new rules for the soldiers, and we were expected to follow them. We had supervision and expectations, so we followed. The detainees fought back. Pushed against us with this stiffening of the rules, they were understandably upset with the direction their home was taking. They began to hunger strike, refused medical treatment, would take all of their items in their huts and take it into the communal living area.

This made for a serious rift between leadership and soldiers. The day-to-day of working the jail had gotten much worse, yet we were expected to hold the standards presented by our commander. Several soldiers were punished for using nicknames for each other to the detainees. Examples being "big guy," "potter" and "mustache." My nickname was "Koop" due to my last name. Once we were found to be using this instead of our last four badge digits, we were reprimanded. Many of the soldiers didn't like the tone that we were pushing. Several wanted to be harsher and were outspoken about who we were there to watch.

The casual racism inside of an army detainee facility cannot be understated. Terms like "Hadji," "Bomber" and "Debt" were thrown around casually. Discussion of what they had endured at the hands of the FBI, the Navy and the CIA were used as a punchline. We were often told to remember that they were the "enemy" and they were not harmless. "They would kill you if they could" was said to us often. Many in my unit knew soldiers that had been injured or killed, which added to the frustration and anger. This lasted until I was taken off the island with an injury. I left before my unit was moved. I was told that the rules stuck and the situation never got better. It was a difficult time for the soldiers who wanted to do it for the right reasons. It was more difficult for the ones who wanted to do it for the wrong reasons.

I transitioned back to civilian life and got a job working federal law enforcement. I became what I learned to dislike early in my career. It took me about a year to realize that law enforcement wasn't for me. I learned that it doesn't matter what side of the gate you are on, it's a hard life when you have nobody. All you have is people who don't know your name, people you are told are the enemy every day. It makes both the detainees and the soldiers on edge. Constantly waiting for something to happen and being told by leadership and trainers that there will be an event and that remaining vigilant is the only option, but it never happened. The prison I was working was on an island thousands of miles from where the war was. There was no escape planned, and most of our detainees couldn't even swim. I will never fully understand why we had to view them as a number instead of a person. The old adage of being trapped together was apt here. ■

## MY STORY



### JEROME R HALL

*I started my correction career at the federal detention center in Brooklyn, New York, where I worked from 1994 to 1997. From there, I went to the U. S. immigration and Naturalization Service, which is now known as Immigration Customs Enforcement, as a detention officer. I worked there from 1997 to 2000. Next I went to the North Carolina Department of Corrections from 2004 to 2006.*

### BEFORE BECOMING A CORRECTIONAL OFFICER

I was a marine. In fact, three days after I graduated high school I was in boot camp. I loved the brotherhood of the marines, and I also learned a lot that had me in good stead ever since.

In addition to what I learned in the marines, I have family members who were incarcerated, and I think that what they had to tell me also helped me as a correction officer. One of my uncles who did seventeen years told me that, no matter what they've done, everyone is human. Don't look down on anybody. Don't worry about what they did. Just do what you have to do. Follow policies and procedures and you'll be fine. I have tried to follow that advice and be that type of officer.

When I got to my first job in Brooklyn, I treated everybody as a human. And I think that has worked for me, because I haven't been in many fights with inmates --maybe four or five in my entire career. I think that, as a correction officer, you have to set the tone. I've been around motorcycle gang members. I've been around Chinese gang members, black gang members, Hispanics, and I treated them all the same. I've even had inmates tell me that they respected that about me and how I did my job. One guy said, "I don't talk to black guys. I don't talk to black COs, none of that. But you came at me as a man, and I've got to respect that regardless of what I'm into or what I believe."

A captain once told me that if you go in, do your job, be fair, firm, and consistent, you won't have a problem.



## MY STORY

If you treat everybody the same way, you'll be fine. And when I became a supervisor, that's what I told my officers.

That captain also told me this, and it always stuck with me: "Society may often forget about the gatekeeper known only as a Corrections/Detention Officer, but what would society do without him or her at the gate." As CO's, we don't general get the attention for the dangerous job we do.

He first day I walked into the federal detention center in Brooklyn and that door closed behind me, I admit that I was scared, because I realized it wasn't going to open again until I got off duty. I grew up in Baltimore, so I already had some street smarts, but I think that being in New York made me tough. You need to be tough if you're going to work in a jail, but you need more than that. You have to give respect to get respect.

You also have to be up on what's going on in the community and in the world,--not just in the jail-- because the inmates definitely do. Some of the inmates watch the news all day. They know what's happening on the outside, and it affects the jail. You may try to hide it, but you really can't. In a federal prison, the inmates get newspapers in many different languages, and what's going on in the news can affect them. So, for example, they knew when the rapper DMX and Kobe Bryant died, and maybe one of them was a huge Kobe fan.

They get riled up and heated. Tensions begin to rise as they are having feelings on top of being locked up without outlets to express themselves.

Or you might have to tell someone they need to call home. They call, and it turns out someone has died. Meanwhile he's locked up and he can't be with his family. In one case, I had an inmate whose mother died in a car accident on her way from Virginia to North Carolina to see him. He was devastated. He was on suicide watch after that, and I was the one who had to stand there while he got that phone call. You have to have empathy in those situations. Empathy not sympathy because it can get you entangled in their world and that can come home with you or get you in trouble. People's children have died. I had one inmate whose children's mother had a boyfriend who killed his baby. Not all correction officers have empathy towards that. And I think in at least some cases it has to do with race. I hate to say it, but some white officers, not all, I've known couldn't deal with black inmates. Being in the Marine boot camp was a lot like being in jail, so I know what that feels like and I try to empathize with the inmates' situation.

Also, when I'm not at work I don't try to be a CO. I hold the door for people, regardless of their race. I say, yes sir. No ma'am. If someone says something to me that's disrespectful, I'm not going to take that because I get that kind of trash talk all day on the job. It takes a lot to get me so mad that I'm going to get into a fight.

## MY STORY

But if you try to put your hands on me we're going to have an issue. Especially since being in a NY facility got me hardened. It's hard not letting work slip into your personal life. I've had my moments but been blessed with people who told me what it was gonna be like.

*“My therapy is in sharing my stories with my friends and families. I get to release and let go of the tension and share my world.”*

COs need to be taught how to separate their home life from their work life, and how to get help when their job is getting to them. When that happens, You need to reach out to employee services or somebody on the job you respect. Some COs are very private. They aren't going to ask for help. But then they need to confide in a friend, maybe someone who started the job at the same time they did, or maybe even a family member.

Everyone needs to decompress. When it's your time off, take your time off. You need to have a life. Have a day off. But some people go home and want to act like they're at work. I was lucky.

*“I got a lot of training outside of the program from being a marine and having a lot of family who had been in jail. ”*

A lot of COs don't have that. They may have read the book and taken the tests, but they need some realistic training. They need someone like me, someone who's worked in the system for twenty or thirty years, to come in and say, “Hey, I worked on every level of correction. This is what you might see. This is what might happen. This is what it's going to be like.” We also don't have the support of therapists and extra Human Resources in our departments to help with the mental health aspect. And we also need more physical training tied to being able to defend ourselves. Not every CO has been in a fight, and they need to learn how to think on their feet. I've seen a lot of COs get hurt and the better we are educated, the safer and better we can do our job. ■



## MY STORY



### KEITH HELLWIG

#### About Keith

In addition to working in the prison system for 36 years, during 23 of which he also served as a police officer (something that he still does today), Keith has written four books, two of which, “No Place Like Home”, and “Morning will Come”, of which are based on his experiences as a Correctional Officer. He is currently writing “In Their Own Words”, a collection of stories from the front line of America's toughest job. He and his wife have been married for 44 years and have two daughters and three granddaughters. He still works with Correctional Officers and offers his insights on his YouTube channel, Cops/Corrections and through his books.

**I'VE WORKED WITH A NUMBER** of agencies, but chiefly with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, where I was employed for 36 years and retired as a Captain. For 23 of those years, I also worked as a police officer on the streets. Now, even though I'm retired, I continue to work as a patrol officer for a couple of small rural communities, which I really enjoy. Two of the three institutions where I worked were medium security prisons and the third was maximum security, where I was what's called a Line Captain. In that job, I was called in when things went extremely wrong.

I'm from a rural community in Wisconsin, so when I started in the prison system at the age of 22 and was thrown into a housing unit where I was supervising 40 convicted felons, it was a rude awakening. I'd gone through the six-week training course at the Academy. So I knew a little bit about what to expect, and I'd also gone to school for Criminal Justice, so I had that in my favor too, but it was still like stepping into a totally different world.

As a Correctional Officer, you're dealing with people whose existence the general public doesn't even want to acknowledge. I've dealt with many serial killers and serial rapists, but as a Correctional Officer, you can't think of them as just a killer or a rapist. That isn't their whole identity, and you have to think of them as complete individuals. I remember escorting Jeffery Dahmer to a facility and still feeling a strong sense of duty to protect him. You have to treat these felons as people. Throughout my career, I've tried to treat everyone the way I would want to be treated if I were incarcerated.

## MY STORY

I considered them humans above everything else--because that's what they are.

We had a hospital unit at the last prison where I worked, and a lot of people who were serving life sentences passed away there. It was my job to notify their family, and in one instance I had to notify the daughter of a serial rapist. She was in tears on the phone, and I remember her saying, "I need you to know that the man you knew wasn't the father I knew." These prisoners, no matter what they've done, still have people who love them. They're still somebody's son, daughter, somebody's nephew, or somebody's father or mother. So, to me, it was important to treat them that way.

It actually took me about three months after I retired to realize that my normal day in prison wasn't normal anywhere else in the world. It took a toll on me, but I was lucky because I was able to come home and talk about it. I wouldn't tell my wife that some guy had been biting pieces out of his arm, but I'd tell her that some really bizarre stuff had happened, and we would sit and talk about it. So I had a sounding board, And I think that was very important. I think one of the problems with many officers is that they say, well, you have to leave the job at work. You can't bring it home with you. However, that's difficult. It's not something you can just turn off. An officer in Missouri told me about a horrible, tragic experience he'd had 15 years ago. Before that he'd never shared it with anyone. He said that just telling me about it had taken a huge weight off his mind. I've known a lot of

people who tried to deal with things on their own, without reaching out to anybody. And usually they wound up diving into a bottle or they'd go home and smoke a joint, sit in a dark room watching movies by themselves, wallowing in their own misery. Unfortunately, I know a lot of people who fell into the bottle, and many who lost their marriages, lost their families, lost their wife and children to the stress they were dealing with. And sadly enough, a lot of them committed suicide.

There was a Sgt. in one of my tactical units who was a great guy with a great personality. You would never think anything was bothering him. He seemed perfectly healthy and stable. However, one day he went out, parked his car in the woods, and shot himself. No one who knew him would have imagined that he would ever do such a thing. He'd obviously internalized everything that was going on. And rather than getting it out, he just killed himself. I know that I myself have had experiences I didn't want to talk about right away, and keeping it in just wore on me. I cannot begin to count the number of Correctional Officers who've killed themselves. A law enforcement officer is killed in the line of duty approximately every 53 hours. More alarmingly a law enforcement officer in this country takes their own life every 47 hours. So, every year more officers die by suicide than in the line of duty. Personally, I've never had suicidal thoughts, and, to be honest with you, I think it was because, when I was 18 years old, I was in a fatal car accident. I was driving, and my best friend and his three-year-old daughter were both killed. I was depressed after that, but I somehow knew it was temporary. So if I fell into a depression because of something that happened at work, I knew I'd come out of it.

## MY STORY

But I have had PTSD. In fact, Correctional Officers actually have a higher rate of PTSD than police officers. People have a hard time understanding that, but when something traumatic happens, a Correctional Officer can't just walk away and forget about it. He has to face it again day after day. As an example, when I was a Captain, a 19-year-old inmate committed suicide in one of the housing units. He waited until the sergeant had done her rounds and then he hanged himself. The officer who found him, as well as the others who were involved in the incident, worked on that unit every day. So every night they had to shine their flashlight into that same cell when they were doing their head-count and that same incident flashed through their mind over and over. It wasn't something they could just walk away from.

As for me, In one instance about 20 years ago an officer was assassinated and I was called to the scene with a SWAT team to clear the building. At the time, I didn't think it had any real effect on me, but a couple of years ago, my wife and I were driving past the place where this officer was killed and it all came back to me. It was like a punch in the mouth.

I started shaking, almost hyperventilating. My wife asked me what was wrong, and I said, "I'll tell you later." Then, when we were on our way back home, we took a different route. They say that it takes an average of at least 30 days for PTSD to really hit you, but, as I now know, it can even hit you 20 years later.

Also, after I retired, I had a dream one night in which I relived some of the horrible experiences I'd had--a man dying in my arms in front of his family, riots I'd lived through, things like that. And when I woke up, I actually felt refreshed. For years that had been inside me and I felt like I had finally processed it all. I felt relieved because I'd lived through all that and both I and my marriage had survived. Many COs survive that but few escape without emotional consequences.

*"But I have had PTSD. In fact, Correctional Officers actually have a higher rate of PTSD than police officers. People have a hard time understanding that, but when something traumatic happens, a Correctional Officer can't just walk away and forget about it."*

## MY STORY

For a while I worked at a County facility that's only a mile away from my home. So I'd be fighting with someone, maybe using pepper spray, and a half hour later I'd be sitting at the dinner table with my family. There was no transition time. It affected me and my family. There were times when I had to remember that my kids weren't inmates. Inmates have to follow a strict schedule, and I was also very regimented with my kids. If I told them to be home at midnight, 12:01 wasn't acceptable. So I was sometimes a little too rigid.

*“It had to be hard for them growing up with a father who worked in a prison and on the streets. I didn't want that for them; it was difficult, and I am grateful that we made it through. I've always had a good relationship with my kids, so they knew they could always talk to me.”*

So, I believe the bottom line is that you have to let your family, friends or close co-workers know what you're dealing with. You don't need to go into all the details, but if you can just sit down and talk about your feelings, it makes a big difference. As a Captain, after an incident was over, I did a complete debriefing with everybody who was involved, because there were new officers who'd never seen anything like that in their lives. So I would talk to them one-on-one. I would offer them an employee assistance program, if they needed it, and they knew they could come and talk to me at any time. I believe it's important to have an open line of communication. Too many people think it shows weakness to want to talk, but I believe it takes strength to get it out. ■

## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

To start, come to a comfortable, cross-legged, seated position. Place a pillow or a rolled-up blanket or sweatshirt underneath your hips. This way the hips are higher than the ankles and you can sit more comfortably. Roll your pelvis slightly forward so you can ground down through the front of your sitz bones—the ones you sit on at the base of your pelvis. Hands can rest comfortably on the knees, shoulders relaxed, chin parallel to the floor. Close the eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. Typical yoga breathing is in through the nose and out through the nose. As you breathe deeply into the abdomen, let the belly expand. Then as you exhale, draw the belly button in toward your spine. Many of us breathe the opposite of this pattern, so don't worry if it takes some practice to get it.

Start standing with feet parallel, hip width's distance apart. Knees above ankles. Hips above knees. Shoulders above hips. Rock back and forth till you find your center from front to back. Shift your weight side to side until you find your weight equally distributed between right and left. Roll your shoulders back and down. Hands by your sides. Palms can be facing forward. Chin parallel to the ground. Imagine someone is pulling a string out of the crown of your head, lengthening your spine.

**1. Inhale.** Then, as you exhale, bring your palms together in front of your chest.

**2. Inhale** extend your arms out front and move them up alongside the ears, palms facing each other. Take a gentle backward bend from just beneath the shoulders.

**3. Exhale** hinging forward into the Standing Forward Fold with a flat back releasing and relaxing over the legs. Let the spine lengthen and the head hang. You can nod the head yes, shake the head no, relaxing and releasing all the muscles in the back of the neck. Place your hands on either side of the feet, fingertips in line with the toe tips. Bend your knees, if you need to, to get the palms flat on the floor.

**4. Inhale.** Stretch the left leg far back and come into Low Lunge. Left knee comes down to the floor. Release the top of the left foot on the floor. Make sure the right knee stays directly above the right ankle. Your front shin is perpendicular to the floor. If the knee goes past the front ankle, it can put too much stress on the knee joint. You can come up onto the fingertips. Lengthen out the back of the neck. Drop the pelvis down and stretch. (If you have any knee pain, place a blanket or pillow underneath that back knee.)

## APPENDIX

**5. Exhale** to move into Downward Facing Dog (Down Dog for short). If you have a four-legged friend, you've probably seen them do this! Weight is distributed evenly between hands and feet. If you want to, take a few breaths here. You can alternate bending one knee and stretching the arch of that foot and then straightening it when you bend the other knee and stretch the opposite arch. Do this a few times. Bring your chest closer to the floor. Keep ears in between upper arms. Bend your knees and tilt the sitz bones—those are the ones you sit on at the base of your pelvis—up toward the sky. If at any point Down Dog becomes too intense, you can: 1) put your forearms and elbows down on the ground instead of just your hands, or 2) come down and rest in Child's Pose. To rest in Child's Pose, drop your knees, shins and tops of the feet down to the floor and sit back on your heels with your arms stretching out in front of you. Your forehead rests on the ground. (Come back to Down Dog to transition into the next pose.)

**6. Bring knees down** to the floor, then chest down, then chin down. Keep the pelvis slightly raised and toes tucked under. Elbows are in close to the sides of the body.

**7. Press through the toes** and slide the torso along the floor until the legs are straight. Inhale to come into Baby Cobra. Release the tops of the feet onto the floor. There is no weight in the palms. The head, neck and chest are slightly lifting off the ground. Bring your awareness to your upper back. Imagine the shoulder blades are sliding down your back toward the base of your spine. Elbows stay in close to the body. Back of the neck is long. Look up with the eyes.

**8. Tuck the toes**, press into the palms, lift the hips, and exhale into Down Dog.

**9. Inhale.** Bring left foot forward in between the hands to come into Low Lunge on the left side. Let the right knee rest on the floor. (Again, if you have any knee pain, place a blanket or pillow underneath that back knee.) Make sure the left knee stays directly above the left ankle. Drop your pelvis down while you lengthen your spine.

**10. Exhale.** Bring the right foot forward to meet the left and come into the Standing Forward Fold. Release and relax the head and the neck. Imagine that your head is heavy like a bowling ball and completely let it go.



## APPENDIX

**11. Inhale.** Bring your arms up alongside your head. Hinge up with a flat back. Bend your knees, if you need to, to protect your lower back. Take a gentle backward bend at the top of the inhalation from just beneath the shoulders.

**12. Exhale.** Palms together in front of the heart. Congratulations! You just completed your first round of Sun Salutations!

Now release the hands to the sides. Feet remain hip distance apart. Close the eyes and observe the effects of your first round of Sun Salutations. Your heart might be beating slightly faster than before, your breath might have changed in some way or you may feel a bit warmer. You may not notice anything at all. And that's okay, too!

Repeat the Sun Salutation series (poses 1-12) two more times. With practice, you will get the movement and breath pattern down and start to feel your own flow. Yoga is different from exercise. It is consciously moving with your breath and becoming aware of how you feel in each moment. Three rounds of Sun Salutations take about ten minutes and are a great way to start the day.

Most importantly, after you finish all three rounds of Sun Salutations, lie down on your back for Final Relaxation. Feet are about two to three feet apart. Palms are facing up and about a foot away from the sides of the body. Set a timer for ten minutes, close the eyes and relax. This lets the body integrate the benefits from the Sun Salutations.

**Modification:** *If you have any lower back pain, bend your knees up and place your feet flat on the floor. Separate your feet wider than your hips and let your knees rest against each other. Close the eyes. You can do the Final Relaxation Pose with your knees bent.*