



Caswell **CORPORATE COACHING** Company

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William E. Caswell

Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives world-wide. He is the author of 14 books including the 12-book series *The Respect Revolution* written, by a CEO for CEOs, as a guide to getting your company to *Excellence*.

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Wasted Manpower, Wasted Dollars!

Our federal prison system holds 14,647 individuals at an annual cost of about \$3,000 million. Since most prisoners end up returning to prisons later, incarceration as a punishment mechanism is not working very well. While most readers of *Comment* may not see the connection between your enterprise and jail, prison operations touch upon key elements of business: reward, punishment, motivation, achievement and equality of opportunity.

The purpose of rewards and punishment is to change people's behavior towards the behavior that the rewarder or punisher deem more desirable. In other papers, we at CCCC have provided mountains of evidence (more than 600 papers and books) which show that external rewards do not work in the long term¹. The other side of the reward coin, punishment, doesn't work very well either – as the opening lines above attest.

People are usually put in jail for two reasons: to punish them for past unacceptable actions and to keep some of them away from society where they may be deemed to be a danger. A third, inappropriate reason, is revenge.

To make the point of this paper, let us not even argue about whether punishment works or not; let's look at the situation from the point of view of optimizing human beings in Canada's prisons.

An age-old game-theory and economics quiz called the *Prisoner's Dilemma* is the reputed model for reciprocity used by social scientists. Imagine that two suspects are arrested but police don't have enough evidence. The two separated prisoners are made the same offer: "If you testify against your partner and he remains silent, you'll go free and he'll go to jail. If he 'fesses up and you don't, you'll be sent to jail while he goes free. If neither of you talk, you both will do half-time in jail. The other prisoner will not be told of your decision." The result of this academic quiz is that participants most always betray one another. However, when the experiment was tried in actual prisons, both participants remained quiet (and shared the hypothetical half-sentence). Different factors are at play in prison where (a) the stakes are higher (death to the 'rat' in the shower) or perhaps (b) a code of honour is being exercised. The point is that prisoners are real people with real feelings, not theoretical models.

Now to the main theme: Twelve years of coaching people in all walks of life to perform better, has illustrated that the Number 1 personal driver is the ability to call one's own shots within the reality of the envelope provided to the individual. For example, a laborer will have a much smaller financial envelope than a business leader. But nonetheless, within the confines of their practical world, each person can thrive, prosper and grow as an individual if they are allowed the freedom to do it their own way. The rise in commitment results in an increased performance for the individual and even more of an increase, collectively, if all people in the group are treated that way. That is, people are encouraged to draw on their individualized talents. (A recent CCCC example is a client company losing money in 2010 and, upon applying these described methods, turned a \$1.5 million profit after taxes, in 2011, the highest profits in the company's 20-year history.)

Bill Caswell is always available for comments or questions at:

bill@caswellccc.com

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CCCC
Ottawa Canada
613-232-1243
www.caswellccc.com

What we say to people who will listen to us is that: (i) Everyone has strengths and everyone has weaknesses. (ii) Stop focusing on the weaknesses (and engaging in useless punishment to change those weaknesses) but instead focus on the individual's strengths and let the individuals thrive at the ease of doing what is natural for them – and as a result, excel from it.

In prisons we have poets, artists, athletes, musicians, writers, actors, thinkers, laborers, leaders, auto-mechanics – each with weaknesses as deemed by our society's authorities – but all with personal strengths of one kind or another. Instead of suppressing these natural talents (due to our historical need to wreak punishment), accept that incarceration, ostracizing from society, is enough punishment in itself. (Ostracizing the individual is one of the 'worst' punishment that the animal kingdom applies to its miscreants; it often leads to death).

Therefore within the prisons, create work groups to make money and artistic groups to entertain and enthrall people. Allow and encourage them to become experts in their natural fields of endeavor. For goodness sake, let them vote and have other privileges of Canada including old-age pensions – accepting that incarceration is a horribly sufficient penalty. Let them enjoy what is left of their lives while behind bars by allowing them to get the ultimate reward – the hit of their dopamine and serotonin within their brains upon achieving any personal successes – just as you do. (These brain drugs have been clearly demonstrated to be the main driver and reward elements of all successful creatures.) Sell the artistry or products on the open market and let the inmates obtain a real measure of their success. Pay them for their work at the same rate as outside the prison. Allow the prison institutions to earn a profit for their investment in these businesses.

Even if only a few prisoners become successful by the end of their sentences (and we predict that more than 'a few' would enjoy such an excitement) they will find a new way to apply their talents once outside prison and would, as a consequence, be less likely to return to crime. Besides, a nice little nest-egg of perhaps, \$100,000 would be awaiting most of them upon release which would give them a financial start that few others would have. Don't be-grudge them their \$100k; they would have earned it!

Result: Of the approximately 15,000 prisoners, thousands of productive people would be added to society, the number of returning-to-prison convicts would be reduced and prison costs would drop dramatically. Instead of Government building new prisons, we would be re-directing such money to build schools¹ or assist other parts of society or help reduce our outrageous national debt of around \$600 billion.

It's time for somebody to speak up.

Bill