

Integrating the Values Inside - Respect and Co-operation

A one day seminar for prison staff

Wednesday 26th January, 1995

Global Retreat Centre, Oxford

Session 1

Address: Respect and Co-operation,
John Whittington, Head of Education, HMP Gartree.

I would like to consider the concepts of respect and co-operation in the context of the to-day. All aspects of the Prison Service have been reorganised, privatised, threatened with privatisation or generally messed about with over the last few years. Change has become endemic, morale has fallen and the only sense of direction that has been discernable has been the wish to get through each day and clock off.

Perhaps at this stage I should stress that these thoughts are mine and do not necessarily reflect the thoughts, statements or official policy of any other living person or organisation.

On a bad day, or during a bad week or even month it seems to me that no-one cooperates with anyone else. Staff from the specialist departments seldom meet, rarely discuss and agree common strategies to deal with the needs of individual prisoners. Officers have been known to be unhelpful to education staff. They have also been known to take less than a full and active part in the issue and recall of library books. Teachers are told that education in prisons is a waste of time and money. Security departments believed that education staff indulged in woolly-minded, liberal escapades that put the welfare of all at risk. This is not to mention the fact that there are those who proclaim that governors cannot govern and that the works department does not work!

Yet despite all lack of respect and cooperation prisoners have been admitted to prison, contained (well most have), cared for, educated, transferred. around the country and released. The Prison Service has continued to function.

There must have been cooperation somewhere to enable the multitude of tasks that make up a day in the life of the Prison Service, to be achieved.

So who has been cooperating with whom? To my mind the greatest amount of cooperation goes on between the prisoners and the system. Now many of the dispersal types, lifers and long term prisoners that I have met would be sure I was senile if they heard me say that, but nevertheless I believe it to be true. Without the cooperation of the prisoners it would be impossible to run the prisons as they are run at present. It is when that cooperation is withdrawn that trouble erupts, Strangeways and the other prison riots are examples of this

Spirituality in Prison – Seminar Report: Integrating the Values Inside – Respect and Co-operation

withdrawal of cooperation. Cooperation exists every night at lock-up. On the whole prisoners are not thrown bodily into their cells, they walk in and are locked in.

It is fair to say that not all prisoners cooperate all of the time. It is also true that not all of the prisoners cooperate 100%, 100% of the time. So there is friction. We have all experienced that friction and it's consequences.

It is equally fair to say that not all staff co-operate all of the time. It is also true that not all staff co-operate 100%, 100% of the time. So once more there is friction. And again we have all experienced that friction and it's consequences. I would hazard a guess that in some way or other we have all added to that friction, we have not always been as co-operative as we might have been.

Personally I doubt if in any organisation there can ever be 100% co-operation between all the parts. We all have our hidden agendas, our private plans and wishes which we promote at the expense of full cooperation. We also all have our off days when the last thing we want is to be cooperative.

Yet we all know that without co-operation we can achieve very little and what we can achieve will be hard won. The process will sap our strength, undermine our enthusiasm and may even lead to our withdrawal from the contest.

Cooperation is evident in any organisation that is dynamic, confident and a pleasure to work in.

So, how does cooperation come about? It is obvious that it does not just happen. One does not expect to wake up one morning and find that everyone is cooperating with everyone else, unless perhaps one has died in the night and awoken in heaven. I believe that cooperation has its roots in the other word that appears in the title of today's seminar - respect.

While organising these thoughts, I looked up the word respect in a thesaurus and found; respect, hold in honour, think well of, look up to, regard, esteem, value. It seems to me that we can respect an ideal; we can respect a goal or target that has been agreed and set; we can respect a cause or a course of action; we can respect a point of view; we can respect individuals; we can respect a group of individuals; we can respect ourselves.

I discussed the concept of respect with one of the life sentenced prisoners and he developed another aspect, that respect can be given, has to be earned and can be withdrawn.

Self respect plays an important part in the way in which we react to those around us. We cherish our self respect and feel diminished when it is challenged or tarnished. Self respect is what drives us to perform well when all around us are saying to hell with it and throwing in the towel - providing of course that we respect the task on hand and value the outcomes to which we may contribute. If we do not value the goals or targets that have been set then we are unlikely to try very hard to achieve them. Their non achievement will not detract from our self esteem since we did not value them. Similarly, it seems to me, we will not be motivated to work well and to cooperate if the goals are not clear

Spirituality in Prison – Seminar Report: Integrating the Values Inside – Respect and Co-operation

or keep changing. Again their non attainment will not detract from our personal self esteem and we would not expect it to cause others to lose respect for us. Why should they? Can we be blamed for not achieving goals in which we do not believe or which are at best confused and at worst, never articulated?

Perhaps those within the Prison Service most markedly affected by lack of respect are the prisoners. They have been convicted of carrying out acts that are totally unacceptable to society, they have had their liberty taken away from them, their first names have been replaced by numbers and a title as simple as Mr. or Miss has been denied them. These facts must diminish self respect, a respect that maybe was not very high to begin with.

Statistics show that 46% of the prison population left school as soon as possible (at 16 years of age), 43% admit to having left that age and 1 % said that they had never attended school. 45% of the prison population under the age of 30 had no qualifications compared with only 20% of the general population.

In short, a very large proportion of the prison population has a very low level of educational attainment in an age when qualifications and achievement are linked with good jobs, good salaries and high esteem. The media directs us all to aspire to the good life, obtainable through the acquisition of wealth. We all aspire, most perspire and some expire. Attainment depicts success and success fuels self esteem. Failure lowers self esteem. By most measures criminals have failed, the burglars, thieves and con men in prison have also failed at their chosen professions since they have been caught and convicted.

Research has shown how low self esteem can adversely affect the individual. We all know from experience that we function best when we perceive ourselves as being successful and valued. Experiments and research carried out in the 1960's and 1970's showed a link between low self esteem (respect) and the commissioning of deviant behaviour.

In one experiment for instance, Elliot Aronson and David Mettee took two groups of students and modified their self esteem by giving them false information about their personalities. One group was told that tests showed that they were mature, interesting, intellectual and so on. The second group were told that tests showed that they were immature, uninteresting, shallow and the like. A third group were not given any results.

Immediately after receiving these results, The students were scheduled to participate in an experiment conducted by a different psychologist. Part of the experiment involved the students playing cards for money. They were told that they could keep the money that they won. In the course of the games, the subjects were presented with a few opportunities to cheat in a situation where it seemed impossible that they could be detected. The situation was arranged so that, if a student decided not to cheat, he would certainly lose, whereas, if he decided to cheat, he would be certain to win a sizeable sum of money.

The results clearly showed that those students who had previously received information designed to lower their self esteem cheated to a far greater extent than those who had received the high self esteem information. The control group, those that received no information, fell exactly in between.

Spirituality in Prison – Seminar Report: Integrating the Values Inside – Respect and Co-operation

The research report goes on to suggest that teachers, parents and concerned others might want to take heed of this:

"Specifically, if it is true that low self esteem is an important antecedent of criminal, cruel behaviour, then we might want to do everything possible to help individuals learn self respect and love themselves."

Prisons need to help prisoners gain respect, not to deny it to them.

How are we to achieve this?

The Bishop of Leicester in *Thought for the Day*, earlier this month, while talking about value for money and that this did not mean something for nothing, since one gets what one pays for, used the phrase

"Tough Love". He went on to say that in the Prison Service this is displayed as hard professional care....

"...tough love in the Prison Service is shown as hard professional care. Hard professional care which protects the public and prisoners from anti-social behaviour, hard professional care which offers a new start to men who otherwise will return again and again to those depressive dustbins of our society".

It is interesting to notice his use of the word "offered". We can offer opportunities to individuals to begin to gain self respect, we can not make them accept it. We can offer the chance of a new beginning. Education and the Prison Service generally can open a variety of doors through which a prisoner may pass to a different and non-criminal future; no one can make him go through the door or accept the challenge of a future markedly different from his past.

It is not only the prisoners within the Prison Service who need to be shown respect, or offered opportunities to regain respect. Staff need to be shown respect and also to respect what they are doing. Enabling this to be achieved is one of the roles of management. A confident staff, with a realisation of their own value and of the value of the tasks they perform, could revolutionise the performance of the Prison Service.

In order to achieve this revolution, an American prison Governor, Dennis Luther, adopted the viewpoint that his prison served many customers. As reported by Peters in 1992, Luther believed that the key to getting his 'inmate customers' treated well and with respect, is to treat well his 'guard customers' who deal with them. In establishing an new ethos or 'unorthodox culture', considerable emphasis is placed on a high degree of self-management and inmate involvement.

Peters, as evidence of the success of the new philosophy, recounts that in mid 1992, after more than three years of operation, the prison has had no escapes, no murders, no serious assaults on inmates or staff, no sexual assaults, no suicides and in its audit was rated outstanding in quality of life for inmates and staff.

Respecting others helps not only them, but may even have benefits for us. We cooperate best within an organisation when we are part of a team that shares the same values and targets.

Spirituality in Prison – Seminar Report: Integrating the Values Inside – Respect and Co-operation

I asked the Writer in Residence at Gartree, Jonathon Rix, for a memorable ending to this talk. To sum up for me the essence of respect, he came up with the idea that RESPECT IS A TWO WAY STREET, we respect those who respect us. He pointed out that we need not like an individual to respect them, that we can have respect for individuals even though we do not agree with everything that they say or do.

In conclusion I would like to leave you with the thought that co-operation implies acceptance of another. To be accepted is comfortable and reassuring, it applies mutual support and trust. Maybe then cooperation means acceptance and acceptance demonstrates respect.

Session 2

A workshop was conducted on *Teamwork and Leadership*.

Session 3

Address: Spiritual Self Respect

Sister Jayanti, European Director, Brahma Kumaris

The quality of our interactions, in all contexts, is dependent on our own self-respect. If self respect is developed through spirituality then it will be stable and constant. Situations involving discriminating behaviour and violence usually involve those who have low esteem. If you walk into any situation remembering your own respect, then others can accept the respect you are showing.

The more time I spend looking inside, aware of my spiritual, my eternal state of being, the more I develop my own sense of value. I can then extend this to others.

At the point when I lose self-respect, there are many repercussions. This can manifest as a lack of respect for the law. I then lack the power to take responsibility for remaining within the law. I feel burdened with other responsibilities in life which sap my inner strength.

Where I am needing or demanding respect from others, it is because I am not respecting myself.

The question is : Do I give first or wait to receive first? I am responsible for myself. If change is needed, I can't start out there, with other people in my environment. I can't demand that they change or wait for it BUT, I can change within. As I take charge of myself, the inner power I experience is such that I can influence change.

If I impose or exert my influence on others this can rebound on me in a negative way. If I just keep asking 'why', I feel victimised or I become judgmental towards others. If I become calm and peaceful, those vibrations will reach out others and create a positive response. I need to calmly and quietly observe what is going on inside of me. However I approach a person, it will invoke that same sort of response from them.

Spirituality in Prison – Seminar Report: Integrating the Values Inside – Respect and Co-operation

One can see another human being with dignity. From respect comes cooperation. We have to learn the power to discern the specialties in others. This enables me to have - tolerance of others which, in turn, allows me to adjust and be flexible as circumstances change. Adjustment leads to flexibility, which in turn generates cooperation. Perhaps, most importantly, is the surrender of my ego. If I stop hiding behind my facades and instead begin to be myself, this becomes the basis of cooperation.

Where is the recognition of, “I can't do it alone; I need to cooperate” then this facilitates the letting go of my own ego - it is an acknowledgement that, at the end of a task, it is all of us who have achieved the outcome.

It is my right to have and to experience peace within. But how does one gain spiritual self respect through which one can maintain the experience of that innate peace? Through keeping myself free from influence and by expressing my inner qualities. I then do not have to say anything with words, but my life become an example to others. All actions begin inside the mind. Knowing and expressing the inner self, enables the quality of my actions to improve.

What, in truth, is this inner self, the real identity. It takes only a moment to switch the consciousness from the identity of the body and the many rules that I play in life, to that of inner being, the soul, through which my inner strengths and virtues are expressed naturally.

Session 4

A workshop was conducted on the *Meaning of Service*.

Feedback

During the last session, participants shared their views on the value of the day:

“I feel the work on respect has to begin with myself.”

“It has been a wonderful opportunity and experience to concentrate on the spiritual issues behind our work.”

“I couldn't have imagined discussing respect with a prison officer in my establishment!”

“It has been very wonderful to have the chance to talk with others from different departments.”

“It has been a very full, spirited and important discussion here this afternoon.”

“It has been very important to hear of the sorts of immense pressures facing governors, especially as a result of Michael Howard's recent directive on temporary release.”