

Selecting the Substance Abuse Specialist

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IN RECENT YEARS, THE supervision of offenders in the community, either on probation, parole, or supervised release, has become tantamount to the care and control of the drug and alcohol abusing offender. In a major study, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University (1998) concluded that drug and alcohol addiction are related to the offenses committed by 80 percent of inmates in jail and prison in the United States. At the time this report was released in 1998, there were approximately 1.7 million men and women in jail or prison, and of this number, fully 1.4 million had a history of substance abuse. Research reflects that drug and alcohol abuse is highly correlated with criminal behavior (Deschenes, Turner, and Clear, 1992; Speckart and Anglin, 1986; Wish, 1987; Wish, Brady and Cuadrado, 1986). A national survey of state prison inmates found that 54 percent of those serving time for violent offenses admitted they were under the influence of drugs when they committed the crime. This survey also found that nearly 25 percent of all prisoners in local jails are there for drug crimes (Clear & Cole, 2000, p.119). In a study of pretrial detainees in New York during two months in 1986, Wish (1987) found that 92 percent of all suspects, arrested, booked, and charged with robbery, and 81 percent charged with burglary, tested positive for cocaine use. Atmore and Bauchiero (1987) found that 87 percent of inmates participating in a pre-release program in Springfield, Massachusetts, had significant substance abuse problems prior to the instant offense that led to their incarceration and that a large majority had committed crimes while under the influence

of alcohol or drugs.

In a recent study conducted in Canada, Zamble and Quinsey (1997, pp.54-56) found that fully 89 percent of a group of parole recidivists used alcohol or drugs 24 hours before the offense violation that resulted in a return to prison. Zamble and Quinsey report that along with other events in the period, there appears to have been an increase in already high levels of alcohol and drug usage in the day immediately preceding the violation. The study concluded that for the majority of offenders, substance abuse is so entangled with other maladaptive behavior that they may be inseparable and the use of intoxicants is certainly an important part of the antecedents of re-offending. To a significant degree, therefore, substance abuse and crime are intricately related. Developing an effective strategy to address the substance abuse problem of probationers and parolees is a critical challenge to community-based corrections.

Since parolees are released from prison we can conclude from the CASA study that 80 percent or about 470,000 have substance abuse problems. While the research on probationers and substance abuse is less clear, it is known that nearly 60 percent of all probationers have been convicted of a felony. Seventeen percent are on probation for driving while intoxicated or under the influence of alcohol and another 24 percent have been convicted of drug-related offenses. Therefore, approximately 41 percent of the probationer population are on supervision for driving while intoxicated, being under the influence of alcohol, or committing a drug-related crime. Of the remaining 59 percent of crimes committed by probationers, a significant per-

centage are likely to have been committed while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, possibly approaching the 80 percent figure cited by the CASA study.

While one can interpret these statistics in a number of ways, two things are clear. Substance abuse among criminal offenders in this country is a major problem and historically, treatment programs have not had high success rates. As the social movement against heroin grew in the 1950s and 1960s, support for treatment of addiction also grew, and special facilities were developed to house addicts as a special population of incarcerated offenders. Civil commitment procedures were frequently utilized to commit the drug abuser to such facilities, where the incarceration term often exceeded what they would have otherwise received. Evaluations of these programs, however, showed very poor results (Clear & Cole, 2000, p. 121).

Since the 1980s federal policies have sought to combat drug abuse by providing harsher penalties. Punishments for drug possession and sales were made considerably more severe, especially in the federal courts, where sentences of ten years or more became common. There has also been a renewed interest in treatment for drug addiction, and some of the prison-based programs, especially those based on the therapeutic community model, are showing better results than the earlier civil commitment programs (Clear & Cole, 2000, p. 122).

An Effective Supervision Strategy

In a previous article entitled, "An Effective Supervision Strategy for Substance-Abusing

Offenders," (Torres, 1997) the history and development of a method utilized by the U.S. Probation Office in the Central District of California (CDC/Los Angeles) was described. In its approach to supervising the substance-abusing offender, the Los Angeles Federal Probation Office opposes the traditional view of addiction, in which drug use is regarded as a matter of pathology rather than choice. The district follows a policy of total abstinence with predictable consequences for drug use. Although the individual officer retains the discretion to determine the appropriate sanction or course of action, the policy clearly requires that some consequence follow any incident of drug use; the preferred action is placement in a therapeutic community. A sophisticated drug detection program is considered critical in identifying offenders who are using drugs, in order to intervene as early as possible and to prevent new criminal conduct. Surveillance is a major component of the L.A. approach, but the probation officer is also expected to focus his attention on other needs the client may have (Torres, 1997a:41).

Two separate government studies supported the effectiveness of the intensive surveillance-treatment total abstinence approach of Los Angeles' Federal Probation Office. A Federal Judicial Center study found that the number of positive drug tests differed considerably across the districts studied ranging from a low of 25 percent of caseloads with one or more positive drug tests in the Los Angeles office to a high of 69 percent in District 5. Thus, one may reasonably conclude that a total abstinence policy, coupled with an aggressive and sophisticated detection program leading to certain sanctions and/or mandatory treatment for drug use, deters many offenders from using drugs (Torres, 1997a:43).

The study's conclusions on arrests of offenders participating in aftercare were even more compelling. According to the Federal Judicial Center's study, 27 percent of the sample were arrested at least once during the period of study; the proportions varied considerably across districts, however. Two districts were well above the average at 44 percent (District 2) and 38 percent (District 5); *at the opposite extreme, only 15 percent were arrested in District 10 (Los Angeles)* (Eaglin, 1984).

A follow-up study conducted by the Federal Judicial Center 2 years later confirmed that the Los Angeles' Central District of California (CDC) was much stricter than other

districts in charging offenders with technical violations during the period studied. In contrast, most other districts did not appear to routinely charge offenders with technical violations in response to positive urine tests (Eaglin, 1986, p.54). In summary, the Los Angeles strategy has proven effective in deterring drug use and preventing new criminal conduct.

Selecting drug officer specialists, however, is an area that has frequently been neglected by probation and parole agencies. Because the drug caseload is extremely demanding and replete with violations, major confrontations, and frequent court or parole board appearances, the selection of the specialist is often based on who "wants it," rather than who might have the most suitable temperament. However, the drug offender's personality traits and characteristics, along with the agency's philosophy, are vital considerations in selecting the drug specialist.

Personality Traits of the Substance-Abusing Offender

An assessment of the personality traits and deficiencies of the substance-abusing offender is critical in determining the probation or parole officer style or typology that is most likely to motivate and contribute to behavioral change. This is an area surrounded by significant disagreement and controversy based largely on the theoretical orientation that an agency embraces. The supervision strategy described above provides a departure point for agencies willing to challenge the disease model approach to substance abuse.

The personality deficiencies exhibited by substance abusers require a directive and firm approach. Personality traits displayed by addicts tend to immobilize them from seeking treatment on their own. Even if they somehow muster up the motivation and energy to enter treatment, most will leave if they are not constrained by the threat of violation (Torres, 1997b, p.13).

Martin et al. (1977) postulated that alcoholics and opiate addicts are characterized by high basic needs, impulsivity, egocentricity, sociopathy, and hypophoria. Various definitions of hypophoria have included elements of lack of confidence, low energy, joylessness, and self-perceived unpopularity. Martin hypothesized that hypophoria was a state that occurred with increased frequency or intensity in drug users. Other studies have supported the idea that drug abusers also suffer from low self-esteem (Vanderpool, 1969;

Berg, 1971).

That substance-abusing offenders exhibit sociopathic or psychopathic traits argues strongly in support of the strategy that is presented here. Psychopathic traits place them at extremely high risk for continuing drug use and criminal behavior. Some of these traits that are highly resistant to change and require a highly directive or authoritative approach include: superficiality, egocentricity, lack of remorse or guilt, lack of empathy, deceit and manipulateness, impulsivity, shallow emotions, poor behavioral controls, need for excitement, irresponsibility, and criminal behavior (Hare, 1993, pp. 33-70). Offenders with these traits do not readily respond to the non-directive approach of the social worker who seeks to effect change through establishing rapport in order to encourage the substance abuser to see the error of his ways and seek help.

Cowan et al. (1979) felt that drug abusers might suffer from some distinctive pattern of pathologic feelings, particularly defeated ones, which can lead to or result from chronic drug use. They go on to say that it is not clear whether feelings of defeat or other elements of a psychopathic state are relatively constant or if they occur in episodes similar to anxiety states. This underlying psychopathic state may occur in drug abusers even when they are not using drugs.

According to Nathan and Lisman (1976, pp. 479-577), psychoactive drugs such as alcohol and opiates may be used to relieve persistent or episodic feelings of defeat. An increase in substance abuse tended to occur when the person's self-esteem was threatened. Smart (1977, pp. 59-63) has reported that opiate addicts had numerous psychological problems before their addiction developed. They include impulsivity, psychopathic or sociopathic traits, low tolerance for frustration, borderline schizophrenia, depression, and alienation. Smart agrees with the authors of the prior studies that opiate addiction and other types of drug use are a mechanism for coping with these psychological problems.

Smith (1980, pp. 50-58) finds that the match between the needs of the user and the changes the user attributes to the substance is important in determining whether use will continue. The individual who places a high value on feeling strong, alert, decisive, and masterful is apt to find amphetamine or cocaine much more satisfying than does a person seeking tranquility or physical relaxation. The better the match between the perceived

substance effects and the user's needs, the more likely use is to continue. He suggests that it is possible for drug use to produce changes in personality that are more or less enduring, for example, increased sociability and improved social skills in a person who is very shy. If such changes are highly valued by the drug user, the probability of continuing use will be increased substantially.

A wealth of scientific evidence confirms that substance abusers display a myriad of personality deficiencies. This brief overview illustrates that traits such as *impulsivity, sociopathy or psychopathy, depression, low energy, egocentricity, low self-esteem, anxiety, and a low tolerance for frustration*, in combination, do not readily respond to the disease model, social-worker method of dealing with substance-abusing criminals. These offenders tend to display severe forms of maladaptive behavior that are not easily modified. Substance abusers, regardless of the approach used, do not change their drug-using behavior in large numbers (Torres, 1997, p.13).

Hence the need for authoritative personality traits in the drug specialist. A probation or parole officer who displays authoritative traits would be described as imposing, dominant, decisive, and definitive. This is not the same as authoritarian characteristics, which tend to be negative and describe a person who is tyrannical, dictatorial, harsh, inflexible, and a strict disciplinarian. Generally, we use the term authoritative to refer to a probation or parole officer who is not reluctant to rely on his or her power and authority to effect change in the substance-abusing offender. The authoritative approach relies heavily on our law-enforcement, control agent role, and is necessary, in our view, because the personality traits described above tend to immobilize the addict from seeking treatment on his own. This approach, like any other, can certainly be a negative style if utilized in an extreme or excessive fashion. Agencies should select officers willing to use their authority decisively to direct the offender toward services and programs that will address drug abuse issues and other problem areas. Because of the personality traits described above, when the substance abuser relapses, the drug specialist must be decisive, definitive, and explicit in dealing with substance abuse violations. Depending on the offender's substance abuse history it may be necessary to coerce, threaten, and otherwise pressure him or her into treatment before the offender reverts to prior patterns of criminal behavior. If the substance

abuser refuses to participate in treatment or does not respond, the authoritative officer will take decisive action, up to and including arrest. When drug use violations occur, a confrontation with the offender frequently follows, and few officers are well-suited for this type of demanding and stressful and confrontational situation. Clearly, while the drug specialist position must be able to use his or her authority effectively and not shy away from confrontation, neither should he or she be inclined toward excessive and abusive use of authority. The drug specialist should possess authoritative personality traits, yet not exhibit the tyrannical traits of the authoritarian personality.

Agency Philosophy and Probation Officer Styles

The type of probation or parole officer selected for the drug specialist position will largely be determined by the philosophical orientation of the agency or department. If an agency subscribes to a deterministic, medical model approach to substance abuse, it will see the substance abusing behavior and resulting criminality as caused by heredity, socialization, mental processes, or the economic and opportunity structures in a society. These elements operate on the individual and drive him or her toward conforming or nonconforming behavior. Because internal and external forces cause the deviant behavior, a person cannot be held fully responsible or culpable for his or her actions. Thus the appropriate correctional response should be to expose the underlying causes and provide correction or rehabilitation (Torres, 1996, p. 18). The agency that endorses this explanation of substance-abusing behavior will seek an officer with a social work orientation toward supervision, perhaps possessing a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree.

According to the rational choice, classical explanation, crime is the result of choice or free will wherein the offender considers the cost and benefits of the behavior before acting. This model is based on the pain-pleasure principle, which maintains that if the potential pleasure outweighs the potential pain, the probability of the behavior will be greater. Some of the principles of the classical school model are similar to those found in the social learning principles of positive and negative reinforcement. In the classical school, because people exercise free will, the appropriate crime control strategy is a punishment suited to the severity of the offense. Retribution, in-

capacitation, and deterrence through punishment are major objectives of this school of thought. The rational choice model ultimately rests on the belief that people have the ability to control their behavior, whether speeding, robbing a bank, or using drugs or alcohol. Individual responsibility is a fundamental ingredient of this correctional philosophy (Torres, 1996, p.18). An agency that supports an antideterministic, rational choice model will be more inclined to select an officer with the authoritative traits described above. Clearly, there are degrees on the continuum between the left-leaning social worker and the right-leaning law-enforcement style, and even the latter must possess the ability to switch to a helping role when necessary.

According to Clear and Cole (1997, p.193), officers face role conflict in virtually all areas of their job. Most of this conflict has its origins in these two contradictory responsibilities: (1) enforcing the conditions of supervision and (2) assisting the offender. Klockars (1972, pp. 550-557) expanded the two basic roles when he developed a typology of four probation officer work styles. The "law-enforcer" or "probation-is-not casework" style would be placed at the extreme right of a continuum, representing a classical, conservative perspective. This officer, emphasizing the "cop" nature of the job, stresses surveillance, enforcement, and community protection. The "law-enforcer" is more inclined to violate and recommend revocation for probation violations. At the other extreme is the "therapeutic agent," or social worker, who stresses casework and treatment. This officer generally is reluctant to violate, choosing instead to continue counseling and attempt to modify the offender's violating behavior (Torres, 1997b, p.12).

A third category or style identified by Klockars is the "time-server," who has little commitment to his or her career and does the bare minimum to get by. The final style is that of the "synthetic officer," who strives to integrate both treatment and enforcement components. This officer endeavors to encourage the offender to obtain treatment while balancing the need for community protection (Torres, 1997b).

Tomaino (1975, pp. 41-46) describes the "five faces of probation supervision" as: help-him-understand, have-it-make-sense, let-him-identify, it's-up-to-him, and make-him-do-it. Tomaino gravitates toward the "have-it-make-sense" face in which the officer attempts to integrate the social-worker and law-

enforcer roles. In this respect, Tomaino would favor what Klockars has called the synthetic officer. While none of these fit neatly into an ideal approach for supervising the substance abuser, it is possible to extract elements from three of the five faces described by Tomaino to develop an effective strategy. In the "have-it-make-sense" face, probationers keep the rules when it is credible to do so because this better meets their needs. With the "it's-up-to-him" face, probationers know exactly what they have to do, what happens if they don't, and that it's up to them to perform. The law-enforcer, "make-him-do-it" face holds that probationers keep the rules only if you take a hard line, exert very close supervision, and stay completely objective in your relations with them. These three "faces" can be integrated into an effective style as a means to encourage or coerce a substance-abusing offender into treatment. The consolidation of the three "faces" might approximate a Klockars' right-leaning synthetic officer (Torres, 1997b).

In summary, probation officers have a range of styles into which they fall, based in part on their philosophical orientation, personality traits, view of the job, and the agency's theoretical approach to corrections. Most authors clearly suggest that the most desirable style is that of the synthetic officer, in which the social-worker and law-enforcer roles are integrated and balanced. However, while a kind of integration is desirable, a "balance" may not be the most effective approach with the substance-abusing offender. The law-enforcer, "make-him-do-it" style, at least at the outset, is more likely to be effective in setting limits, which is of critical importance in supervising a substance abuser caseload (Torres, 1997b). This type of officer does not recoil from maximizing the coercive power of the criminal justice system to encourage—and compel, if necessary—an offender into treatment. It is a style that does not fit neatly into the above typologies but instead draws heavily on the law-enforcer, "make-him-do-it" role in order to accomplish what the social worker seeks to attain through a supportive, warm, and nonjudgmental relationship. The authoritative officer will use community resources and services extensively to assist the offender while at the same time monitoring abstinence with intensive surveillance and drug testing. We believe, therefore, that the drug specialist should be a *right-leaning synthetic officer*, able to identify, locate, and refer to community resources while at the same

time setting and enforcing limits, and decisively encouraging, coercing and threatening an offender into treatment if he or she continues to abuse drugs or alcohol. The drug specialist must remain alert to the potential threat posed by the offender who continues to use drugs and/or alcohol and must move quickly to remove him or her from the community if the offender poses a threat to anyone.

Conclusions

The magnitude of the drug/crime correlation problem in the U.S. requires a proactive, aggressive supervision strategy. In this article, we have briefly described the strategy that we implemented in the federal probation office in the Central District of California at Los Angeles, which can best be described as an intensive surveillance-treatment approach that requires total abstinence and holds offenders accountable for *their decision* to use drugs or alcohol. While incarceration as a consequence for violating the terms and conditions of probation, parole, or supervised release always remains an option, the threat of custody is used primarily to motivate offenders to participate in a treatment program.

It has further been suggested that the personality traits exhibited by substance abusers do not readily respond to the nondirective, social worker approach. Traits such as impulsivity, sociopathy or psychopathy (a cluster of problematic and high risk traits), depression, low energy, egocentricity, low self-esteem, anxiety, and a low tolerance for frustration, in combination, do not readily respond to the disease model approach. We have emphasized that the probation officer drug specialist, should possess authoritative personality traits such as dominance, being imposing, decisive, and definitive. These desirable authoritative traits were also differentiated from the less desirable authoritarian traits like tyrannical, dictatorial, and harsh. Needless to say, excellent organizational skills are important in probation and parole generally, but even more so with a drug offender caseload due to the high level of activity which occurs.

Lastly, we have described the various styles or typologies found in the probation literature and have concluded that the authoritative traits needed to effectively supervise the substance abusing offender are most likely to be found in the law-enforcer, "make-him-do-it" style. The social-worker approach, while

well meaning, simply will not be effective with the substance abusing offender and will only reinforce manipulative, game-playing behavior. The strategy described here has served us well in the Central District of California and has resulted in a low positive rate and a low rate of new criminal conduct, while also motivating a significant number of offenders to participate in drug treatment. We believe that our approach has contributed toward community safety while also serving the best interest of the substance abusing offender.

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