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# Security and Technology — The Human Side

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Just a few years ago, people did not think of the words security and technology together in a corrections context. But now, with advances in this area, it all seems like a science fiction movie. Today, many still would be surprised at the available technologies in the fields of law enforcement and corrections. The ability to track individuals everywhere they go, recognize people by voice or eye scans, detect heartbeats from afar and shoot weapons around corners are all examples of technologies that are very real in today's environment.

February's headlines about a diamond heist in Antwerp, Belgium, indicated that the thieves breached multiple levels of the world's top security to steal \$100 million in diamonds. The report was fascinating in that it described the area where the diamonds were kept as “100 percent secure,” with monitors outside the vault and doors made of steel that was 2 feet thick. Guards, metal barricades and cameras that track all movement were breached to pull off the heist. Naturally, it was accomplished as the result of an inside job. Because crimes of this nature require know-how, law enforcement went looking inside and found that an organization had rented office space in the area and studied the ways the vaults were accessed. Two years of preparation went into planning the heist.

There is an age-old position that technology is only as good as the

people using it. We can all cite examples of where the systems fail if not used with proper training and integrity by humans. Then we all realize that the human component is exactly what it took for some technologies to improve. The new global positioning systems that replaced the old electronic monitoring systems are examples of how human ingenuity aimed toward bypassing the technology can result in improvements.

Some good news is that brutality and force have been replaced with surveillance and technology systems. There are fewer numbers of staff and inmates being injured during cell entries and less lethal technologies are now being used with increasing effectiveness. The days of assembling large tactical teams armed with impact weapons, such as batons and shields, have been replaced with tasers or pepper spray, two officers and a pair of handcuffs, followed up with fresh air and a cool shower. Escapes from prison have been all but eliminated with the advances in perimeter technology. Offender management systems enhance information sharing and allow us to improve effectiveness in areas such as intake and transport scheduling.

With identity theft being a major concern for the public, we can expect this problem to creep increasingly into prisons. Biometrics is certainly a part of the solution. Many also say that the size and

capabilities of cell phones are the newest greatest threat to the security of facilities. They are easily introduced as contraband, can circumvent inmate phone systems, take pictures, send e-mails, and capture audio and video recordings. They are hard to detect and, with the advances in the disposable models, they are hard to track and recover. If staff do get lucky and find one, tracing it back to the owner and/or user is next to impossible.

When I entered this business more than 25 years ago, I was told by one of the old hands that the best security is to “know your inmates.” While technology helps us see farther, hear better, document, evaluate, interrogate and perform other aspects of business at break-neck speeds, it may all be for naught if we let it sidetrack us from doing the things that we know are most effective in the management of people. The old guard was exactly right; to be effective, we must continue to emphasize the face-to-face contact with offenders, walking the yard, and spending time listening and paying attention to the climate and the interactions of staff and offenders. As technology is embraced, the goal remains that it benefits and not forgets humankind. ♦