



*The best in the business, such as those you will read about in this issue, are people who ... have a mission, not merely a job.*

# The Best in the Business

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Each year, the American Correctional Association publishes the “Best in the Business” issue of *Correction Today*, which is filled with inspirational and motivational stories of corrections professionals and volunteers from around the country. They are stories of personal and professional sacrifice and stories of the pursuit of excellence.

It has been said that the good is the enemy of the best. Too often, we allow and accept for ourselves, and for those around us, good performance and good leadership. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with being good, if we are not diligent in our organizations, an environment will evolve where good is good enough. This atmosphere may be averse to unacceptable or substandard performance but does not positively recognize or encourage those who work hard and seek to do their best. Complacency and mediocrity will become the dominant culture. However, high performers — those who consistently pursue their best — are antidotes to complacency and mediocrity.

The context of the cliché, “above and beyond the call of duty” is that there are those who do more than is required or even expected of them. Doing our best or expecting others to do their very best is somehow the exception rather than the rule. The best in the business, such as those you will read about in this issue, are people who understand that their duty as public servants is to do their best. They are people who have a mission,

not merely a job. They consistently strive to provide the best public safety and the best services, and develop and implement the best programs that keep people out of prison either prior to or subsequent to incarceration.

So how do we know when we are achieving our best? Much of the literature written regarding individual achievement in an organizational context measures success by results directly linked to the financial and economic health of organizations. Measuring results in governmental organizations, and specifically corrections, is a challenge. However, due to the efforts of ACA, the Association of State and Correctional Administrators and many other professional correctional organizations around the country, standards and performance measures have been developed and implemented. As a profession, we are holding ourselves to a higher standard of accountability for results than ever before.

Yet how do we, corporately and individually, continue to achieve the best during times of diminishing resources? The best leaders, the best professionals, the best people are not deterred by challenges. Quite the contrary; adversity, challenges and obstacles fuel the desire to succeed and

breed creativity and innovative thinking. The best leaders know that they must surround themselves with the best people.

Theodore Roosevelt, in a speech he delivered in Paris in 1910, said: “It is not the critic who counts, nor the person who points out how the strong person stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena; whose face is actually marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again, who knows great enthusiasm and great devotions, whose life is spent in a worthy cause; who, at best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and at worst, if failure wins out, it at least wins with greatness, so that this person’s place shall never be with those timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

I am reminded of some words of wisdom a college professor said to me almost 30 years ago as I struggled to decide the career path to pursue: “No matter the field you choose, there is always room for the best.” It is my hope that readers of this issue will be inspired and reinvigorated to reject complacency and attain the very best in our noble field. ♦

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