



... the majority of corrections professionals choose to conduct their responsibilities in accordance with the highest degree of professionalism and are dedicated to being the best in their profession.

Striving To Be the Best

By **James A. Gondles, Jr., CAE**
Executive Director
American Correctional Association

In my capacity as executive director of the American Correctional Association, I have traveled to nearly every state and met thousands of correctional, probation and parole officers in this country and abroad. I have spoken with them and their families — their spouses, children and parents. I have had the opportunity to discuss the causes of the stress, turmoil and pressure that their choice to enter the corrections profession has placed on them as well as their families. And, most important, I have developed an understanding as to why people choose to enter this profession.

Nearly everyone in corrections that I have met has made a conscious decision to enter the field. Most have also made a choice, as a corrections professional, to respect the dignity of all individuals, the rights of all persons and the potential for human growth and development, even as others claim that the people in our prisons are unable to be rehabilitated. Corrections professionals choose to demonstrate integrity, respect, dignity and fairness, and to pursue a balanced program of humanness, restoration, rehabilitation and the most appropriate sanctions consistent with public safety, while some in our society would rather lock people up for long periods of time. Corrections professionals choose to provide programs and constructive activities for offenders that promote positive change for responsible citizenship, while others discuss budget shortfalls and the costs of these programs. Many of the people I have met choose to search for new

knowledge, technological advances and effective practices that strive toward excellence and positive change, while others are content with how things have “always been done.” In short, the majority of corrections professionals choose to conduct their responsibilities in accordance with the highest degree of professionalism and are dedicated to being the best in their profession.

During good times, the individuals who work in corrections, as well as the work they do, go unnoticed by the public — and often by our policy-makers in the White House, in the halls of Congress and at our state capitals. However, just one mistake quickly changes things, placing the entire profession in the spotlight. The public — especially the media — expects us to be perfect, and we must try to meet their demands.

ACA is not content with merely following industry changes or reacting to the environment in which we exist. We strive to shape the process to meet the needs of our members as well as the communities in which we serve. ACA's accreditation process is designed to develop and promote effective standards for the care, custody, training and treatment of offenders in all age groups and all areas of the corrections field in an effort to make the facilities and programs we accredit the best in the business. We have invested in the development of educational and training programs to ensure that those working in corrections have access to state-of-the-art resources. In addition,

we commission numerous publications to help disseminate best practices and leading research.

We hold our accreditation process, educational programs and publications to the highest standards. We strive to ensure that the ideas reflected in the policies and resolutions that guide our decisions are thoroughly thought out and reflect the profession's best practices. This is not to say that ACA has not made mistakes. It is saying, however, that we constantly strive to ensure that everything we do is done to the best of our abilities.

ACA believes that the principles of humanity, justice, protection, opportunity, knowledge, competence and accountability are essential to the foundation of sound corrections policy and effective public protection. As ACA members, you continue to guide sound corrections practices, to make clear the philosophy and aims, and to inspire cooperation and support from leaders of local, state, national and international communities and organizations. In today's economic reality, we must work harder than we have before to ensure that the programs and services provided by corrections professionals meet the highest standards of both quality and accountability. Every member of ACA has made the choice to embrace our principles. We all have made a choice to devote our professional lives to corrections, and ACA will continue to lead the fight to be the best in our business. ♦