

Who Listens To The Captives?

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It's been awhile since I've written an essay; probably a month or so. Not because of lack of info to share, quite the opposite. But sometimes, while doing time, it gets very frustrating when the problems come not from other inmates, but staff.

Guys, let me make this crystal clear: there isn't ONE man or woman working in the Federal Bureau of Prisons who has any right making inmate's life harder than it is. No Warden, Captain, Lieutenant, Case Manager, Unit Manager, Counselor or any staff member in medical, education or anywhere has any authority to treat us as if THEY judged us. Not ONE person has that authority or right.

Yet, it is common practice. Very common.

I've heard officers even say it, "I'm here to make your life hard."

And just WHO gave him or her that authority?

This causes the people here, the inmates to question the authority. Society expects inmates to reform, but it's

quite impossible when staff is too busy taking out their personal prejudices and problems against inmates.

So, what does the believer do? And yes, there ARE believers in prison.

Since I write about what I experience, it is important for me to be, if possible, objective, while also being positive and inspiring, while not backing down from the problems at hand. I'm not kissing up to BOP for kicking me in the face. But I also have to balance the carnal with the spiritual.

Inmates here often have very valid arguments about their treatment, but is often suffocated by BOP policy. And when the prison IS wrong, there's a cover-up, to give the illusion that it never happened, or it was the inmate's fault.

Folks...sometimes the inmates CAN be right.

So, who listens to us? What do we do when we have a valid argument, but the prison refuses to acknowledge it? Let me give you a real example:

Here at USP Tucson, there has been, for YEARS, complaints about the mail room. Inmates have complained for years (I've only been here less than 3 years at the time of this essay) that mailroom staff was illegally opening legal

mail (which by LAW, they're not supposed to do), and throwing inmate mail away.

Let that sink in folks; inmates still have the right to get correspondence. Imagine a mother writing to her son in prison, or a wife writing to her husband, or a ministry writing to a person in need of prayer. The mailroom here at USP Tucson will take it, then decide if you get to have it, and then, if they decide to, throw it away...without telling you. Why would a prison throw away a letter from an inmate's mom? Why would the mailroom throw away a letter from a church? Why would they throw away a LEGAL letter from a lawyer, or open it up and make copies of someone's appeal?

It happens here- a lot- and it goes without saying, it's against the law.

But they do it anyway, because the prison turns a blind eye, and deaf ear, to the inmates.

A few weeks ago, I had a "Team Meeting"...

(Hold on a sec, gotta explain that...)

In prison, inmates are supposed to have what's called "Team Meetings" with the dorm Unit Manager, Case Manager and Counselor. The THEORY is that they're supposed to listen to any questions you may have, and give you the status of your incarceration, i.e., how many points you have, if you can

request a transfer, how much time you have left, ect. However, if the team is lazy and apathetic, it's really a waste of time... and yes, I'm being blunt about my "team". So, let's continue...

I go to my Team Meeting, held once every 6 months... or is it 3? Who cares? To me, it's worthless because my Case Manager, Mr. Lewis, is about as compassionate as Hitler was for the Jews...

(Hard shot? Yeah, it is...)

So I go to Team Meeting and Ms. Flores, my Counselor, asks me if, or when I can make my next FRP payment...

(Another pause here. FRP is the prison's way to force inmates to pay for court assessment fees. It's supposedly called Financial Responsibility Payment... something no inmate ever agreed to pay, but if you DON'T pay it, the prison levels you with about a dozen forms of persecution, including limiting your canteen spending limit to \$25 a month.)

So I tell Flores that my mother said she'd send the receipt that very week; it was Tuesday when I had Team, so I expected the receipt by Friday latest.

So that week goes on, and Friday I don't have my receipt. Did mom forget to pay the FRP? Or did something happen where she wasn't able to do it? Without a doubt, if

the payment isn't made, this prison is quick to punish us. We're accountable to every fault, even if not clearly defined.

So now I'm concerned. Mom surely paid it; she said she would. Yet, I don't have a letter from home, which would have had that receipt. The following week, I call home, and ask mom if she paid the FRP.

Mom tells me that she DID pay it, and sent it the same week. Then, I should have gotten it. Why don't I have my receipt, or mail for that matter? It didn't take long to figure it out...

The mailroom.

It's highly likely they threw it away... along with other people's mail.

A week later, I find out that the mailroom was under investigation for mail tampering... based on countless complaints of inmates not getting mail, of legal documents CLEARLY marked "LEGAL MAIL" and being opened anyway, and even missing legal documents. It easily explains why I didn't get my receipt or mail... the prison threw it away.

Why would anyone do something like that, knowing how critical mail is to the inmates, especially legal mail? And perhaps the greater question, why didn't the prison listen

when we clearly complained? No warden can plead ignorance; he knew. No Unit Manager or Case Manager can do likewise; they all KNEW that the mailroom was tampering with United States Mail. Incarcerated or not, we are still entitled to US Postal Services.

But it gets frustrating when no one listens.

When things like this happen, you have options. One, which most inmates do, is complain. Most guys sit and curse the prison. And while I supposed venting can be somewhat therapeutic, it hardly solves the problem.

A second option is to attack the problem carnally... by that, to take steps intellectually. This means writing a complaint to the warden, filing a BP (a grievance procedure), or filing a lawsuit. This, to me, is more effective than complaining, but the flaw is that because it's carnal, there's no guarantee that the prison will even honor the complaint. I mean, if they KNOW the mail is tampered with, are they going to argue that they're wrong? You could be 100% right, but if the adversary regards not honesty, then you'll still lose.

The third option is one that I think is most effective....appeal the situation SPIRITUALLY. The Bible says we don't wrestle with flesh and blood, but rather principalities. The fight, the war, is spiritual. So see it that way, knowing your real enemy isn't USP Tucson, it's the devil.

This does NOT excuse the staff from what they're doing, because they should be held accountable. But if you appeal to God for wisdom and action, you'll be far more effective and critically dangerous, to any staff member that abuses the authority God gave them.

Proverbs says that if we acknowledge God in all that we do, He will direct our steps. Isaiah says that no weapon formed against us (believers) will prosper, and every word spoken against us WE will condemn. Psalms says that we shall not fear evil tidings, our hearts are fixed, trusting in God. If the prison chooses to abuse their power by persecuting and oppressing the inmates, then it is the believer's option to appeal to God, Who WILL, not might, step in and fix the problem. If that means staff getting replaced, so be it. But to be sure, God will defend those who call upon Him.

So, who listens to the captives? Most don't because society has been conditioned that the captives have no rights and are completely lawless. But consider, if the community is lawless, how bad are those who run it? If a town in the Old West was "lawless", it was likely because the Sheriff or Marshall was corrupt, or that there was no real justice. No different in prison. Staff must be held accountable just as much as the inmates.

That means they need to listen to the captives too.

If they did, perhaps we'd get our mail, as we OUGHT
to.

Anyway, until next time....

This is one of many I've written. My hope
is to generate responses, so I can be encouraged to write more,
or find venues to blog. I hope this helps; I've written close
to 1,000 pages in 3 years...

Fred M.