

Examining Prison Discipline/Hypocrisy
Case Study 3A: Punishing visitors as felons

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There are countless areas to explore prison behavior, and how the prisons administer discipline. Now let us agree on this; discipline IS necessary in prisons, and is essential to establish order in an environment that does often get chaotic. Yet I submit to you the verbiage of "discipline". Oxford 2nd Edition American Desk Dictionary and Thesaurus defines it as a noun or verb, even an adjective. As a noun, it deals with "control or order exercised over people, or animals, ect". Another definition is "rule" or "authority". Yet what we're discussing is in the form of a verb, and Oxford defines it as "correct", or "to correct".

So what is discipline for? Simply to establish order, or to correct? In prison, this determines if the institution is actually trying to rehabilitate or simply to punish. This is critical in prison behavior, because it determines if we, as inmates, have value. My "examinations" have been an attempt to show that sometimes, prison discipline has little to do with corrective behavior, and only in persecution. This is shown quite clearly in the scenario involving visitation.

There has been numerous complaints about officers at

visitation. Many inmates have complained of officers here at USP Tucson who have treated their loved ones with little regard. Inmates claim these officers are extremely restrictive of what is allowed to be worn to visitation. One inmate's mother, over 70 years old, was refused because she had some metal in her bra... so she had to go and find a sports bra, and even then, she was given a hard time.

One inmate had family come from Maine, to Tucson, Arizona, to visit. The officers refused them TWICE because of their clothes, until a SENSIBLE staff member was able to vouch for the inmate. Had she not been there, that inmate would not have gotten the visit.

Prison officers also lie about calling an inmate to visitation, forcing inmates' families and friends to wait in the waiting room for well over an hour. Then, these same officers would lie to the visitors, even to imply that maybe their loved ones don't WANT to see them. One mother told me she was crying in the waiting room because the prison officers here at USP Tucson told her, "we tried to call him, but I guess they don't want to see you".

Another inmate waited over 2 hours, waiting for the call to visit his mother. He was ready at 8am, when visitation supposedly started. They finally called him just after 11am. When he finally got to visitation, about 10 minutes later, his family told him that the prison claimed they kept calling for him, but he never came.

The fact here is this: any call for visitation is made first to the dorm officer, who calls out for the inmate. Everyone can hear that in the dorm. Or, the inmate's name is called over the public address speaker; everyone on the COMPOUND can hear that. So, in this case, the officers never actually called the inmate until 11am.

One inmate's parents were so disappointed with this "prison courtesy" that he demanded the warden's number. The prison officer tried to side-step the request, saying "He's not here". The father of the inmate told him he would call the warden the next day if necessary. The officer gave the father of the inmate the number, then smartly remarked, "You should say 'thank you' for giving you that information".

The entire purpose of visitation is to establish a link between the inmate and his loved ones, because it has a direct effect on his rehabilitation. But the prison's responsibility is to ensure a POSITIVE interaction between staff, visitors and inmates. It is NOT the authority of any staff member to persecute any visitor, which by the way, is a United States citizen. It is, in fact, very poor professionalism for officers to treat visitors like inmates. Like one inmate said to his parents after the visit, "if they treat you like that, imagine how they treat us".

There is a place for security, which is Priority One in all prisons. I am not implying that prisons ought to allow just anybody to drive on in and visit who they want. There is

a protocol which must be obeyed. But when officers abuse that authority, the lines of judgment become blurred, and they start treating inmates' loved ones like criminals. Many officers here at USP Tucson have been criticized for nasty attitudes against inmate's loved ones.

Discipline, in its purest form, establishes order- yet FAIR discipline establishes a respectable order. There was very likely discipline in the German concentration camps during World War II, but there was nothing FAIR about it. You'd hate to compare prison guards to SS officers...

There must be a discipline, an order, when it comes to prison visitation. There are rules to be followed. But as any rule, it must be a sense of fairness, compassion and logic to support it. No officer working at USP Tucson, or ANY prison, has the right to persecute an inmate's loved ones. How would I react, if an officer talked disrespectfully to my mother, who travelled 3000 miles to visit me? I would personally have great contempt for that officer, and the prison, for treating my mom like a criminal. Yet, this happens and many inmates hate that, yet feel powerless because they are afraid that if they speak out, the prison will retaliate. And even loved ones on the outside fear retaliation if they reported persecution.

So, is discipline established? The overall idea of visitation remains intact, yes. But the VALUE of it, and the integrity of the personnel, who happens to be Federal employees, is greatly compromised. So then, there is

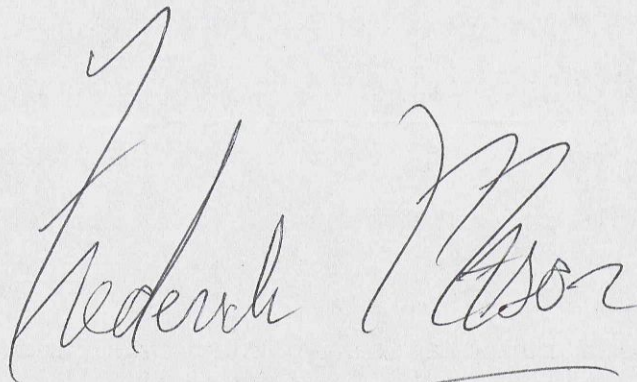
hypocrisy, a mockery of what true discipline really is. Does this help the inmate; certainly not, nor does it reinforce positive behavior, or respect of the prison administration.

Until there is a sincere value of what visitation means to inmates, and respect of persons to their loved ones, this action isn't productive, and the discipline, or "order" that the prison administers can be seen as nothing more than persecution:

"Sure, we give inmates visitation, but we'll treat their loved ones like the trash their criminal friends and families are..."

(Sorry, that just seems to be the USP Tucson motto...)

Until next time...

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Frederick Eason". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "F" and a stylized "E". Below the signature is a horizontal line.