

# Prison Officers: Why They Work Here

"What is your occupation?" Have you ever seen that question asked on some kind of application or form? Have you ever sat down and thought about the different occupations out there? Have you ever wondered, "Why do they do this? What reasons do they have for working in that field?" Have you ever people-watched? Trying to figure out who a person is, how they live, what their job is, and why they do what they do?

Well, let's look into one occupation that is so critical in today's society as it has been since the wake of this country and in others... Prison Officers. That includes everyone from a new correctional officer to a veteran officer, from a Sgt. to a Captain, from an administrative officer/secretary to the Head Warden or Superintendent. From a prison social worker to a prison case manager. For each of these positions, there are 3 trend-type reasons the normal society citizens work to obtain them. Mind you, this is not based off of statistical research, this is more of a 5 year first-hand, perspective people watching and subtle questioning review. As a lawyer I know said, "The more data you have, the more facts you have, and the more you will be able to make accurate conclusions."

Let's take a look at the 3 overall reasons for becoming a prison officer. Number 1: The Best Types, which I break down into 2 sub-categories - Those passionate about prisoner rehabilitation and the "check-collectors".

Number 2: The purposefully extra types, which can be said a different way as the Wanna-be or Reject Police officers.

Number 3: The Unconscious Worst Types, which, again, I have 2 sub-categories for. One for Military Veterans who still act as if they are in the military. And the second, people who have no control in their lives outside of the job, but Crave Control.

Understand this, the majority of these Uniform positions require the individual to



Work 12 hours shifts 16 days a month. Monday and Tuesday then Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The other 2 days are for the other officer rotation. Now think about the timing throughout a 24 hour day. Wake up 2 hours before your shift, Drive 1 hour to work, work 12 hours, take 1 hour to get back home, sleep for 7 hours. That's a total of 22 hours, meaning you'd have approximately 2 hours of freetime. (Don't forget, however, this is a responsible working schedule). Now imagine doing this 5 days out of 7 days, in a week. What kind of life do you think you'd have? The answer, None, You work too much. Lets also take into account that most people in each of those Uniformed positions, work overtime and extra days. They live at work. There is a saying, "If you love your work, you'll never have to work a day in your life." That saying does not apply to the majority of those who work in prison.

### Number 1, The Best Types of Prison Officers:

↳ Passionate about Prisoner Rehabilitation: Those who usually obtain a position as a prison Social worker or prison psychologists, tend to belong to this sub-section. And why shouldn't they? They usually devote their lives to their work. My own personal experience with them has shown me that they also tend to be more grounded and understanding. They are not like the masses of citizens who are unknowledgeable of the turmoil in and lack of rehabilitation programs in Prison.

For example, my first year in prison, I requested to speak with a therapist (psychologist), who I will name, Mrs. W. I can't say everyone is like her, but Mrs. W. is very observant and down to earth. In addition to speaking about my life and experiences, we also spoke

about life in prison, prison environments, and the justice system as a whole. One of the things she said which really stuck out to me was this, "Working here, in the Criminal Justice System, I have seen all of the injustice that continues to occur in it. I could be small or large, but it happens in almost every case. And then those people come to prison to get a 'mentality check' because there is no rehabilitation, this is an animal holding pen. The powers that be want you to become an animal. They want you to become untamed because it means you'll come back, your friends will come, maybe your family members, but especially your children."

The fact that Mrs. W. had this knowledge and was willing to tell it straight, proves her attention to her working environment, with the blinders off. She shares this knowledge with her friends, with strangers, with anyone, hoping to take the blinders off of other people. I commend her. Thank you, Mrs. W.

↳ The "Check - Collectors": These type of people, typically, are lowly Correctional Officers. The ones prisoners see on a daily basis and would have the most interaction with. Although they are the ones who usually know nothing important making them a target for the quick tempered prisoners who are suspicious of all officers. But this type is pretty self-explanatory, it's all about the officers who come to work because 'it's a job', 'better benefits than a lot of places', 'the paycheck pays the bills', etc... The people come to work and don't bother anyone, they don't try to be 'Super-Cops', they're not working to oppress anyone, and honestly, they're not too dedicated to the job. One of the signs you'll see in a person associated with this sub-section is how much they ~~dislike~~ <sup>dislike</sup> being called "Police" or "12".

To give you an example, there was an officer I got to know a little bit named Ofc. P. He was a great example of everything I wrote above. One of the things he told me was that he hated the stigma that came with being associated with his



job. Apparently Correctional Officers are not exempt from being hated by the public if they were seen with their badges, especially after the death of George Floyd. He told me of a situation where he was riding from work on his motorcycle (he's a biker) and he was wearing his black uniform with the picture of the badge on the front left pocket. He ~~drove~~<sup>rode</sup> past a group of about 10 people in his downtown area and when they saw him, they started throwing rocks at him.

Despite several situations like this, his attitude at work didn't change. He remained professional and continued to collect his checks, pay his bills, and continue life. When I spoke to ~~Off.~~ Ofc. R. about what he felt about these things happening to him, he simply said that he has the same anger as everyone else about the injustice in the 'Justice' system, so he can't be upset at anyone for feeling the way they do. The only thing he can do is work to be someone who can play a role, albeit a small one, to not be one of those people negatively contributing to system. So to Ofc. R., I also commend you.

## Number 2, The Purposefully Extra Type of Prison Officer:

↳ Most times, these are the Wannabe and/or Reject Police Officers. A lot of Correctional officers and Detention Officers try to start their careers ~~in~~<sup>in</sup> these places as a stepping stone to get to the police academy. Some departments actually require it, mainly Sheriff's departments. For those departments who require the experience, it is a smart thing to do, I believe, as long as the reason behind the experience is recognized and understood. They should understand the conditions of those whom they could/may arrest in the future. It should sober them and bring some compassion in their dealings as a police officer. I know many Sheriff deputies and maybe it's because of my background, but they typically are a lot more reasonable and

understanding than those who do not have the experience.

That's the good, however, there is a lot of bad. Some of these individuals waiting to go to the academy get rejected and/or don't make it through the academy for one reason or another. Some get rejected before even having the opportunity to go to the academy. Unlike what a lot of people seem to think, not everyone gets accepted into the police academy or past the application phase. In fact, in most cases, only 30%-33% of applications actually get passed on to the next phase in most departments. I know this from personal experience having been a LAPD cadet and having been accepted before for a police academy in North Carolina, before I decided against being a police officer.

However, there are several individuals who believe being a police officer is an excuse to abuse power and do whatever they want, to bully people and cut in lines, etc... Most of these people are rooted out in the pre-academy stages, but the mentality is still stuck in them. Rejection from a police academy only makes it worse because their next best option is to apply as a Correctional or Detention Officer, where these institutions can't afford to be picky. Add in there, that there is already so much corruption and lack of caring for prisoners and you get this category of people who add to the corruption. Not becoming police officers puts a chip on their shoulder, even if people don't know it about their background. They think of themselves as better than everyone else because they applied where others didn't, because they "could've" become police officers (had they passed the pre-academy stage or the academy). They become Purposefully Extra Correctional Officers.



### Number 3, The Unconscious Types: (Typically the Worst officers)

↳ The first subsection in this section would be Military Veterans. First off, let me say that I salute their service whether ~~you~~<sup>they</sup> were HDS or DHS. So, I don't want any of them to believe I discredit their service to this Country. What I will say, however, is that outside of the Uniform or posting, a mentality change needs to occur. I understand that sometimes this difficult, but I also know that there are plenty of Veterans who don't try to change their mentality. Unfortunately, the non-military Society is just that... non-military. So acting as if it is causes issues. ~~blow~~

Even more than that, however, is working as a Correctional officer where not much is required, in terms of Occupational standards. So it's even more important to change your mentality, because not doing so can cause a War Zone on institutional soil, The opposite of what should be occurring. This is actually difficult to explain, so let me give an example.

There was an officer, Ofc. H., whom I first met while processing in a medium custody prison (more open movement). He is an Ex-Marine of 10 years. Now Marines have a number of duties to perform while on post, which is drilled and memorized during Basic/OCS. Ofc. H. committed those duties into his everyday life style. There inlies one of his most basic issues while working as a Correctional officer. He would continuously cause issues because of his out-of-place duties and was unfortunately stabbed by prisoners.

If that wasn't enough, I saw/met him again when he transferred to a Closed Custody Prison (less movement, typically Modified). The residents of these types of prisons tend to be a lot more vident, less caring, have less patience or they have to spend an amount of time at the Custody level due to the nature of

their conviction until they can go to a lower custody level and better environment. Well, Ofc. H., who had come from a lower custody prison where he had issues with the prison population there and had been stabbed, ~~come to~~ <sup>Transferred</sup> to a higher custody prison. You would think that he'd be a little more chill and would understand that he's now in a worse and more hostile place. Well he didn't. An example of his excessiveness? While passing out food trays there is always an excess of drinks left. The left over food and drinks get thrown away after feeding. One prisoner asks that if there are any extra drinks after feeding, he would like one. Ofc. H. ignores him and walks straight past him. Well that prisoner lets the disrespect slide and just waits. After feeding there are about 20 cups of juice left. When the prisoner approaches to get one of the cups, Ofc. H. stops and puts his hand on his pepper spray, unlocking the hatch. The prisoner stops and tells Ofc. H. he is only trying to get one of drinks before they are all thrown away. Ofc. H. ~~says~~ <sup>tells</sup> him that he heard him the first time, but policy is that ~~only~~ <sup>each</sup> prisoner can only have one drink. Luckily a Sgt. was coming around at that time and the situation was explained to him. The Sgt. looked at Ofc. H. like he'd lost his mind and informed the entire block that there was no policy like the one Ofc. H. told people, then instructed Ofc. H. to give out the drinks to whoever wanted one. This was a rare case of an officer not having the other officers back. Usually they lie for each other. But guess what? Ofc. H. did it again the next week. After 6 weeks working at the prison, he was seriously stabbed again because of several more situations of that petty caliber.

That's an example of One Officer who is a Veteran, but the truth is a lot of Veterans who become Correctional officers are very similar in nature. Being that way and refusing to change their working mentality, causes them issues, unnecessarily.

↳ The second sub-section of this section and by far the worst of all are those people who crave control and power because they have no feelings of control in their lives outside of the job. Maybe they were bullied in school, so now they get to bully prisoners (sometimes to their demise). Maybe they have had a bad experience with a significant other so now everyone who resembles their significant other, they try to ruin. Maybe they grew up being told what to do at their home and they resented it, so who better to get revenge on than those who barely have anything anyway. Prisoners!

Too often these types of Officers work in "Corrections". Their demeanor is one of being "better than all of you". They typically work a lot of overtime, because what else do they have to do? They participate in the corrupt and brutal, excessive, force applied to prisoners and they take delight in it. One of the worst things about these kinds of Officers is that they, most times, are also ambitious and thus work to get promoted because promotions equal more power and with more control and power they can get away with more and more corruption.

I'll give you an example. There is a Correctional Officer who at the moment is a Lt. at a closed custody prison. Before I continue let me show you the <sup>Chain</sup> ~~hierarchy~~ of command in Prisons (In order from least power to most): Officers, Sgts., Asst. Unit Managers, Lt.s, Unit Managers, Captains, Asst. Wardens/Superintendents, Head Warden.

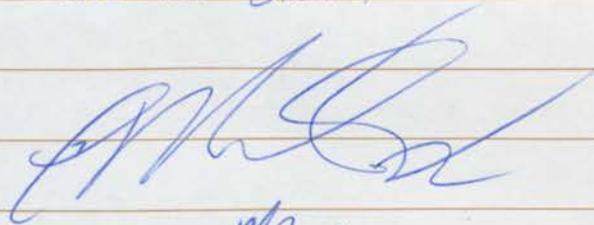
Well, this Lt., Lt. M., 1 1/2 years ago when I first knew about him was a Sgt. He made it his mission to bug the prisoners in which ever Unit he was in, usually starting fights and then calling backup. He'd cover up what he'd done and the prisoner(s) would get in trouble. None of this stopped as he got promoted. In fact, we had a running joke

that in order to get promoted, you just need to keep getting beat up. This "joke" tends to have a lot of truth because these people are usually people in this category. It also makes me consider the current Correctional Officers I see at my current prison. There is a Captain who was a Sgt. 1 1/2 years ago. That means within 18 months they moved up 4 promotional spots. Wow. So remember, these top people, typically are corrupt, it's always been their way since the beginning.

→ I wrote this paper to give notice of the types of prison officers/officers for those who don't know, for those who may be considering a career in Corrections, and for those fighting for change. Change has to occur from the inside as well as the outside, in order for it to be effective. So now you have some inside knowledge to help make better and more conscious choices and change on the outside or, as we say in prison, "in the real world". Make the most of it.

Remember the Golden Rule: "Treat others the way you want to be treated." You don't need much more than that.

Create Peace and Dream,



M.L.A.

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