

Evaluation Report: Improving Officer and Inmate Well-Being at Sing Sing Prison

Jacob Carney

Old Dominion University

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Abstract

This report assesses both systemic and interpersonal issues evident during shadowing Officer Ted Conover at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Conover faced a steep learning curve, having to overcome considerable obstacles as a Newjack, which were mostly manifested through the enormous occupational stress, manipulation of inmates, and the constant threat of harm. Such problems are not only individual flops but are entrenched in the sociological and psychological processes of the carceral world. When these issues are examined, it becomes clear that they are caused by deficiencies in inmates, including ineffective socialization, psychological trauma of disintegration/disorientation during the intake process, and physical constraints of the Telephone Pole prison designs.

To address these urgent problems, this report proposes a new model of direct supervision that enables staff and inmates to interact more effectively and respond to problems proactively. Moreover, standardized professional training and evidence-based classification systems will be introduced to reduce adverse staff culture and enable staff to cope with inmate volatility. By addressing both environmental and human concerns in Sing Sing, the administration may improve security, honor, and the overall welfare of the officer corps and the prisoners.

Introduction

As a consultant appointed to shadow Officer Ted Conover and observe the operations at Sing Sing, it is quite evident that the facility is run in a state of constant tension. The experiences described by Conover in *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing* serve as the main case study for determining the points of friction between employees and prisoners. This report goes beyond anecdotal evidence and examines the root causes of these dilemmas, drawing on existing

research and theories in the correctional field. By analyzing the prison's architectural design, the psychological condition of the underclass, and changes in inmates' rights, the report will offer the Warden a roadmap for institutional reform.

Officer Stress, Fear, and Role Conflict

One of the main dilemmas Conover encountered was feeling excessive fear and confusion about her role. He was a new officer, and his responsibility was to uphold discipline among men who, in most instances, were more mature in the prison system than he was. Conover discusses the physical and psychological stress of this continual alertness, in particular the gut-twisting fear of venturing into the gallery and the dark, narrow lanes, where he imagined himself to be weak (Conover, 2000, p. 11). The characteristics of this "Newjack" shock include a high level of anxiety about personal safety and the possibility of not finding a compromise between being a hard-ass and being soft.

This stressor stems from the nature of the inmate population. The Module 3 Section 1 PowerPoint (n.d.) states that inmates often bring about a malfunctioning socialization and disorganized background with a history of trauma. Moreover, they tend to be impulsive and have no sense of empathy, leading to a situation in which an officer does not know when a regular conversation can ultimately become violent. Such uncertainty is intensified by the disorientation outlined in Section 3 (n.d.), which creates an extreme state of internal disorganization among all who enter the facility, including the staff who must address it.

Sing Sing should adopt a Direct Supervision model to reduce this stress. According to the Prison Design & Security Levels PowerPoint (n.d.), officers can be located in the housing units and interact directly, allowing them to notice small problems before they grow. This precautionary measure is helping lessen apprehension about the unknown. Moreover, Johnson et

al. (2016) recommend an extensive approach to support and train officers in mental health communication, enabling them to address role conflicts and the mental load of the profession.

II. Inmate Manipulation and Challenges to Authority

During his time in office, Conover was tested on numerous occasions by inmates who sought to have him favour them or destabilize his authority. For example, Conover narrates how inmates tried to outsmart him over cell placements or privilege exceptions, exploiting his status as a "Newjack" when they wanted to push the limits (Conover, 2000, p. 102). These ranged from simple rule violations to complex psychological challenges designed to test whether this officer would crack.

The studies confirm that such behaviors are typical inmate shortfalls. According to the Module 3 Section 1 PowerPoint (inmates, n.d.), inmates are master manipulators who can always downplay the seriousness of their crimes. Irwin (2013) clarifies that, since prisoners feel a loss of control in their lives, they want to re-establish authority by using the staff, who represent the system. This power conflict is an inevitable product of the process of disintegration, in which inmates lack formal connections to organizations and seek to become dominant within the prison walls (Section 3, n.d.).

The proposed solution is to implement a rigorous, evidence-based classification system. Using the correctly calculated "criminogenic needs" and potential dangerousness as proposed in the PowerPoint Prison Design and Security Levels (n.d.), these could isolate the most manipulative or high-risk prisoners from the rest of the prison population. In addition, Johnson et al. (2016) state that manipulation can be avoided only by ensuring that the same rules are consistently enforced. The training should be standardized so that inmates cannot shop for the kind of officer they want.

Inmate Violence and the Threat of Unrest

Conover vividly describes the constant fear of violence, like the state of tension during the lockdowns after a stabbing on the block (Conover, 2000, p. 182). This environment of instability has rendered Sing Sing a difficult place to be in, as both employees and prisoners are in hyper-arousal mode.

This violence, in many cases, can originate from the psychological trauma of imprisonment itself. Section 3 (n.d.) explains the procedure of disintegration, under which prisoners lose access to their own property and the capacity to perform business tasks, such as paying bills, or to maintain other relationships that hold them together in the family. Such an intense feeling of alienation, anxiety, and distress usually shows up as aggression. Also, as stated in the Inmate Rights Movement PowerPoint (n.d.), the shift from the distant era's hands-off style to an increasingly bureaucratic regime increased inmates' expectations. Unrest is the consequence of failing to meet these demands for decency and dignity when overcrowding or inadequate conditions occur (The Inmate Rights Movement, n.d.).

To mitigate violence, the facility must address these "deprivations." Johnson et al. (2016) recommend reducing overcrowding and increasing access to family communication to reduce inmate frustration significantly. Moreover, ensuring rational governance, in which disciplinary measures are just and transparent, minimizes the reactive bitterness inmates feel towards the system (Module 3 Section 1 PowerPoint, n.d.).

Negative Staff Culture and Inadequate Training

Conover noted that much of the training he received at the academy did not adequately prepare him for the realities of Sing Sing. He points out that older officers used to treat the academy as a sham and instructed recruits in the principles that the only way to live was to be

unyieldingly tough (Conover, 2000, p. 64). This toxic subculture is preventing new officers from acquiring the interpersonal skills required for effective New Generation policing.

This issue lies in the historical hands-off style, in which correctional administrators were closed off from the courts and worked with minimal supervision (The Inmate Rights Movement, n.d.). This legacy has allowed a culture of "us vs. them" to persist. Johnson et al. (2016) suggest that, in the absence of what can be referred to as the idea of standardized, professional movement within the correctional system, local facilities would be prone to localized bad habits and non-accountability.

The solution lies in transforming the training academy and implementing ethical codes. To adopt a more professional approach, Sing Sing needs to encourage practices recommended by Johnson et al. (2016) that reward officers who manage conflict situations without resorting to physical force, instead using de-escalation. The solution to that would be to institute supervisory accountability so that the senior officers could be scrutinized to the same level of professionalism as those they are supposedly training to become the Newjacks.

Structural Limitations of "Telephone Pole" Prison Design

One of the most significant physical barriers Conover faced was the layout of Sing Sing itself. He explains how challenges were experienced in managing the huge A-Block, since its length and height made it a monster to handle (Conover, 2000, p. 121). The levels had formed some blind spots, which prisoners used to engage in illegal activities or fighting.

Sing Sing is a classic example of "Telephone Pole Design." This design, as described in the Prison Design & Security Levels PowerPoint (n.d.), features 4-6 interior cells facing exterior walls, which is efficient but not safe. The design ensures that it becomes impossible to supervise

down a tier, and offers a loud, dangerous environment in which officers struggle to respond to issues on the tier (Prison Design and Security Levels, n.d.). The invisibility and the radial or linear restrictions are the remnants of a 19th-century philosophy that emphasized containment rather than safety or rehabilitation.

The remedy is to redecorate or migrate to the New Generation architectural characteristics. These will involve Campus or Courtyard designs, which are more visible and offer a more humane environment to live in (Prison Design and Security Levels, n.d.). In case a complete reconstruction is impossible, the administration ought to use technology such as advanced surveillance and centralized supervision pods to close the loopholes left by the outdated structure.

Psychological Disorientation and Inmate Mental Health

Conover observed that a large number of inmates appeared mentally collapsed. He recalls how a prisoner had a breakdown in his psyche due to being put in solitary confinement and how the isolation had only worsened the natural instability of the man (Conover, 2000, p. 215).

This was the direct consequence of "disorientation." Section 3 (n.d.) explains the procedures in the booking process that may require 8 hours in "holding tanks" that contain urine, alcohol, and body filth, creating internal disorganization. This, combined with such common inmate deficits, like low IQ and PTSD (Module 3 Section 1 PowerPoint, n.d.), creates a psychologically frail population. Irwin (2013) points out that the environment tends to reduce individuals to a state of rabble and deprive them of whatever social competence they still have.

To remedy this, Sing Sing needs to enhance their attention to rehabilitation and mental health. A suggestion for a "reception facility" that emphasizes better classification and

psychological evaluation can help identify people at risk at an early stage (Section 3, n.d.). Delivering "educational programs" will restore the "formal ties" that have disappeared during disintegration, providing inmates with a path to a prosocial identity (Irwin, 2013; Johnson et al., 2016).

Conclusion

A mix of antique architecture, acrid organizational culture, and failure to address the psychological trauma of incarceration has led to a deterioration in the well-being of the staff and inmates at Sing Sing. As a consultant, I would advise the Warden to leave behind the Telephone Pole days and adopt the New Generation and Direct Supervision philosophies. Professionalization of the personnel, modernization of the facility, and treating prisoners with the decency and dignity demanded by the Inmate Rights Movement will help Sing Sing turn this facility, an area of disorientation and fear, into a facility that prioritizes safety and rehabilitation.

References

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