

## Sanity in an Insane Workplace

By Dr. Patricia Franklin, Correctional Educator & Past President CEA

I'd like to address issues that may be of concern to a person considering a career in correctional education. There are four main subjects that for most of us are relevant in making this decision: safety; professionalism; gender bias; stress. This is a very brief article, simply to provoke thought.

Safety has to be the primary concern of any educator considering working in an institution where people are being 'held against their will'. Those students may be manipulative because they are unhappy with their environment generally. A Correctional Educator, different from a regular educator, needs to follow all Institutional guidelines and notify administration immediately if there are questions. Do not feel stupid. Custody will respect you for your understanding your proper role and staying in it.

Professionalism is a basic criterion for success or failure as a correctional educator. As you present yourself in how offenders who have "24-7" (twenty four hours a day, seven days a week) will perceive you and treat you. Dress like you would for a job outside an institution. Speak as you would in any professional setting. Do not become familiar or too comfortable with your students. It is human nature to want to become 'close' to the people with whom we work. This should be true, only to a point, as a correctional educator. Personal information about oneself; address, phone number; personal activities; pictures of family should never be shared with students. I would also recommend that such personal information should be guarded also from custody and staff until you are comfortable on a trust basis with colleagues on an individual basis.

Stress has to be considered a "condition of employment" for correctional educators. Some level of watchfulness is always warranted when working in an institutional setting. Attempting to have a 'professional' rapport with students as a correctional educator creates a fine line of tension that is simply unavoidable. Prepare for it and deal with it by having a healthy well-balanced life "outside" of poor relationships or private issues to work. If you need to talk, find someone "away from work" to offer counsel. Eat correctly. Exercise. Have hobbies that reduce stress and promote well-being. Do not take your work home with you and do not share personal stories about your students outside the workplace. Not only could this become very stressful, but it is unprofessional.

Gender bias is a sensitive issue that has multidimensional facets. As correctional educators our role is to keep us solely in the realm of the teacher, counselor, advisor, facilitator of educational plans. However, as correctional educators we are often placed in dual roles and must always be ready to function 'for safety purposes' in a correctional mode if required to by the conditions put on us at hiring. How this becomes a gender biased issue is when females and males are working together. In male institutions females in authority positions must hold themselves to a high standard of professionalism so that respect is present in the relationship, but not animosity which can often be the case in relationships with male offenders and female authority.

Further information, advice, questions can be shared with me on line at [koallii@gte.net](mailto:koallii@gte.net).