

PURPOSE NOT POWER

Introduction

"Why should I?" a prisoner demands. We can respond in different ways. For example:

- "Those are the rules."
- "I'm telling you to."
- "If you don't, I'll..."

These may all be true. But they invite resistance, or at least resentment. We are telling prisoners that they must act because we're more powerful than they are. With the support of our colleagues, and the system, we can make them do what we want.

We want prisoners to do as we ask. But we also want to minimise conflict and build good relationships with prisoners. This means we need to communicate requests and requirements in ways that encourage action and build trust. We can do this by emphasising the purpose of our request, not just our power.

We can highlight different purposes. Most immediately effective is to show the prisoner what's in it for them: the direct benefits. For example, "The sooner you get this done, the sooner you can get to the showers/have lunch/get out to exercise." We can also mention longer-term benefits: "I know you're working towards enhanced: this will be a good step towards that." Then, there are the purposes of the system: "The rules exist to make sure everyone's treated fairly." Finally, we can link to underlying values and principles: "It's the right thing to do."

By mentioning the purpose, we demonstrate that we're acting for a reason, not just because we're picking on a particular prisoner. It's easy for a prisoner to take a request, a reminder or a restriction personally. But it's not meant personally: we give instructions to keep the wing safe, maintain order, and promote prisoners' wellbeing. The less personal we can make it, the easier it is for them to follow instructions without feeling threatened. This also makes it easier for us to achieve changes without harming our relationship with them.

This strategy can be used in almost any situation – not just when making a request. For example, let's say we have to use force to ensure a prisoner's compliance. We can *still* emphasise purpose over power: "I'm moving you away from here for everyone's safety", for example, rather than "I'm not going to put up with this any longer." This is another example of our showing that our actions aren't based on our likes and dislikes – they're done for a reason. Reminding prisoners of a purpose may even encourage them to pursue that

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purpose: for example, to use their activity or education time to gain new skills, not just to fill time.

How can you pursue this strategy?

- A. **Avoid using 'power' language:** Avoid using language that emphasises power, unless you're giving the prisoner a choice between an action and a consequence. Try to cut out phrases like "You have to," "We'll make you," "You have no choice." If you fall into using language about power, correct yourself when you notice. For example, you might say "You have to... and it's the right thing to do in terms of working to get off basic."
- B. **Explain:** Whenever you're planning an action or giving instructions, say why. Why does it matter to the prisoner? Why does it matter for their day today, or for their future? Why does it matter to other prisoners, and to society? There should be a reason for every action: you can explain it by adding just a few extra words to an instruction. For example, "I need everyone ready to get back to the wing" can be followed by "so we can get you fed promptly" or "so we can get the others back to their wings."
- C. **Narrate:** Explain the purpose as you act, or afterwards. This is particularly important if you have to use coercion or force to get prisoners to do something. As you do it, or afterwards, you can give the rationale, "I've done that to keep you safe, now take some time, calm down, and I'll speak to you in a bit."

Potential Pitfalls

- **Ducking responsibility.** One way to emphasise purpose is to explain that you're following rules, policies and procedures. It's better to say that an action is "a routine check," or "I'm just following policy," than have a prisoner believe we're singling them out. However, this doesn't mean we should pin our decisions and responsibilities on others. For example, saying "I'm only doing this because the governors/my manager/the rules say I have to," suggests we don't believe in what we're doing, and we're not making our own decisions. We might feel like we're showing the prisoner we're on their side and building a relationship with them. But a relationship which relies on us not doing our job properly isn't a healthy one. Point to a purpose and uphold that purpose.

Case Study

It is patrol state. Officer Bradley is patrolling the landing. They respond to an emergency cell bell on the wing. They approach the cell door and see the prisoner, Rachel, sitting on their bed. The officer asks "What's up Rachel? Why

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is your cell bell on?”. Rachel responds “I need a shower and to call my husband. My in-cell phone is broken right now”. The officer replies bluntly “I am not unlocking you now. You know you can’t come out now. Don’t press your emergency cell bell to ask me these sorts of questions. Next time I will have to write you up for this sort of thing”. Rachel tries to respond but the prison officer walks off.

This is a **non-example** because the officer presumes that the prisoner knows that they can’t come out of their cell at this time and therefore doesn’t explain why can’t unlock them at this time. This kind of interaction is likely to breakdown trust and staff prisoner relationships leading to “a them & us” dynamic between staff and prisoners.

An example in this case would be if the officer explained why the prisoner can’t come out of their cell for a shower and a phone call at this time. They could also explain when there next may be an opportunity for them to come out of their cell and for the in-cell telephone to be fixed. They would also explain why they shouldn’t use their emergency cell bell in non-emergency situations.

Mitigations to using this technique

Consider the following questions to think about the circumstances when you would and wouldn’t choose to use this technique:

- Are there any situations where you wouldn’t use this technique. If so, why?
- How can you effectively deliver more complex directions to prisoners?

Final Reflection Questions

Answer these final questions to help to consolidate your learning and consider how you will use this technique in your day-to-day practice in your current working context.

- What is the goal? What are prison officers looking to achieve by using this technique?
- Why should this technique work? How should prisoners behave differently?
- What do you need to do? Outline the key success checks you need to meet to apply this technique?
- What are the pitfalls? When shouldn’t we use this technique? What barriers do you foresee to using this technique? How could you overcome them?