

# Prisoner Training — a Corporate Role?

*a bold proposal  
for on-site pre-release training  
in mobile facilities*

**Herbert W. Boeckenhaupt**

Much is being written about corporations that are assuming roles of "social responsibility" and have established a number of programs directed toward the ethnic minorities, the disadvantaged and underprivileged. These programs are certainly not part of the companies' profit-making strategies. There can be no question that minorities and a lot of disadvantaged people must be assisted in restoring self-respect and dignity through educational and vocational upgrading.

What role can these same, or counterpart, firms play in the "social concern" that could restore self-respect, confidence, dignity and dollar-earning capabilities to another disadvantaged/underprivileged minority — the 300,000 men, women and youth now incarcerated in penal systems across the country? These are people serving actual terms or sentences in prisons or other facilities as a result of felony convictions.

These people, after serving a fixed number of years, return to society. Some will return earlier through the parole provisions of the particular system that is incarcerating them. Most will have only those skills learned in prison to rely upon for employment.

## Potential Value

Each of these persons has a potential value to society. They can be released from prison ready to contribute and provide for themselves and their families in a law-abiding manner, rather than being non-productive.

Granted, prisons are going to house prisoners as long as they exist and crimes are committed. But a good number of inmates can be returned to society in shorter terms with a marketable job skill — something the prospective employer needs to run his business. The prison system that accomplishes this is truly serving society

and working at bringing wrongdoers to grips with the remainder of their lives. Prisons should most definitely not be turn-around points for future criminals.

A great number of federally and state operated or financed vocational training programs exist for prison inmates. These make use of prison staff or hired teachers, available tools, equipment, physical space in often overcrowded prisons and budgets allocated for the specific program. Funds often come from the Manpower Development & Training Act, the Office of Economic Opportunity, or the Congress itself.

## Funds are Lean

Anyone associated with federally or state funded projects knows too well the leanness of funds for vocational programs, especially for those used in prisons. A lot of disparity exists in an overall sense because it is possible that some "pet" programs may get an abundance of funds, while others suffer financial shortage, cutbacks and declines as the years pass, to the point of collapse. It depends, of course, on what priority the decision-makers who control the funds place on the individual programs.

This does not mean that some fine programs are not in operation under supervision of excellent trainers. The glaring fact, at least it seems to me, is that not enough people in prison are exposed to these outstanding training opportunities. Limited facilities, location of imprisonment, type and length of sentence, age, cultural background and prior schooling are some of the prohibitions within the specific penal system. The outlook taken by controllers and state legislatures on prisoner rehabilitation affects vocational program efforts and survival, especially funding.

Selection criteria for vocational



programs seem adequate, or at least standardized. Many prison systems put men to work on jobs that in their true light, act as a service for the institution or the state itself, as is the case with license plate making, state printing shops for forms, etc., and a number of similar operations.

#### **Application Problem**

The problem comes up in the area of application of the "skills learned" in the prison to a vocation upon parole or mandatory release from the prison sentence. Too often, the graduates are not parole-ready, or the parole board does not make grants and the training, for all practical purposes, is lost in the ensuing months and possibly years.

The parole situation notwithstanding, I feel there is an untried approach to the skill-training problem within the limited budget prison systems. It is a problem which could be alleviated by private industry and in particular, those industries operating or contemplating "social responsibility" type involvements. It is not my intent to claim that this is a demanded or required function of any corporation — it is not. But I do want to encourage those inclined to see my point to explore this type of involvement for their companies.

#### **A Model**

As an example, let us create a "socially responsible" company that manufacturers home appli-

ances (washers, dryers, refrigerators, freezers, air-conditioners) and associated products. After manufacture, the appliances are sold in retail stores which install, maintain and repair not only that brand, but offer a general maintenance service for similar equipment of all makes.

The retail outlet employs full and part-time workers on both sales and installation/maintenance payrolls. The sales force does not have difficulty in selling the products, yet a constant strain is placed on the repair team to install new units and to handle a high volume of repairs to older equipment. There is a shortage of trained repairmen in most outlets which handle the products, across the country.

Top management of the corporation wants to do something about the servicing problem and attacks it in the textbook manner by hiring more general repairmen in the areas where the workload is getting out of control. These additional workers may or may not be trained in this field.

#### **A Proposal**

An additional step that I would propose if I were in a position to do so, is aimed at the same problem, although it is not an absolute cure, nor will the results be as immediate as the local dealers would like. It is to supplement the add-on tactic already implemented to curb the overloads. The new effort is long-term, a little daring, bold, somewhat costly and falls into the "social responsibility" theme.

By whatever method this new concept is implemented within the company is not of concern to us for the purposes of this article; the end result, however, is. Resources should be directed at development of a short, concentrated and practical training program that covers theory of equipment operation,

installation, trouble shooting and maintenance. Training manuals should be prepared and be made available for the students; tools and training films and other audio-visuals should be planned; and instructor teams hired. Now comes the innovation, or at least a newer use for an already successful technique.

### **Mobile Package**

The entire course would be packaged into a mobile trailer system which can be moved from one location to another with only minor reworking. The complex would require only such utilities as electricity and plumbing at the destinations.

The operation site would be within maximum security (walled) prisons or at satellite camp facilities. The students would be inmates selected through standard screening techniques. They would enter the program voluntarily. There would be no cost, other than utilities, to the prison hosting the unit. The entire cost of transportation, operation, wages, etc. connected with the mobile training facility is to be borne by the

sponsoring company. The company could use whatever publicity it desired in promoting its public image in conducting the programs. Tax considerations could be worked out by company lawyers and government tax experts.

### **Logistics Involved**

Long-range planning and working with prison officials could probably result in placement of one mobile training unit at about four prisons per year, depending on the course length. This would spread the facility out very thin, yet if several companies join in making this training available, the country could be zoned for their convenience. The coverage could thereby provide facilities for many locations in one year.

This type of training cannot be conducted by prison systems. They cannot change courses overnight, but it is possible to do just that using some type of mobile unit. Prisons are severely limited by funds, lack of physical space, lack of trained instructors, materials, tools, mock-ups, and basic equipment.

The companies that participate

in this type of involvement may realize advantages of trained prospective employees. It would be to the advantage of both the company and the inmate-trainees if, upon satisfactory completion of the course and release from prison in a reasonable length of time, the company would guarantee the man employment.

### **Direct Pay-off**

By hiring the graduates of their programs, companies can get a direct payment from their efforts. The inmates — and this applies more to state prisons than federal — might use this “employment guarantee” in applying for a parole. A home, job and sponsor are usually required for release. With one-third of the basic parole requirements met through in-prison training programs, the inmate’s chances for success on a parole bid may be increased.

If a man were to be trained before release, he could be assimilated into in-house training programs once hired by the company. His employment plans would then be the same as any other new employee — earn and learn. He would not be faced with the “ex-convict stigma” which hampers many parolees in getting satisfactory employment. The company will have knocked that barrier down prior to release. The man’s chances of remaining out of prison would be better.

This job guarantee by the companies can apply to most vocations although research will be required in areas that require union membership. There may be some reluctance or even flat refusal to admit parolees or ex-convicts into local or national labor unions. In those cases, the training would be of no value to anyone.

### **An Exciting Approach**

The whole concept of corporations bringing top-rated training programs into prisons with mini-



num cost or obligation from state or federal penal system funds offers an exciting approach to being "socially responsible" by assuming a burden in an area in dire need of professional assistance from "outside of the system".

Resident training has no equal in practical terms and in situations where local conditions prohibit use of a permanent facility within prison walls. A mobile package may provide the atmosphere necessary to foster learning and motivate the men involved. An enthusiastic approach to helping this group of disadvantaged people could readily contribute to society's betterment — no matter how small the individual's contribution. If an ex-convict or parolee can earn his own way — and assumes the role of a contributor — he ceases to be a problem.

While our model has centered around maintenance occupations, we need not limit applications to that one career area. It is possible to apply this training concept in any trade, including some white collar jobs. The job training limits would be up to the company's needs, interests and desired program applications.

### **Camp Training**

Other considerations should also be brought to light. There is a trend in prison systems to reduce the number of inmates within the walled facility and to transfer some to existing satellite camps. In some cases, the populations of these camps are going to increase faster than inmate job assignments (meaningful ones) can be created. I feel that idleness may be a common routine and a serious problem at these camps.

Idleness is wasted time in the lives of these men. This particular problem can be somewhat minimized by the use of corporate training programs conducted at

the camps. A definite vocational training effort should be maintained for those in excellent position for parole or release of some sort, because chances for putting the training to work are greater.

This does not mean that the inmates within the walled prison are to be ignored. It would be a poor situation to eliminate any inmate group solely on its members' degree of physical incarceration, especially in states where no other type of detention facilities exist.

### **A Manpower Resource**

The implementation of specific training at a federal prison would probably not be felt on the labor market or fill localized skill needs. Again, federal institutions should not be ignored on that basis either. It is the training for the men that is most important. There is an advantage in that respect, as an example, in adding to the potential manpower pool in an identified skill in a particular state. A training program conducted at one or two prisons within that state can help supply the pool. Chances are that upon release, most men in state prisons will return to their home towns or other cities within that state. Parole plans usually require it.

Their return to society and subsequent employment could easily cut down the need for the particular skills by providing their talents while they earn a fair living. Professional studies can pinpoint the skill needs in states without difficulty.

Plenty of statistics are available to determine the skill needs of particular areas of each state as well as data to make some preliminary assumptions along those lines.

Any training conducted and successfully completed should, as part of the job guarantee, result in

the inmate-trainee receiving formal company certification. This gives him a "factory trained" advantage and, of course, recognizes his accomplishments. Any additional certification that can be given should be designed to continue the trained inmate through to civilian employment and assist him in overcoming the problems he may face in the community.

An additional company involvement that could come into play at this time would be some sort of job-related educational grant for those inmates who show ability for advanced training. This grant program could put a man on a work-study plan backed up by the company. It would be beneficial so long as it relates to the man's employment and will benefit him in remaining on the "straight and narrow."

### **"Clearinghouse" Technique**

It would probably be advantageous for several companies to join together on the development of these types of mobile units. The "clearinghouse" technique may be ideal for the development of the different company courses and yet allow each company to retain its identity as a participating sponsor and underwriter.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that there is no obligation for companies to assume a role in this area — it must be a voluntary action taken by far-thinking firms that have developed a sound philosophy about their place in today's working world and their "social responsibility." I hope that companies, are receptive to this concept and open the door to further exploration by committing some of their resources to help imprisoned individuals.

The need is too great to be ignored.

---

Herbert Boeckenhaupt is presently serving a sentence on conspiracy charges at the federal penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pa. His educational background is without college and contains military training in electronic communications

systems maintenance. During the past several years, he has been active in the leadership of an institutional chapter of the United States Jaycees which under his presidency, achieved honors as the most outstanding divisional chapter in Pennsylvania and the num-

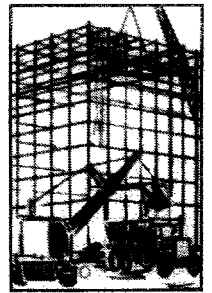
ber two penal chapter in the nation. He was honored as the outstanding chapter president of the Pennsylvania Jaycees last year. He currently is the Buffalo Valley (prison) Chapter's executive vice president. He has served six years of his sentence and is 30 years old.

---



## 1972 economic censuses

Conducted in 1973 by the Bureau of the Census



### **BUSINESSMEN - MANUFACTURERS - CONSTRUCTION FIRMS**

The Economic Censuses are for you  
... **by** you ... **about** you

**You** need the results (The basic information about your industry comes from the Economic Censuses)

**We** (The Bureau of the Census) collect the data (to tell you about the latest developments in your industry)

The sooner **you** get answers to the Census Bureau  
The sooner **you** can use the data to **your** advantage

Fill out your questionnaire **now**  
Mail it to The Bureau of the Census **now**

It's **Your** Census ... It's **Your** Duty ...  
(Deadline for Economic Census Forms - Feb. 15, 1973)

**Confidential by Law — which protects the privacy of all  
information reported to the Census Bureau**

---

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Social and Economic Statistics Administration  
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS