

Emotional Survival - Key Concepts

1. Over time there are **many negative changes** that can take place within our lives:
 - the way we see people (perpetrators, inmates),
 - their enthusiasm for work (drops),
 - their attitude (negative) toward management and the organization they work for,and
 - concept of entitlement (growing).

These changes can have very detrimental affects on you, your families and the work place. Are these changes predictable and are we prepared to deal with them?

2. Work agencies typically invest heavily in operational training/skills, but little, if any addresses emotional survival.
3. **What causes the above-noted changes?**

The long-term effects of dealing with unknown risk everyday results in a Hypervigilance Roller Coaster© in which correctional officers and other services workers, on duty hours are spent at elevated levels of awareness. This results in a biological depletion of resources and sets the member up to spend his/her off duty hours at lower levels of awareness.

Thus, at work the member is alert, feels alive/energetic and is able to make quick decisions. Off duty there is a tremendous drop and the member is “tired, detached, apathetic and isolated”. He/she does not feel like making decisions or being active in relationships. This effect is not isolated to emergency work, but is more prevalent in it.

The net effect is an association of feeling good and more alive at work and a feeling of being tired and depressed at home. Ultimately, this can lead to overinvesting one’s energy in your work role and under investing in one’s private life. Relationships become strained or non-existent and you get pulled more and more into your work world.

Breaking the cycle involves keeping the high levels of awareness on the job but raising the off duty levels back into the normal range.

4. The **workers who are most prone** to this phenomena re the best, the most committed.

5. The first victim of this phenomena is the worker. He/she ceases to be “the person they used to be”. Old friendships, community activities and hobbies fall off and the world is seen differently. The family is also affected, parenting takes place at the lower end of the awareness scale.

The “I usta” syndrome kicks in. I usta do this....I usta do that..... the workers world is shrinking.

6. **One’s sense of self** can become more and more tied to the work role leading to a singular sense of identity. “I am a parole officer versus I work as a parole officer”. If anything threatens that sense of identity, i.e. his/her specific assignment - then the worker’s sense of self feels threatened. Resistance to change becomes a way of life.

At least once in an employee’s career, his/her assignment will be changed against his/her will or he/she will win some way feel unfairly treated. This can lead to victim-based thinking and the loss of sense of control. The employee becomes “vulnerable, susceptible, emotionally at risk and paranoid”. “I can handle the job, but not management”.

7. **“Emotionally overinvesting in the work role** results in the merging of professional and personal lives, hypersensitivity to change, rigidity and inflexibility, loss of professional detachment, an ever present sense of threat, and affects one’s sense of right and wrong”.

If one perceives one’s self as a victim, it affects one’s ability to make decisions. He/she goes from basing decisions on core values to situational values, i.e. because someone did this to me, I did that to them. It is dangerous to move away from core values.

A sense of entitlement (victim-based thinking) can ensue; “the rules don’t apply to me”. This needs to be addressed by accountability, either from within or externally applied.

8. **Continuum of Compromise©**

Victim based thinking leads to:

A. Acts of omission	B. Acts of commission	C. Acts of commission
lower productivity, work stoppage	ignoring administrative rules	criminal acts

9. **Survivor or victim? Your choice.**

Victims focus on what they don't control. Survivors focus on what they do control.

10. **Keys to Emotional Survival**

A. Personal Time Management	B. Fitness/Wellness	C. Other Significant Roles
- pre-planned - personal - written - calendar/agenda	- exercise - diet / caffeine/ nicotine/ sleep - beware of stress-related consumerism	- invest self in multiple roles; exercise, family, sports, hobbies, spirituality, community, friends....