Probation and Parole Officers Often Wield God-like Power

Yet they are so Human!

Perhaps you saw the article in the Denver Post recently titled “Adams County Probation Supervisor Busted in Nebraska on Drug Charge”. It’s just one more story that displays the humanity and fallability of those who supervise people with misdemeanors and felonies, those who judge, those who prosecute criminal cases, D.A.’s, legislators, pastors, teachers, and our neighbors who are in professions where they are thought of highly. The link is included above for your reading convenience.

Much of the literature around sexual offending, at least that literature that has been purported to be “true” in Colorado, would indicate that all people who commit sexual offenses are hard-wired to commit these offenses and will commit more. Recent research (over the last 10 -12 years) outside the State of Colorado indicates that a model called Risk, Need and Responsivity (RNR) is successful with the general felon population as well as with those who sexually offend. It recognizes that people who have sexually offended are not all the same, and that MANY will not reoffend if they are treated as individuals and approached in treatment according to their risk, their criminogenic needs and their abilities to respond in group and individual settings as it regards their education, group milieu, language, culture, empathy between therapist and person receiving treatment etc.

Probation and parole officers, with whom I work daily, are frequently not just firm with those they supervise; they can be downright mean. Don’t get me wrong; there are officers who do their job with firmness and heart at the same time. In fact, Executive Director Rick Raemisch of CDOC stated at the Colorado Legislature during the fall of 2013 that parole officers should be ¾’s social worker and ¼ cop. While the job can be stressful and we can perhaps expect that officers will be “cranky” at times, people who have committed sexual offenses as well as other felonies need a hand up.

Can you imagine sitting in CDOC for 10 – 12 years, waiting anxiously for the day the parole board says you are going to be paroled, and finally the words are said and the papers are signed. Your euphoria only lasts a moment, maybe a couple of hours, for when you reach the parole office, you are frequently confronted with a “stressed out parole officer” who hurries you through a list of things you must initial and most importantly understand and remember, and sends you out the door as quickly as possible to get a UA and an ankle bracelet etc. You know the drill. You do not feel as excited about being out as you did when you got the word from the parole board and your case manager that you were getting out. The same is true for probation officers who oversee those who haven’t gone to prison - yet!

Was this probation officer who used and apparently tried to distribute the same drugs that she was determined to keep the felon from using “bad to the bone” from the beginning? Or, did she make a bad choice? Perhaps she has been making bad choices for some time, only no-one knew. Those who have committed sexual offenses are not allowed to say they made a mistake. They must say that they made a bad choice or bad choices when they committed their offense(s). Does the fact that this probation officer made this bad choice or these bad choices mean that she is hard-wired from here on out to keep doing the same things with drugs that she apparently did in this situation? Could her use of drugs and /or alcohol lead her to commit other crimes such as –oh no, don’t say it – a sexual offense? Or perhaps a burglary? Or a murder? Ninety percent of people in prison are there because of drugs and alcohol, no matter their crime, according to a personal conversation I had with Dave Michaud, former police chief in Denver and former head of the Colorado Board of Parole.

It is time for probation and parole officers to start treating those with sexual offenses and other felonies and misdemeanors with at least a small speck of compassion – that social worker piece that E.D. Raemisch speaks about so profoundly. We are all human beings, and must all be held accountable for our bad choices, sometimes by our friends and family, and sometimes by the courts and the officers that serve them. For those of us who believe in God, we are mostly held accountable by what He has to say in His Word about our behavior. God calls it sin, an unpopular word in today’s culture.

I hope that this probation officer will be dealt with as seriously according to the law as those who are not probation officers or D.A.’s or legislators or sheriffs (Pat Sullivan) etc. are dealt with when they commit felonies and misdemeanors! It is my hope and prayer that while these acts and behaviors must be dealt with under the law, forgiveness and a hand up will be granted to those who are caught in the midst of bad choices and inappropriate decisions. You notice I said those who are caught, for across the rest of humanity, many are never caught. And they are all of us!

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