

# Core Competencies **AND** Jail Leadership

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VISION  
ORGANIZATION  
MISSION

**What skills, knowledge, and abilities** do you need in order to be a credible and successful jail leader? Beginning with the July/August 2015 issue of *American Jails*, we are exploring the 22 core competencies identified by jail administrators across the country. Welcome to the fifth installment on core competencies and jail leadership.

In this issue of *American Jails*, we take a closer look at the core competency identified as “Develop and sustain organizational vision/mission” and recommend several valuable resources related to leadership.

## If You Don't Know Where You Are Going, You Are Already There

**Description:** Establish a long-range purpose for the organization and provide overall direction and guidance for achieving its mission and measuring success.

**Rationale:** This competency establishes the basis for pursuing all others. It clarifies the essence of the organization's existence by creating, implementing, and maintaining the jail's vision and mission through participatory consensus-building with staff and stakeholders.

Knowledge of:

- Techniques for developing and updating a vision/mission statement.
- How to operationalize a vision/mission statement and create measures of success.
- Productive use of feedback.
- Strategic planning.

Skills for:

- Collaborating and teamwork.
- Building consensus.

- Forecasting.
- Action planning.
- Following through.
- Identifying appropriate benchmarks.
- Implementing change.
- Listening.
- Making modifications as needed.
- Anticipating potential obstacles.
- Keeping the vision alive.
- Reinforcing the vision.

Abilities To:

- Be visionary.
- See different points of view.
- Maintain a passion for the vision.
- See the "big picture."
- Be courageous.
- Keep organized and on track.
- Evaluate.
- Be patient and persistent.
- Obtain constructive feedback.
- Be flexible.
- Be well-organized.
- Maintain a passion for the vision.

Supervising a jail is even more complicated and stressful if you have no sense of where you or your organization is heading—and not just for today, but also for the foreseeable future. As I heard a commencement speaker tell a restless gathering of new college graduates: *"If you don't know where you are going, you are already there."* Who wants to work for leaders who either can't articulate the future vision of your job and agency or who don't have a vision at all? And what about the organization's mission?

Creating a vision and a mission is more than a public relations gimmick or meeting the demands of current leadership practice. The jail's vision and mission statements serve as the foundation of recruitment, hiring, employee training, leadership development, inmate programs, jail operations, budgeting, and accountability. A strong vision statement is one of the few strategies that will break through and change the current internal culture and also derail those who fight to maintain the status quo at any cost (Kotter, 1996).

## 22 Core Competencies for Jail Leaders

- Anticipate, analyze, and resolve organizational challenges and conflicts.
- Assure organizational accountability.
- Build and maintain positive relationships with external stakeholders.
- Build and maintain teamwork; mentor and coach others.
- Communicate effectively, internally and externally.
- Comprehend, obtain, and manage fiscal resources.
- Develop and maintain a positive organizational culture that promotes respect for diverse staff.
- **Develop and sustain organizational vision/mission.**
- Engage in strategic planning.
- Enhance self-awareness; maintain proactive professional commitment.
- Establish organizational authority, roles, and responsibilities.
- Leverage the role of the jail in the criminal justice system.
- Make sound decisions.
- Manage change.
- Manage labor relations.
- Manage power and influence.
- Manage time.
- Obtain and manage human resources.
- Oversee inmate and facility management.
- Oversee physical plant management.
- Reduce jail-related liability risks.
- Understand and manage emerging technology.

## Characteristics of an Effective Vision

1. *Imaginable*: Conveys a picture of what the future will look like.
2. *Desirable*: Appeals to the long-term interests of employees, customers, stockholders, and others who have a stake in the enterprise.
3. *Feasible*: Comprises realistic, attainable goals.
4. *Focused*: Is clear enough to provide guidance in decision-making.
5. *Communicable*: Easily communicated; can be successfully explained in five minutes.

Source: Kotter, J. P. (1996) *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

## Barriers to Improving Leadership

When asked, many NJLCA graduates report that the most significant barriers to adopting the leadership lessons learned at NJLCA are:

- Lack of trust in the “administration.”
- No collaboration.
- “Old type” thinking at the top of the organization.
- Command staff is “retired in place.”
- Leaders “fear” change.
- No communication.
- Unapproachable bosses.
- Micromanagement from the top.
- Red tape.
- Just plain stubborn people.

Some participants report the realization that they, themselves, are barriers to improved leadership.

—From NJLCA Classes 18, 19, and 20

Just as important, a mission directs employees in their work.

Establishing and sustaining an organization’s vision and mission is a challenging task, and “defining the jail’s mission and setting goals to achieve that mission” is one of the primary responsibilities of a jail administrator (Martin & Rosazza 2004). Although jail administrators can sit in their office to ponder the vision and mission and then post the results for all to see in the lobby, this is *not* a highly successful one-person project. Even if you could create the vision and mission all by yourself, how do you then motivate managers and subordinates to embrace that picture and develop the tools, strategies, and funding to get there? How do stakeholders and funders get excited and committed? “Being

forward-looking is the second-most admired characteristic that people look for in those people they would be willing to follow” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Some of you may be thinking that identifying the vision and mission is the “sheriff’s job” or the “county administrator’s job” or “anyone’s job but mine.” However, if the organization has effective leaders, they have already collaborated with stakeholders and employees to identify the agency’s vision and mission. If your facility hasn’t posted a vision and mission, perhaps it is your job.

### The Vision: What Is in the Future for Jails?

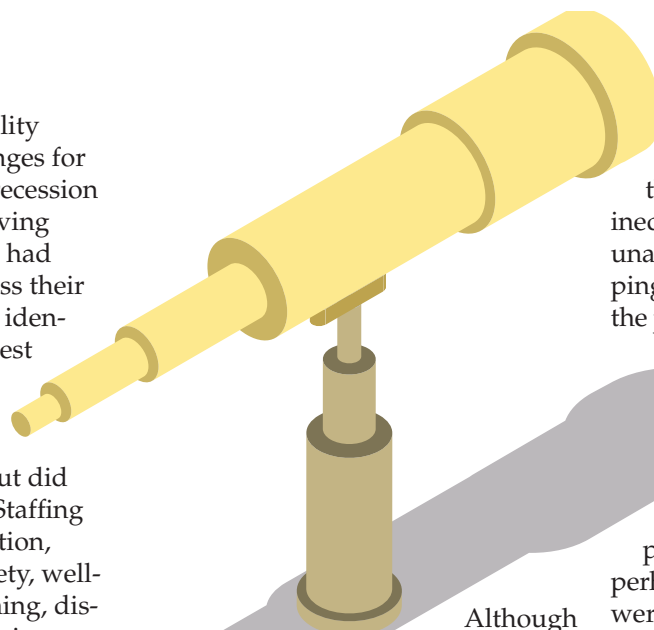
In order to be prepared for the next challenge, it is critical for jail leaders to pay attention to what is

happening in the world around us. Failure to scan the horizon and then create a vision and mission to meet these challenges has brought jails to embarrassing and very uncomfortable crossroads. For example:

- The closing of mental health facilities and the deinstitutionalization of persons with mental illness began in the late 1980s. Yet with all the extremely negative outcomes of persons with mental illness held in jails, the impetus to fund more community alternatives has slowed. Why didn’t jails see this coming? Excuses can be made that even if jails did anticipate their new role as the community’s mental health center, “no one” would have funded the much needed staffing, infrastructure upgrades, and acquisition of mental health professions. Hard to prove a negative, but the truth is, few jails asked for help. We should have seen this coming.
- Funding authorities at the State and local level are asking probing questions about why so much of their budgets are going to jails and prisons when reported crime is down. In fact, some jail populations are down from historic highs. For example, data indicates that 473 people were admitted to jail 18 times or more, accounting for 10,000 of the almost 1 million admissions to jails (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012; Subramanian, Delaney, Roberts, Fishman, & McGarry, 2015). Should we have been prepared for the challenge of answering the question about why correctional outcomes are poor? Again, jail leaders may argue that they weren’t given the resources to deter recidivism or even examine their own data; but how many jails actually asked? Jails often feel excluded from the policy deliberations regarding inmate reentry, bond and bail reform, and improved risk assessments, but fail to demand a seat at the table. We should have seen this coming.

- Finding and keeping quality staff are continual challenges for jails. With the economic recession and fewer employees leaving for greener pastures, jails had almost six years to reassess their internal culture, work on identifying and training the best supervisors, and knowing a time would come when people would have other job options. But did anything really change? Staffing issues (recruitment, selection, retention, succession, safety, wellness, compensation, training, discipline, etc.) remain the primary issue for the State prison systems and most jails (ASCA, 2014). We should have seen this coming.

Part of the vision process is to use all available resources and to consult our peers in the justice system and beyond (such as legislators and policy makers) in order to anticipate what challenges the jail needs to address in the next 5 or 10 years.



Although the crystal ball may not be clear all the time, the past has very stark lessons.

effectiveness of a jail's operation are left to be defined by the crisis-of-the-day (real, imagined, or invented). Employees feel unappreciated and detached, or like ping-pong balls, as the trajectory of the jail veers from one "flavor of the month" to another, yanked around by unseen forces or unseen leaders.

Some adrenaline junkies welcome this philosophy of jail leadership—perhaps because that's how they were parented in this business. The question then becomes: If adrenaline is all you have to inspire and lead people, does that work? Without a clearly established vision and mission, the focus, passion, and energy are diluted in the organization and employees drained.

So, what defines a meaningful vision and mission for a jail? Resources are identified in this article, but here's an overview.

### The Adrenaline-Fueled Jail: Is that a Vision or Mission?

Why does a jail need to establish a mission and vision? Absent a meaningful vision and mission declaration, the priorities, direction, and

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## Visions Statements for Jails

Each NJLCA class is asked to develop vision, mission, and value statements for a jail they create. Even given the short amount of time for participants to develop a statement, universally the work has been excellent. This demonstrates how collaboration and commitment reap rewards.

### From NJLCA Classes 17 and 19:

- To continually strive to incorporate innovative and creative means of management to enhance safety, staff development, and return offenders to society as more responsible members of the community.
- To focus on the rehabilitation of inmates through community-based programs, while adhering to budgetary constraints and creating the greatest professional working environment possible for staff, and the future leaders of the organization.
- To serve our community with professionalism and compassion by providing education, outreach, and rehabilitation programs.
- To create a safe community by effectively managing offenders and providing opportunities for positive change.

- The *vision* is a clear picture of what the jail hopes to accomplish in its future, created and shared by those who are on the journey. This process requires for those involved to step outside the four-walls of “maintaining a constitutional jail” to fully embrace the impact of their jail operations on the inmates, their families, and the community. Vision statements are aspirational—unveiling a colorful picture of what the future entails.
- Vision statements must be “simple, understandable, beneficial, and energy creating.” (Northouse, 2012).
- The vision process is inclusive, gathering images from those who choose to participate. It does not ignore the legal mandates, and welcomes everyone—political and otherwise—into the *environment* of jails.
- The vision sets the stage for the jail’s mission and its value statements about those in the organization and how it intends to fulfill its vision. “People commit to causes, not to plans.” (Kouzes & Posner 2012). The vision state-

ment is the “cause”—why the jail exists.

- The vision process is critical to promoting change in the organization—from managing the internal culture to deciding where staff can park their cars. Without the vision of how this jail will operate in 5 or 10 years, there would be no motivation or energy for change.

Now that we’ve established why a vision for a jail is necessary, let’s breakdown the process.

### The Vision Process: The Steps

There is no one “right way” to develop the vision of the jail, but here are some ideas from leadership gurus:

- **Identify the stakeholders.** Many jails suffer from the community’s lack of knowledge about their complex and important contributions to the justice system. Many business leaders are also unaware of the jail (until there is a request for more money or a tragedy of an inmate death). The vision process is an opportunity to engage business and neighborhood influencers. Identifying staff who want to participate is obviously critical—include volunteers as well. This

will be the “powerful guiding coalition” necessary for this initiative (Kotter, 1996).

- **Identify the “opposition” and barriers.** In the political environment of jails, it is prudent to consider who needs to support this initiative, who are the opposition, and who will construct barriers. If you can’t gain the support of “administration” to update or create an agency-wide vision statement, consider your sphere of influence and how you can make the professional lives of your staff better through this initiative. After you identify those people, include them in the initiative. As we know, people support what they help to create.
- **Brainstorm.** Open-up the floor to all suggestions without comment, list them, and then seek concurrence and agreement. The Internet also provides opportunities to explore the potential contributions of other organizations to the thought process.
- **Communicate.** Create an internal web page that provides current information and seeks contribution and ideas. When you think you are done communicating, communicate more.
- **Follow-up.** Allowing the process to languish helps bolster those in your organization who claim this is not a worthwhile process or that it wastes their time.
- **Publish.** When the final product is done, place it on the website, business cards, and all communications.
- **Communicate.** Oh, did I mention—when you think you are done communicating, communicate some more.

### The Mission: Why Are We Here?

Many jails define their mission by their legal reason for existing—what’s provided in the State law. While certainly correct, what’s the jail’s reason for existing beyond that? The mission statement of a jail must:

- Address the agency's reason for existing.
- Be current.
- Reflect all of the agency's functions.
- Be motivating and inspiring.
- Include external and internal stakeholders.
- Be realistic.
- Be focused, succinct.
- Be clear, not subject to interpretation.
- Is remembered easily and known throughout the organization

So what are the other opportunities for an updated mission statement? Here are examples gathered from an exercise performed in NJLCA classes 17 and 19:

- To provide safe, secure and efficient facilities. Through professional development of staff and by providing programs for offenders to become productive members in our community.
- To serve the community, staff and those in custody with a safe environment, quality education and training to reduce recidivism and make our community safer.
- To be committed to implementing professional, detention services within our community by demonstrating pride and professionalism. It is our mission to provide a safe, secure, clean, and humane facility while protecting the dignity and rights of all individuals within our custody.
- To provide a safe and humane environment while in custody. To provide opportunities for rehabilitation and successful integration back to society.

Ask these questions: Why are we here and why do we show up for work each day? Jails must now think more broadly about their role in the community and in the justice system, rather than just focus on "the safe and secure confinement" of inmates. Critically important—but not enough.

## Ideas from the Field

Many jails have developed vision and mission statements. In addition to exploring the Internet for more ideas from your peers, here are some ideas.

### Vision Statements from Various Facilities

- To provide safe and secure housing for incarcerated juveniles, to encourage positive long-term behavioral changes, to reduce delinquency and recidivism, and to facilitate the learning of Hualapai and other Native American cultural beliefs. (Hualapai Juvenile Detention, Arizona)
- The vision of the Madison County Sheriff's Office-Detention Facility is to be a premier Corrections organization dedicated to public safety. Through ethical, innovative, and professional leadership we will deliver superior services to the residents of Madison County. (Madison County, Kentucky)
- Our vision is to exceed community expectations through exemplary service. (Travis County, Texas)
- Committed to promoting the core values of service and integrity through effective leadership, comprehensive training, and accountability. Dedicated to expanding services through the use of technology, innovation, and education while striving to maintain the public trust. (Osceola County Corrections, Florida)
- The Louisville Metro Department of Corrections (LMDC) is an innovative leader within the corrections profession and is an integral component of the criminal justice system. The Louisville Metro community is a safer place to live and work because LMDC provides services and programs that allow for the appropriate management and supervision of offenders. (Louisville, Kentucky)

### Mission Statements from Various Facilities

- The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department is committed to our mission to protect the community through prevention, partnership, and professional service. That commitment and dedication extends to the millions of visitors that Las Vegas plays host to each year. (Las Vegas, Nevada)
- To provide professional service and protection with honor and integrity. (Benton County, Arkansas)
- The Louisville Metro Department of Corrections (LMDC) enhances public safety by controlling and managing offenders in a safe, humane, and cost-efficient manner consistent with sound correctional principles and constitutional standards. LMDC is committed to excellence, emphasizing accountability, diversity, integrity and professionalism. We shall assess an offender's needs and provide services that assist the offender in the transition and reintegration back into the community. (Louisville, Kentucky)
- We serve and protect our community with professionalism by providing a safe and secure detention facility for all individuals in our care or custody to fulfill our role in the Criminal Justice System. (Brazos County, Texas)

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As with the vision process, establishing a mission is an inclusive exercise and community stakeholders need to have a voice. If the community's mission for their jail, for example, is to help prevent recidivism, then their help will be critical to establishing and funding those programs.

### Does Vision and Mission Attach to the "Former" Sheriff, Old Regime?

When probed about why jails don't more fully engage in developing meaningful vision and mission statements, many reasons are given. Some say that is what we did 20 years ago. And the more cynical claim that the agency never walked the talk, so the vision and mission had no credibility. Some jails say they don't have the staff time and resources to do this work, or their staff won't participate. Whatever the excuses, leadership is about setting the future course of the jail. If the executive leadership (sheriff, county administrator, tribal council) changes, the role of the newly installed leadership is to assess

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direction and reinvigorate the enthusiasm and direction of the jail.

### What's Next?

Examine your organization's vision and mission statements. Consider if your jail is future-directed or not. Is staff inspired by the future, or are they uncaring or indifferent? Consider the place where you want to work and lead.

Leadership guru Warren Bennis says it best "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality." You can't be a leader without knowing where you and the organization are heading—or are you already there? ■

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