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Perrie Lectures 2019

Leadership, Humanity and Hope

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Introduction

As organisations alter through political, strategic and cultural change, the topic of leadership is a subject that is often considered and examined, especially when that change means adjustment to policy or future direction. Moreover, the importance and focus on leadership, especially when faced with crisis in either private or public sector organisations, brings the topic more sharply to the fore. And in considering the issue of prison leadership, we often seem to grapple with the argument of style, behaviours and longevity. And these discussions have prevailed for some time, and we may agree that John Howard might have opened the debate when he said ‘the first care must be to find a good man (or woman) for a gaoler, one that is honest, active and humane’.¹ However, the ongoing attention given to contemporary prison leadership, has in the main, only attracted irregular and insufficient scrutiny, whether from the determined studies of academia or indeed internally as an organisation. The evaluation and examination of leadership styles in prisons is one that requires constant vigilance, especially given the variety of demands that are obvious from the number of audiences that are attracted to or reliant on the work of the prison establishment.

Within the flyer for the Perrie lectures this year was a short biography of Bill Perrie, the person who the lectures are named after. One line within the flyer caught my eye, and it says this. ‘Throughout his career Bill was ever aware of the essential humanity of his staff and charges, his inspiration and support are greatly missed’. Furthermore, it notes Bill Perrie as a preeminent Governor of his era and in other publications² it refers to him, along with others, as a *humanitarian* and a leading Governor. It is obvious that Bill Perrie was indeed an exceptional person, and in my own determination to lead with a humanitarian and person-centred focus, I wonder this. Why does a leader of this type, and these qualities, now command

significant and influential audiences at an annual event that seems to go from strength to strength? Are humanitarian values and ways of working the elite qualities and styles of leadership of only a handful of people, and if so why is this. Should we encourage a more liberal and benevolent style of leadership in organisations that are inundated with vulnerability and where the essential focus is about people. Moreover, we might want to ask whether these types of leaders are more successful than others. Is their influence and effectiveness simply down to the way in which they position their values and moral footing, or have we, through significant cultural and societal change, supported by a strong and unyielding punitiveness ideology, simply accepted that treatment and rehabilitative ways of working are too difficult to accomplish.

Is there an absence of humanitarian leadership?

I feel fortunate to be studying at Cambridge, and I am currently in my second year and about to start my study which is linked to humanitarian leadership and its potential to influence in prisons. And in the variety of literature that I have read and taken from for my dissertation, I am often overwhelmed by the number of articles that contain references to humanitarianism and also liberal approaches to prison leadership³ as other commentators have also researched and shared enthusiastically. And it is also comforting, that I can sit in the Criminology library surrounded by books, and people too, on this particular subject, and feel perhaps a little nostalgic that there has always been a fervent and ever-present committed membership who maintain and share, powerful and influential views on a type of leadership that has the welfare and benevolence of others as fundamental expectations.

In other articles, the discussion of aims statements⁴, of values and standards⁵, of decency agendas⁶ and the variety of reports that are cited and remembered fondly by those who can remember them, remain fixed and littered in penal history. And I guess,

1. Whitfield, R. (1991) *The State of the Prisons 200 years on*. London, Routledge
2. Ibid
3. Crewe, B. and Liebling, A. (2011). *Are liberal-humanitarian penal values and practices exceptional?* In Ugelvik, T. and Dullum, J. (eds) *Nordic Prison Practice and Policy-Exceptional or Not? Nordic Prison Policy and Practice* p.175-98. p.175.
4. Bottoms, A.E. (1990). *The aims of imprisonment* in Garland, D. (ed) *Justice, Guilt and Forgiveness in the Penal System*. Edinburgh University: Centre for Theology and Public Issues
5. Liebling, A. assisted by Arnold, H. (2004). *Prisons and Their Moral Performance: A Study of Values, Quality and Prison Life* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

what stands out so much for me, is that the reports I mention, which include the enduring Woolf report⁷, which ought to still demand attention, is the continuing appeal and invitation to lead differently in prisons, coupled with the need to consider how leaders view and how they own and demonstrate their own various types of leadership and behaviours.

In 1992 Joe Pilling, the then Director General, spoke fondly about a number of the humanitarian and liberal leaders of the past with a speech called 'Back to basics'⁸, and the basics that he was referring to were in regards to leadership, relationships and respect. This repeated metaphor continues to play out when we discuss back to basics in our current position, but we now often refer to clean prisons and cells, clothing, security and stability and other functions, that sometimes, if we allow them to, may neglect those harmony basics linked to people, relationships and welfare. This is of course in no way a criticism, we are facing considerable challenges within our prisons. We have recognised the surge and prevalence of organised crime in prisons and the determined and formidable challenge that this represents, and we know that a significant amount of work is being done and has already been undertaken to make changes that we hope will be for the better. In addition to this challenge we must not ignore the obvious unrelenting appetite for a managerialist⁹ focus that seems to command a remarkable and established grip on institutions that ought to be more centred towards adopting themes of humanity, underpinned by a person-centred approach that finds no shame in talking about welfare or the befriending of those, who without our help in prisons, would lead their lives in destructive ways. The demands of penal managerialism¹⁰ often diverts the prison leaders' gaze away from the diverse needs of the prisoner and of their staff too. This distraction and impediment that challenges the focus of the humanitarian and welfare-oriented leader is

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nothing less than significant frustration and irritation. And whilst there must be an appreciation and an understanding of the need for assurance and confidence, the desire for a managerialist determination must not take us away from holding the hand of a prisoner who is scared, and nor should we delay when someone in our segregation unit calls out for help, and needs comfort. It also shouldn't prevent us in giving much needed time, space and support to those staff who are only now finding their feet, in careers that we hope can find longevity once again. Prisons are places full of incessant emotion that are in my view too often unattended to, they prevail and often damage, especially when the attentions of staff and managers are elsewhere, in places where the focus is not about prisoners.

Anxiety, change and purpose

When I arrived in Guys Marsh in August 2016 the prison was quite challenging and in need of continuous attention, especially in regards to stability and of resources too. I met with an officer that I had worked with years before and when we spoke he said this to me 'Steve, all you need to know is that staff are coming to work on the strength of medication, and that some staff even park their cars in the far-flung corners of the car park so no one sees them cry before they start their shifts'. This really upset me, and resonates in my thinking even today. I was acutely aware that this was a time where I thought differently about leadership, and where my thoughts were positioned solely towards wellbeing and support for those who worked and lived in our prison. The growth project in HMP Guys Marsh was conceived following a meeting with Dr Sarah Lewis in September 2016 after seeing a tweet she posted on Twitter regarding a Norwegian prison study and the concept of growth and change in prisons. This approach to change and improvement certainly stimulated my own thinking about how we lead and manage in prisons, and a

6. Narey, M. (2001). *Speech to the prison service conference* Nottingham, February 2001

7. Woolf, H. and Tumim, S. (1991) *Prison Disturbances April 1990* London: HMSO

8. Pilling, J. (1992). Back to basics: relationships in the Prison Service. *Eve Saville Memorial Lecture to the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency reprinted in Relationships in Prison. The Transcript of a Conference held July at Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln.* Lincoln: The Bishop's House. p5-11

9. Bennett, J. (2015) *The working lives of prison managers: Global change, local cultures and individual agency in the late modern prison* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

10. Cheliotis, L.K. (2006). *Penal managerialism from within: Implications for theory and research in International journal of law and psychiatry* 29(5), pp.397-404.

discussion regarding the transference of this concept into an English prison ensued, and the growth project in Guys Marsh was born. Furthermore, what I wanted for Guys Marsh, was a prison that thought differently about the capacity of people to use their potential to arouse and consider the importance of relationships, and to encourage an environment that supported overall wellbeing. Moreover, it was important to be hopeful about our future and our overall improvement, and to encourage and provoke the culture of humanitarianism. Nurturing a culture that was simply about people was certainly the right option for us, as a senior team we made ourselves more visible, more helpful and supportive, more interpersonal with the staff and the men. We appreciated and acknowledged hard work, and recognised achievement at every opportunity that we had. Our key messages were underpinned by strong values, of relationships and connection, we looked forwards and learnt from the past, and above all we had hope.

Persistence and relentless efforts towards behaviours and actions that are fuelled with humanity, kindness, respect, fairness and trust¹¹ can and will make a huge difference in institutions that are filled mostly with masculinity¹², vulnerability and instability. But we must work smarter, if we were to consider life in prisons from the lens of the prisoner, then we would have very little belongings, hardly any responsibility, a reduced sense of identity, zero privacy, and where a significant number of those incarcerated try very hard to avoid the permeating contaminants of prison life. These pains of imprisonment¹³ have endured for far too long, and will continue to harm and have an effect on any improvement aspirations. We must always recognise that most people who find themselves in our prisons usually originate from places within our communities where common themes of inequality, unemployment, poor housing and general disadvantage dominate¹⁴,

and where hope and optimism are stifled and remain unrealised. And this theme, as you are all aware, isn't new, for decades, those who inhabit our prisons have not been exposed to opportunity or recognition, and they remain unfamiliar with education and culture too. And the person who can lead differently in prisons and who is motivated by a humanitarian focus will not see those in custody as *bad, broken, beyond repair, or*

beneath them, they will see them as people who have lacked the fortune that seems common in others, like us perhaps, or who have been starved of emotion and parental influence and who find themselves leading a life that is without direction and meaning, and where love and compassion are the scarce commodities that essentially we know are the bedrock needs of all people. The word humanitarianism is often used when we think about catastrophe, conflict and suffering. It is also associated with homelessness, poverty, unemployment and sometimes abuse too. So, it is probably worth noting the reasons why most people offend, and then ask ourselves why it is, when the word humanitarianism is used there is usually great hesitation and sometimes fear at the idea of mentioning that word and prisoners in the same sentence. This is food for thought I feel, as the problem with the 'them and

us' description, the issue and use of discretion¹⁵ and of fairness, and the significance of labelling demand regular attention and constant debate. In addition, people who lead with a humanitarian focus will also note the importance of families as agents of change¹⁶, and create environments where their inclusion is natural, expected and always appreciated.

Humanitarian leadership

I strongly believe that there is now an opportunity to think differently, and be more ambitious about how we lead in prisons, where there is a genuine emphasis

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11. Liebling, A. (2012). *Can Human Beings Flourish in Prison?* Paper presented at The Prison Phoenix Trust, London, U.K.
12. Jewkes, Y. (2005). *Men Behind Bars: "Doing" Masculinity as an Adaptation to Imprisonment in Men and Masculinities* 8(1), pp.44-63.
13. Sykes, G.M. (2007). *The society of captives: A study of a maximum security prison*. Princeton University Press.
14. Wilson, W.J. (2012). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. University of Chicago Press.
15. Liebling, A. (2000). Prison officers, policing and the use of discretion in *Theoretical criminology*. 4(3), pp.333-357.
16. Farmer, M. (2017). *The importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime*. London: Ministry of Justice.

on people, and where values and rehabilitative ways of working do not become lost or diluted within measures of constant accountability. We all know that the word 'values' is often plugged and stimulated widely but it means very little without practice and active demonstration. Values need commitment, they need to be exhibited often in order for them to be observed and repeated by others. This person thinks differently all of the time and looks for opportunities to improve the chances and prospects for those in custody, and where they create environments that support the wellbeing of staff, which includes their mental health fatigue. And that this is constantly at the forefront of their thinking, and where ways of working and policies are *preventative* in nature, in order to become less reliant on processes that have been established to deal with the after effects of harm. This leader shows rather than tells, they give, and they serve¹⁷ with an enthusiasm that encourages others who then continue to lead in a way that serves rather than takes. Furthermore, this leader is always visible, they set the right standards, the tone, and challenge appropriately when they aren't met. They aspire to build a humane environment and they challenge and eradicate vengeful behaviour and object to poor conduct. They celebrate success all of the time, and provoke the decency trait in everyone. They realise the importance and the effect a good

leader can have on those who are dependent, they note the current challenge within our prisons, and appreciate the risks and advantages of inexperienced staff, they share their thoughts, they teach and nurture, they care deeply and inspire others to do great things. They serve with humility and they also find their heroes.

Leadership should not be linked to grade, rank or title, leadership is bestowed on those who have the right skills to do so, and who do not think they are in any way better than others. Leading is a privilege, but only for those who sees the good in everybody, and who treats people equally and fairly, and they recognise that setting the right examples and standards are the default attributes of any leader. Furthermore, the right leader is mindful that a selfish mindset has the potential to infect the collective culture, and in prisons this can be

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damaging. In addition, humanitarian leadership can only flourish when the environment, which includes the strategic direction, is conducive to its application, and when the authority for its use is acknowledged. The ambitions that we have as an organisation that are linked to achieving the aims of rehabilitative cultures are surging positively ahead, and we should be proud of the improvements that we are making. But with any change there is a risk and a danger that if these ideas are not maintained and continuously grown they will simply wither away and become just another idea. Rehabilitative cultures need to be taught, cultivated and continuously developed as time goes on, and not

become a target. They need to be rooted firmly in a strategic direction that has the simple principles of humanity boldly invested throughout. The winning organisation is an environment filled with professional development and personal growth where individuals and teams learn from each other. Organisations decline quickly unless they continue to change, and even when we are at our most successful, we have to be observing consistently and position ourselves to make the right decisions about the future. Autonomy will always trump autocracy, humility will challenge any ego, and a truly collaborative singular organisation is more productive than silos.

Furthermore, prison leaders must immerse themselves more in the discussions about the use of prisons, and consider societal issues consistently in order to regain the right and informed focus on the penal debate. They must express themselves and be courageous, externally as well as internally, and use their significant influence and experience to support change that has the person who finds themselves in prison at the centre of that consideration. It is also right that they note their responsibility for, and situate themselves centrally to discuss the prevalence of the punitiveness ideology and the demise of societal focus and challenge accordingly, as the weight of other and current commentators on the subject just isn't sufficient enough. Prison leaders now and in the future must also find their voice and be the influencers for change that provoke policies that are less about control and more about 'penal

17 Greenleaf, R.K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Cambridge, Mass: Center for Applied Studies

humanitarianism'. Where the practice of benevolent treatment and care, are delivered by multi-agency teams who work together to find the answers and resolutions to the complications of prison life, and where there is less reliance on outdated ways of working that do not match the contemporary world of the prison.

And in returning to the challenge of improving Guys Marsh, we often asked ourselves what were the main contributors that we could safely say helped us to improve. And in answering that question I can confirm that it is never just one thing, there were many changes that we made, and countless decisions that we took and sometimes got wrong. But if I was to pick a winning formula, it would be this.

1. **Trust your team** — Our staff, of all grades, ranks and functions played their part, they understood their responsibilities, they gave their best and then they gave an extra 1 per cent. We gave them responsibility and ownership, we encouraged the team to think differently and to be innovative, and trusted their decisions and choices. We trained and we taught and we developed and invested in the team. We recognised their hard work and visibly supported them. Leaders create leaders.
2. **Set and share your standards** — We were visionary, we shared openly about what it was that was important and why, and why it should be important to others. We looked beyond our own field and we discovered new things and learnt considerably from academic learning. We found that our staff wanted to learn, so we told our stories, that was important we felt, *don't keep them to yourself*. Do the right thing, and be the best you can be. The standards you walk past are the standards you set.
3. **Trust your vision** — There is a need for patience with vision and culture, change takes time. But with ingredients such as enthusiastic and committed staff, who understand the potential power of great relational skills, based around the promising keyworker policy. And also, where the

use of authority and of discretion is monitored closely, and where the ideas that we continue to punish people just because they have a label are challenged and diminish over time. **Visions become reality**

And within that formula, I mentioned the word trust several times, and this is important. When trust is authentic and shared generously, you should then feel encouraged to relinquish your power to others in order to truly build an environment that is collaborative, appreciative and empowered. In addition to these

principles of improvement, I mentioned earlier that we should find our heroes, and what this means for me is simply this. Being a leader does not mean that you know the most, or that you are more experienced. It doesn't mean that you are better than anyone, or that you should demand respect. When a leader is at their very best, they are humble when asking for views, they are inclusive and empowering, their confidence is not arrogance, and in prisons they teach and help people to flourish, and they reveal and share their humanity with enthusiastic and genuine purpose. Finding my heroes is all about identifying those people who work hard every day, and for who, their jobs mean the world to them, those members of staff, and we all know and have them, who just get it and give their best every day. Those heroes who perhaps don't recognise that their stimulating, inspiring and steady hands often saves lives

and influences change in people who only usually have people like prison staff to rely on. These are the people that deserve recognition. Officers, nurses, teachers, drug workers, probation officers and so many others. And furthermore, Guys Marsh like other prisons have experienced deaths in custody, events like these really do erode on many fronts, they stay with you, and they often come back and reminds us how difficult our job sometimes is. The staff that deal with such incidents and keep going, are also my heroes, wherever they are. Sarah is certainly my hero too, her commitment for reform and her patience with those in our prison and sometimes just listening to her, and the way in which she persists even with some of the difficulties that she has, she is certainly my hero, who are yours I wonder?

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And in conclusion, a smart person once said. That what you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others. I am a rugby coach for my twin daughters' team, and I teach the team values as often as I can and I talk about legacy too. We speak openly about mentoring others and also of the influence that an unselfish attitude and approach to life can have. They sometimes listen, which is good, and I can only hope that this regular promotion of decency will have an effect on them and their lives. Legacy is an important word for us in the jobs we do, and a number of readers will have their names etched into wooden plaques in the entrance halls of their prisons, something to be very proud of. And when I get that same opportunity, for me it will be a privilege. And if my name is etched on some plaque, I will constantly think about my legacy, what have I done for others that has helped them. How many staff have I influenced to

become future leaders or better people, and how many prisoners have I helped to become better citizens. The potential power of humanitarian leadership is in us all, if we apply the simple characteristics of honesty and integrity, and are authentic and morally right, we will be more resilient and in turn perform much better. If we remember to be inclusive and have a strong team who push that extra 1 per cent, if we teach and nurture, and if we are humble and compassionate. And finally, if we are unselfish and imagine that the hard work and the leadership that we commit to now, will contribute to a safer and more humane society that is seen and experienced only by those who we have taught and influenced, we can then be satisfied that not only did we do the right thing, but as the stewards and caretakers of our organisation now, we would leave a legacy that without apology, has humanity principles firmly fixed in how we work.