
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Happy Friday, Everyone:

I don't have a lot of news to share, but on a personal note, I went to the leg doctor and he says I'm on schedule with my healing. Which means it's going very slowly. I'm still walking stiff-legged and can get where I'm going, but it takes me twice as long to get there. I've been cleared to do a little driving, but I'm still mainly allowing others to drive. I find myself being a very nervous passenger since the wreck, but I suppose that's part of the "trauma." Onward and upward.

I guess by now you've seen the news that two different organizations cited Louisiana juvenile justice as a national leader in the reduction of juvenile incarceration. The Justice Policy Institute and the Casey Foundation issued reports that showed Louisiana having a 56 percent reduction in the rate of youth incarceration over about 12 years, saying it was one of the most dramatic improvements in the country. We are being called a national model in reducing the number of kids being removed from the home and the reports cited better screening as one of the factors in our success. I talked with Dr. Ed Latessa of the University of Cincinnati today and he congratulated us on our national recognition. We know that our hard work is paying off, and now other people are taking notice as well.

So, last week I talked a little bit about the fear of being inexperienced and starting out in this field. Which can be scary. I'd like to follow up on the topic of fear, as it is not always a negative thing. A little bit of fear can be very healthy. In a lot of ways fear is a natural instinct for survival and self preservation. FDR said in his first inaugural address that what we fear is fear itself. The fear of failure makes us work harder. The fear of public speaking makes us prepare better. The fear of being in a car wreck makes us drive slower. The fear of getting caught speeding makes us take care not to get caught and get a ticket. So sometimes we really need to listen to those messages, so that we can manage our behavior in socially acceptable ways. On the negative side of fear, is that fear can sometimes breed aggression. In fact, sometimes the lack of aggression is the best act of courage.

Reflecting back again when I first started in corrections, I was the assistant warden of a woman's prison. It was my first week on the job. And so, I was making my rounds in the housing units, as a good assistant warden would do. It was my first time to do that alone, without an officer alongside. On one housing unit there was only one woman present at that time, because she was so dangerous she was not allowed outside. We'll call her Bobbie Lou. (Not her real name, because she's out now and I don't want her to come looking for me 😊.) Bobbie Lou was notorious in that prison. She was there for taking seven people hostage and killing a deputy sheriff. Not a nice lady. Well, Bobbie Lou called me over to show me something in her cell. I looked around her room and thanked her and turned to leave, but she blocked the entrance and started getting aggressive. I told her not to start anything and move aside to let me leave. She had other ideas. She was going to whip my butt. What I wanted to do was knock her out of the way and run, but what I did was to stand quietly in a non-aggressive position and asked her again to step aside. Should I have been fearful – yep – but luckily I was able to manage my fear, and think and talk my way out of the situation. Sounds a lot like our training, doesn't it?

It takes special people to be able to do this kind of work and to deal with kids and adults who only know violence as an answer. I know some of you work with people like that every day. No matter where you work or what tasks you do, my thanks to you all for everything you do every day to meet the mission.

Sincerely,

"Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers*

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