

TRANSCRIPT: AN INTERVIEW WITH STACY SINNER (Video, February 7, 2019)

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This interview can be viewed online at <https://vimeo.com/321602219>

CONNIE CLEM: [00:00](#) Hi, I'm Connie Clem, and today I'm profiling Stacy Sinner, who is a former jail administrator from Olmsted County, Minnesota. She's moving into the consulting field and has a lot of expertise to share. Let's get right to it.

[SCREEN TRANSITION TITLE: About Stacy]

STACY SINNER: [00:14](#) Well, Connie, thanks for having me and including me in part of your project here. I provide technical assistance and consulting services to criminal justice agencies and jails across the United States. That can be operational assessments, staffing analysis, training, executive coaching, and in some cases capacity building for agencies. Right now I'm in Sonoma, California, and I'm working with the National Institute of Corrections on the Strategic Inmate Management initiative.

Strategic Inmate Management is the NIC's new initiative that promotes safe and secure environments by employing the best practices of direct supervision and inmate behavior management—applicable to all physical plant designs and in jails and prisons. So some of the things that happened with this initiative is that it supports correctional leaders in fulfilling their role in providing safe and secure facilities.

[01:11](#) It demonstrates the importance of having a cohesive inmate management strategy in the work that we do. We assist agencies and integrating Strategic Inmate Management as an operational philosophy, including integrating "SIM," as we call it, into the organizational culture of the agency.

And finally, we build organizational capacity to sustain the integration of Strategic Inmate Management throughout all levels of the organization. So it's a very exciting initiative. It's a deeper dive with individual agencies than we've done before.

So we're in Sonoma this week. This has been a year-long engagement with Sonoma to establish these initiatives and make sure that they're really prepared to move forward with this initiative and do it really well.

CONNIE CLEM:

When you are working with an agency at this level, you're working with the upper management or mid-management to enable them to move forward with this?

STACY SINNER:

[02:14](#)

Great question. We begin with the executive staff of the agency. So we come onsite, and we spend three days with the executive staff—the sheriff, the undersheriff, all of the captains or lieutenants or the higher level of executive management team, to establish that they understand what they're going to be asking their staff to do, and that they buy the concept in its entirety. Then we come back and we teach the line staff and the supervisors “Strategic Inmate Management: The Officer’s Role” and “Strategic Inmate Management: The Supervisor’s Role.” Then we train trainers so that there’s capacity-building inside of the organization.

And we not only do the training for trainers, but we coach the trainers through their first couple of deliveries of the material. And we've found that to be really helpful and useful, because it’s one thing to say, “Here’s a lesson plan,” and demonstrate how the lesson plan is used, and it’s another thing entirely to give it to them and then just say, “Well, that’s it—that’s all the support you get.” So we really walk them through that really carefully, and make it a very successful for them to be able to continue to build capacity in the organization and to do it well.

[SCREEN TRANSITION TITLE: Where did Strategic Inmate Management come from?]

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Strategic Inmate Management is the evolution, if you will, of all the research and all of the work in the field that has been done with direct supervision starting with direct supervision in prisons in the 1970s—direct supervision research and lesson plan development, curriculum development in the early '90s for jails. There was a rewrite of the curriculum in the early 2000s of direct supervision and then a version of direct supervision called Inmate Behavior Management, because we learned that agencies were having a little bit of difficulty understanding the application of the principles of direct supervision when they had a physical plant design that wasn't direct supervision.

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And so a there was a little bit of adjustment to the curriculum so that people could understand it a little better. And now, the [NIC] Prisons Division is going to be picking up Strategic Inmate Management as well.

[SCREEN TRANSITION TITLE: Is it working?]

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There's question about whether or not what we do works—you know, are we out here just spinning our wheels or what is happening? And so a couple of different layers to that, I think.

Related to staffing analysis or operational assessments, things like that, we use very specific, established methodologies to come to conclusions there, state jail standards, and national jail standards. And so the roadmap for an agency following an operational assessment is a pretty clear roadmap.

When we talk about training or transition processes with agencies, then we're getting into a bit of agency culture, right? A bit of organizational culture. And that is a little bit of a softer touch in it.

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And the question about success is a little more vague. So if this was, for example, an optimal place to be for an agency, and this is a current condition, the degree of success than an agency will experience, has to do with, first, the readiness of the agency to make a change, right? So if the agency is highly ready and prepared to make a cultural change, then they can move. If this is a continuum, we can move along that continuum a further distance. And so that's important for the staff and the leadership of an agency to examine carefully before they embark on something like this.

And the National Institute of Corrections, related to the Strategic Inmate Management program, will do a readiness assessment with an agency, and will select agencies with the highest degree of readiness to receive a program like this and to walk through an engagement, that's 12 to 16 months long, to have them be ready for that, so that those staff in that agency can practice the art of inmate management and do it the best that they can. So that the impact on that agency as large as it can be.

So we want to move people from here to here, agencies from here to here [*demonstrating with hands*], and we want to get them as far down that continuum as we can with that engagement. So we're going to select agencies who are most ready.

[SCREEN TRANSITION TITLE: How did you get into jail work?]

[06:39](#)

I would say that I'm in the business accidentally. I feel like most people are, right? I don't feel like a lot of kids grow up going, "Well, I'd like to work in jails when I get older," or something like that. There isn't a lot of that. Maybe it's starting to happen a little bit more now.

But, coincidentally my grandfather was an elected sheriff in Pipestone County, Minnesota. And when I was a child, that was during the time when jails were part of the sheriff's residence. And so the jail itself was separated from the sheriff's residence by this industrial kitchen.

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And so when we would go and stay with my grandparents, my grandmother would make meals in this kitchen when she was making meals for our family. At the same time, she was making meals for the inmates who were in custody. And so when I was five years old, I was taking trays from the kitchen and walking over and giving them to the inmates that were, you know, six steps away from the central part of the kitchen. So I don't know if there was a little osmosis happening there, but I grew up in this business.

And then I just had some really, really wonderful mentors, you know, people from the National Institute of Corrections, yourself included, who I was fortunate enough to interact with during the course of my career. I had wonderful sheriffs who really wanted to do the very best work that we can be doing.

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So I was really fortunate to be able to be surrounded by people who wanted to do good work, who were interested in the latest ways of doing good work and how it would best serve our communities.

[SCREEN TRANSITION TITLE: What else should people know about jails?]

CONNIE CLEM:

[08:13](#)

So, Stacy. What else would you like people to know about jails, corrections, and the industry?

STACY SINNER:

You know, we're in this together, right? As practitioners and citizens. You know, whether you're a correctional officer or a supervisor or a perhaps a contract health care provider or food service provider, a member of an executive team, an elected sheriff or a warden—the American justice system is important, and your excellent contribution is valuable. So working together

to make sure that, that we're doing our best work—this is the human condition, right? And we're bound together, all of us as human beings—and we can mark time, or we can make history. And so this work to me is meaningful, and it's generative. And so that's why I do it. And that's why I want to continue to do it, and that's why it's important to me.

CONNIE CLEM: [09:13](#)

Thank you very much for being on the interview today.

STACY SINNER: [09:16](#)

Thank you, Connie.

CONNIE CLEM: [09:18](#)

Thanks for watching. You can continue a conversation with Stacy by contacting her at LinkedIn.com [[LinkedIn.com/in/StacySinner](https://www.linkedin.com/in/StacySinner)] or by email at stacyesinner@gmail.com.

I'm Connie Clem. Goodbye.

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