

# Creating a Supervision Tool Kit: How to Improve Probation and Parole

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**WHEN PROBATION OR** parole officers meet with offenders, what should they do? Of course, there are bureaucratic tasks to be performed—paperwork to be completed or perhaps a drug test to monitor. But the most salient issue is whether, in the often circumscribed supervision meetings, there is anything that officers can do to reduce the likelihood that offenders will recidivate. In the past, most officers were left to fend for themselves. They received either the wrong advice as to what to do—or no advice. Given that about 4.8 million offenders are under community supervision, this failure to supply officers with best practices—with the tools to fix offender deficits—is a major omission on the part of correctional researchers (Maruschak & Parks, 2012). It is time to take a very different direction; it is time to create an effective *supervision tool kit*.

Of course, a growing community corrections population, constrained budgets, and unwieldy caseloads have, in part, contributed to ineffective supervision practices. Many officers have been unable to do little more than take a “pee ‘em and see ‘em” approach. Moreover, perhaps because officers may perceive certain strategies as less time-consuming and resource-intensive, one answer that has been given to probation and parole officers is to encourage them to talk tough with offenders. Essentially, this strategy involves intensive supervision combined with officers threatening offenders with revocation if caught violating supervision conditions. As will be discussed below, this approach has been shown to be ineffective at reducing

recidivism and should be removed from any best practices tool kit we might fashion.

An emerging line of inquiry has recently demonstrated more promising results. The approach starts with recognizing that probation and parole must embrace not only the control of offenders but also their rehabilitation. Especially with high-risk offenders, threatening revocation and even applying punitive sanctions have minimal enduring effects. They may suppress untoward conduct in the moment, but they do not achieve lasting behavioral change—the kind of change that will contribute to public safety. By contrast, emerging research suggests that officers might have positive effects on supervisees by moving in a more human services direction. One aspect is to build quality relationships with offenders. Another key tool is to use the extant knowledge on the principles of effective intervention to frame interactions with offenders in supervision meetings. Here, we report on important developments in this regard. The goal is to show both that officers can have meaningful effects on offenders and that our knowledge about what the best supervision tools might be is growing.

## What Does Not Work

The work role of a probation and parole officer includes a mixture of both treatment and control-oriented strategies. Thus, traditionally, probation and parole officers were expected both to help and police offenders. In the 1980s, a natural experiment was conducted that changed community corrections in a decidedly more control- and

punitively-oriented direction. Instead of rehabilitation as the primary goal, community corrections embraced a “get tough” approach—that is, to adopt a model of community supervision that was oriented more toward control, surveillance, and law enforcement. The shift from rehabilitation to a “get tough” approach resulted in the expanded use of intermediate sanctions such as intensive supervision, electronic monitoring, boot camps, drug testing, and home confinement. This shift occurred for four major reasons.

First, one factor spurring the creation of such alternatives to incarceration was prison overcrowding and the concomitant inability of states to fund the high cost of incarceration (Petersilia, 1998). Second, studies of felony probation showed the inability of probation officers to closely supervise felony probationers and to lower their recidivism. As a result, states wishing to reduce prison populations sought to reform felony probation by making it more intensive and controlling (Petersilia, 1998). Third, Martinson’s (1974) essay discrediting rehabilitative efforts fostered more questions about whether rehabilitation actually worked. Fourth, there was political support for the expansion of the use of intermediate sanctions. Morris and Tonry’s (1990) book *Between Prison and Probation: Intermediate Punishments in a Rational Sentencing System* influenced the creation of more graduated sanctions rather than a polarized option of sanctions for judges to choose from (Petersilia, 1998). Importantly, those at both ends of the political spectrum embraced community control programs, especially

intensive supervision. Thus, conservatives liked the “get tough” approach to supervision, whereas liberals liked the prospect of using such programs to divert offenders from prison to the community (Cullen, Wright, & Applegate, 1996).

Notably, the community corrections shift towards a more punitive and control-oriented philosophy was an attempt to give officers new tools for their tool kit. They could disregard any notion that treatment needed to be offered and could now focus their time on threatening, watching, and sanctioning offenders. Underlying this philosophical shift was rational choice theory, which suggested that offenders would choose to conform if confronted with a realistic risk of detection and punishment. Intensive supervision programs attempted to specifically deter offenders from committing crimes through close monitoring in the community in place of incarceration; proponents of rational choice theory believed that the threat of revocation would reduce the likelihood of reoffending (Fulton, Latessa, Stichman, & Travis, 1997).

But did this punishment-deterrence tool work? A number of programs were implemented and evaluated, and the evidence was clear—they did not work (MacKenzie, 2006). For example, Cullen et al.’s (1996) comprehensive narrative review of the literature concluded that ISPs increased surveillance but did not reduce recidivism among ISP probationers unless rehabilitation was used in conjunction with intensive supervision. These findings indicate that “trying to get tougher with ISP offenders is unlikely to be the magic bullet that makes these programs work” (p. 88). In addition, a 1997 report to Congress of a systematic review of 500 scientific evaluations, some of which included intensive supervision programs, concluded that intensive probation and parole supervision did not work (Sherman, Gottfredson, MacKenzie, & Eck, 1998).

Meta-analyses conducted by Gendreau, Goggin, Cullen, and Andrews (2000) and by Drake, Aos, and Miller (2006) found similar results to those of the narrative reviews. Both meta-analyses concluded that ISPs fail to reduce recidivism (Lowenkamp, Flores, Holsinger, Makarios, & Latessa, 2010). Gendreau et al. (2000) examined 47 ISP program evaluations and found ISPs either had no effect or potentially increased recidivism by 6 percent. Similarly, Drake et al. (2006) meta-analyzed 23 surveillance-oriented adult ISP programs and also found that traditional

ISPs had no apparent effect on recidivism (see also Lowenkamp et al., 2010; Drake, Aos, & Miller, 2009). Finally, in one of the largest and most rigorous investigations of ISPs to date, Petersilia and Turner (1993) conducted an evaluation of 14 ISP programs situated in 9 states involving more than 2,000 offenders. They used an experimental design that included random assignment of probationers to intensive supervision or regular supervision. The study revealed that elements of surveillance (for example, increased monitoring, drug testing) have little influence on recidivism, and that there is no significant relationship between increasing surveillance and recidivism reduction. Most important, findings show that ISP did not reduce the frequency of rearrests or the seriousness of the new charges, but it did increase the number of technical violations and the length of jail time. When ISPs included a treatment component, however, recidivism decreased by 10 percent. (Information on any change in technical violations was not reported.) Taken together, these findings tell us that probation and parole officers will not succeed in reducing recidivism if they devote their interactions with offenders to threatening and/or exacting punishment. This control or enforcement model of supervision simply is not evidence based; there is no research to show that it works. It is the wrong tool to use in trying to fix offenders. But if this is the case, then what tools should be used?

On a broad level, the answer is that supervision must involve a human services or treatment component. Indeed, “treatment is potentially an essential and complementary component within community crime control programs” (Cullen et al., 1996, p. 89). Offenders change not by associating with those whose primary goal is to catch them doing bad things and to inflict punishment upon them. Rather, much like the rest of us, offenders change their ways when those people who matter to them are sufficiently involved in their lives to help them think and act differently.

In this content, two possible strategies exist. First, human services can be provided when officers function as program brokers—that is, when they actively refer offenders to treatment programs, help offenders to access services, or run groups themselves. Although this is important, it is not the current concern of this essay.

The second strategy—the main focus here—involves the actual interaction between officers and their supervisees. It may well be

assumed that office visits are too brief or perhaps too bureaucratic to be a conduit through which offender change can be facilitated. But dismissal of the value of office visits now appears to be a mistake. Thus, as noted above, an emerging literature shows (1) that the quality of the relationship between an officer and offender, a sort of therapeutic alliance, is important, and (2) that the content of the officer-offender discussion within the supervision meetings may be essential to effecting behavioral change. In our terms, these are important “tools” that officers can use to “make supervision work.” We discuss them further in the sections that follow.

### **Building Quality Relationships with Offenders**

Developing a high-quality probationer-officer relationship is essential to probationers’ success. In fact, relationship quality is believed to be the most important of the core correctional practices (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). It is the backdrop against which every interaction between the officer and the probationer is colored. High-quality relationships can facilitate better correctional practices among officers and better compliance among probationers. Without such relationships, officers could easily resort to a non-effective authoritarian style that is likely to be met by the probationers with resistance.

Relationship quality in the mandated context is different from that typically seen in a traditional “therapeutic” setting. Traditional therapeutic relationships are likely to be geared primarily toward improving symptoms and functioning and thus are best conceptualized as a “working alliance” that features shared goals, an agreed-upon plan to achieving these goals, and an interpersonal bond (Bordin, 1979; Horvath & Luborski, 1993). In contrast, probation/parole officers must carefully balance their roles as both “counselor” and “cop” if they wish to achieve the dual goals of public safety and offender rehabilitation. As such, the officer-probationer relationship is more than a working alliance; it is a “dual-role relationship” (see Skeem et al., 2007; Trotter, 2006).

High-quality dual-role relationships are fundamentally fostered by the officer. Having a balanced approach toward supervision and placing equal emphasis on control (e.g., monitoring for compliance with the terms of probation) and care (e.g., demonstrating genuine concern for the offender and assisting the offender with his needs) set the tone of the relationship. This alone has been shown

to have an impact on offenders' outcomes. An ethnographic study of 7,000 probationers demonstrated that probationers who are supervised by officers who blended roles as a "law enforcer" and a "therapeutic agent" have better criminal justice outcomes than those who emphasize only one role or the other (Klockars, 1972). Similarly, a study of 240 parolees also revealed fewer violations and revocations among those supervised by officers with a "hybrid" orientation, as compared to law enforcement or social casework orientations alone (Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005).

Also, building a sense of trust between the officer and the probationer is essential. The probationer needs to feel safe with the officer. If an officer wishes to effect behavioral change, the probationer needs to know he or she can share issues that arise—damning or otherwise—without being judged, belittled, or berated. Officers who can avoid this authoritarian approach and instead employ a more authoritative, "firm-but-fair" approach are likely to be much more successful in establishing a trusting relationship. Officers can—and should—hold offenders accountable for their actions but do so in a way that fosters collaborative problem solving (e.g., by using techniques such as reinforcement and modeling of prosocial behavior), shows genuine concern and respect, and provides the probationer with the opportunity to express his opinion and contribute to decision-making (i.e., "procedural justice"; see Lind & Tyler, 1988; Watson & Angell, 2007). In short, high-quality dual-role relationships involve firmness, fairness, caring, and trust.

Studies of dual-role relationship quality underscore its importance in officer-probationer interactions and probationer outcomes. For example, observer ratings on the Dual-Role Relationship Inventory-Revised (DRI-R; Skeem, Eno Loudon, Polaschek, & Camp, 2007), a measure developed precisely to capture the core features discussed above, is related to in-session officer (e.g., affirming, reflecting, supporting) and probationer (e.g., inverse relationship with resistance) behavior. Officer- and probationer-rated DRI-R scores are related to fewer violations among probationers with serious mental illness (Skeem et al., 2007). In a study of over 100 non-disordered parolees, high-quality dual-role relationships were associated with a longer time to rearrest—even after controlling for personality and risk of the parolees (Kennealy, Skeem, Manchak, & Eno Loudon, 2012). Perhaps most telling, a recent study comparing

specialty and traditional probation for offenders with mental illness found that dual-role relationship quality fully mediated the effects of specialty probation on arrest outcomes of 359 probationers with serious mental illness (Skeem, Kennealy, & Manchak, 2010).

With the new understanding that officer-offender relationships matter and can positively affect offender outcomes, practitioners can work toward building high-quality dual-role relationships into supervision settings. Currently, several models that integrate this knowledge of dual-role relationships show promise and support for officers to be effective agents of change within supervision meetings.

### Effective Supervision Meetings: Three Examples

Each year in the United States, the 4.8 million offenders on probation or parole supervision meet with their supervising officers regularly. These conferences represent an invaluable opportunity for probation and parole officers to impact the lives of their supervisees. During these sessions, officers can interact with offenders one-on-one, under conditions where the offender is reasonably attentive. To reap the full benefits of such interactions, officers need to use effective tools. As noted above, one means of enhancing behavior change in offenders is to build quality relationships with them. However, a second "tool" or strategy involves officers using so-called RNR principles when interacting with offenders (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Phrased differently, time spent with offenders should not be wasted or spent in ways that are not rooted in a coherent model on how to change offender behavior.

Correctional scholars and practitioners have grown increasingly familiar with the treatment model that argues that effective interventions must adhere to three main principles: risk (R), need (N), and responsivity (R) (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Gendreau, 1996). This paradigm is often referred to as the "RNR model," an acronym that represents its three core principles. For those less familiar with this approach, we can take a moment to summarize it. First, the risk principle proposes that programs should first identify offenders' risk and then match the intensity of services to risk level, where highest-risk offenders receive the most intensive programming. Second, the need principle states that treatment programs should target offenders' criminogenic needs. These needs, which are also called "dynamic risk factors," are the empirically

established predictors of recidivism that are malleable (i.e., not static) and thus open to being reduced (for example, antisocial attitudes). Third, the responsivity principle suggests that programs should use treatment modalities that are capable of addressing (that is, are "responsive to") criminogenic needs. Cognitive-behavioral therapies are one example of a program that has been found to be particularly effective. Programs also should be tailored to respond to certain characteristics of clients that may constitute barriers to successful treatment. Examples of such barriers, often referred to as "specific responsivity," include intelligence, transportation issues, and mental health (Gendreau, 1996).

Notably, this movement in corrections to adopt the RNR principles has been instrumental in developing effective treatment programs (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Cullen & Smith, 2011). However, the value of RNR principles is not limited to identifying and creating effective treatment programs into which officers might place offenders (the brokering function). An exciting development is that these principles might be used to inform officer-offender interactions during office visits. Indeed, three closely aligned models have recently emerged that use RNR principles to guide the content of supervision meetings. The goal is to transform such meetings from a time for offenders to merely "report" or "check in" to a time that is used productively to impact recidivism. Below, each model and the available research assessing the approach are reviewed.

### Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS)

Developed by Bonta and colleagues from Public Safety Canada, the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision model—or STICS—uses RNR principles to guide the content of supervision meetings (Bonta, Bourgon, Rugge, Scott, Yessine, Gutierrez, & Li, 2011). The goal of STICS is to integrate what we know about RNR principles into a "real world" community supervision setting. Bonta and his colleagues first audiotaped probation officer meetings with offenders to determine how well officers actually adhered to RNR principles. Their observations were disappointing. They discovered that there was little, if any, adherence to the risk, needs, and responsivity principles (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Bonta and his colleagues realized, however, that the audiotape findings offered an important opportunity: It might be possible

to train officers to use their sessions in a more treatment-appropriate way. In essence, the officers needed to be taught the RNR principles and how to use them effectively when interacting with offenders in their meetings.

A General Personality and Cognitive Social Learning (GPCSL) theoretical perspective underlies the STICS model and training. The GPCSL asserts that criminal behavior is: (1) learned and “follows the laws of classical, operant, and vicarious learning” (Bourgon, Bonta, Ruge, Scott, & Yessine, 2010, p. 4); (2) learned through interactions with others in the environment; and that 3) certain risk factors are more important than others—antisocial attitudes and beliefs, for example. The idea here is that the more antisocial or criminal behavior is rewarded and/or the less it is associated with a cost/punishment, the more likely an individual is to continue the criminal or antisocial behavior (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

STICS consists of a 3-day training that includes 10 modules, or lessons. Overall, the training teaches and explains the GPCSL in an attempt to “buy-in” or motivate probation officers to recognize the importance of STICS and how it can help overcome problems with officers’ clients. The training aims to change officer behaviors within officer-offender meetings, and then use the skills from the training to in turn change the behavior of their clients (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Within the training, the RNR principles are reviewed and the importance of adhering to these principles is emphasized—specifically when it comes to identifying the criminogenic needs of clients. Officers are taught how to build rapport and a respectful relationship with the client, integrate cognitive-behavioral techniques to sessions, and structure officer-offender meetings to be concrete and meaningful (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; see also Bourgon et al., 2010).

The structure of the officer-offender meetings has four components: check-in, review, intervention, and homework. During check-in, the officer should enhance the relationship with the client, check for any new developments in the client’s life, and check for compliance. The review component assists in facilitating learning through repetition, practice, and rehearsal of material that has already been learned. This helps in the flow of the officer-offender meeting and gives the client practice and constant reinforcement to use the cognitive-behavioral techniques taught within the meeting. Next is the intervention component. The officer conducts an

intervention with the client, teaching some type of cognitive-behavioral intervention (i.e., behavior sequence model, cognitive restructuring, prosocial skills). Homework, the last component, is assigned by the officer and gives the offender the opportunity to practice the newly learned intervention outside of the session (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Research on the STICS model shows encouraging results. With regard to training officers, a study by Bonta et al. (2008) of 62 probation officers found that through case files and audiotapes, it was evident that staff needed training to improve adherence to RNR principles during community supervision. The study also showed that the officer-offender contacts were only somewhat related to risk level, and important criminogenic needs were rarely the focus of the sessions (Bonta et al., 2010; see also Bourgon et al., 2010). After the implementation of STICS, Bonta and colleagues (2010) found significant change of officers’ adherence to RNR principles and STICS, and a positive—though non-significant—change in offender recidivism. When compared to the officers in the control group, officers that went through STICS training spent significantly more time targeting criminogenic needs, antisocial attitudes, and higher-quality skills and interventions based on RNR principles (Bonta et al., 2010). Though not statistically significant, Bonta et al. (2010) found a lower recidivism rate for offenders chosen by STICS-trained officers than for offenders assigned to officers in the control group—about a 15 percent reduction. STICS shows encouraging and promising results for changes in both officers’ jobs and offender recidivism.

### **Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)**

Similar to STICS, Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), developed by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI), attempts to equip community supervision officers with knowledge on translating RNR principles into action and using core correctional practices within meetings—specifically with one-on-one interactions with offenders. EPICS strives to teach probation and parole officers how to structure offender-client interactions using evidence-based practices (Smith, Schweitzer, Labrecque, & Latessa, 2012). Research shows that the use of core correctional practices within community supervision services has been associated with considerable recidivism reduction of

offenders (Bonta et al., 2010; Bourgon, Bonta, Ruge, Scott, & Yessine, 2010).

EPICS aims to help probation and parole officers structure face-to-face interactions with offenders, increase dosage with higher-risk offenders, target criminogenic needs, and use cognitive-behavioral and social-learning approaches within officer-offender meetings (Smith et al., 2012). Supervisors and peer coaches are engaged in the training and implementation process of EPICS. This helps develop the proper infrastructure to support adherence to EPICS after training and coaching sessions are over (Smith et al., 2012). EPICS includes a 3-4 day training, monthly meetings with supervisors and peer coaches, and feedback for individual officers. Officers submit audio recordings of one-on-one meetings with clients throughout the process; these are then coded by UCCI research assistants for adherence to the EPICS model and structure. Important to the EPICS model is strong leadership. The leaders are in constant contact with peer coaches from UCCI and hopefully become the resource for the probation or parole office after coaching sessions are completed. Collaboration is key to effectively implementing EPICS and maintaining program fidelity and quality even after UCCI is no longer part of the process (Smith et al., 2012).

Notably, EPICS employs the same four components used in STICS—check-in, review, intervention, and homework—with each component also having similar functions. Check-in consists of building and enhancing rapport with the client while also assessing for crises/needs and compliance of the offender. The review component consists of establishing/discussing the progress of short- and long-term goals, a review of previous interventions, any updates and discussion surrounding outside agencies (i.e., drug treatment, mental health treatment, anger management), and a review of homework. For the intervention component, several cognitive-behavioral techniques are taught to officers, who then implement and integrate the techniques into one-on-one interactions with their clients. Interventions include a behavior chain, teaching a prosocial skill, cost-benefit analysis of behavior, and cognitive restructuring. The fourth component is homework assigned to the offender; this should be based on the newly learned skill. Additionally, the session includes the use of positive reinforcement of clients’ prosocial behavior and/or comments, effective use of authority, and effectively disapproving of clients’ antisocial behavior and/or comments.

A recent study of EPICS shows encouraging results. UCCI research associates coded 93 audiotapes as part of the pilot project for EPICS. Of those tapes, 57 came from the experimental group and 36 from the control group. The results show that when compared to the control group, officers trained in the EPICS model were more likely to target criminogenic needs during sessions and reinforce prosocial behavior and comments (Smith et al., 2012). Smith et al. (2012) also found differences between the audiotaped sessions in the experimental group. Of the 5 tapes officers recorded, there was a significant difference in adherence and use of the EPICS model in sessions with clients—specifically after the second and third coaching sessions—indicating that officer proficiency of core correctional practices occurred as a result of the ongoing coaching sessions (Smith et al., 2012).

### Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR)

Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest, or STARR, is similar in concept to both STICS and EPICS. Developed by Lowenkamp and colleagues, STARR aims to train officers in skills the literature identifies as most important to offender behavior change at the federal level of community supervision (Robinson, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Lowenkamp, 2011). The main goal of STARR is to reduce clients' failure rates and recidivism through the use of trained officers engaging in behaviorally based skills. Similar to EPICS and STICS, the STARR model is developed based on the RNR principles.

STARR includes a 3½-day classroom training that teaches and discusses the underlying theory, research, and goals of the program. Training also involves “a demonstration of each skill, exercises, and an opportunity for officers to practice each skill and receive feedback” (Robinson et al., 2011, pp. 58-59). Skills taught during STARR training sessions include: “active listening, role clarification, effective use of authority, effective disapproval, effective reinforcement, effective punishment, problem solving, and how to apply and review the cognitive model” (Robinson et al., 2011, p. 59). During the training, officers submit audiotaped officer-offender meetings with clients. This helps determine the officers' level of understanding skills and officers' progress. In addition, it gives trainers an opportunity to provide constructive feedback (Robinson et al., 2011).

In a study by Robinson and colleagues (2011), 88 officers submitted 598 audio recordings for review (400 from the experimental group and 198 from the control group). Robinson et al. (2011) used an experimental pretest/posttest design to analyze the impact of STARR. They found that 34 percent of STARR-trained officers used reinforcement and disapproval compared with 17 percent of untrained officers. Regarding the discussion of antisocial cognitions, peers, or impulsivity, STARR-trained officers were also significantly more likely to target antisocial cognitions, peers, or impulsivity than the control group (44 percent versus 33 percent, respectively). Further, STARR-trained officers were more likely to use cognitive techniques to teach offenders the link between cognitions and behavior (17 percent) compared with the control group (1 percent) (Robinson et al., 2011).

Within the same study, data on failure rates for clients involved in the STARR process were promising. Prior to STARR training, there was no significant difference between the experimental and control group in failure rates of moderate- and high-risk clients, at 39 percent and 38 percent, respectively. Post-training, however, the failure rate of clients in the experimental group was 26 percent compared to 34 percent for the control group—a difference that was statistically significant (Robinson et al., 2011).

The study also compared failure rates after controlling for risk level. Pre-training failure rates for moderate-risk clients showed no significant differences between the experimental and control group (32 percent versus 31 percent). Notably, at post-training, the failure rates for control-group clients stayed the same at about 32 percent, whereas the experimental-group failure rate was significantly reduced to 16 percent (Robinson et al., 2011). The effectiveness of STARR for moderate-risk offenders was subsequently replicated in a 24-month follow up (Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Alexander, 2012). For high-risk offenders, however, STARR skills did not yield statistically significant results. This result could be because such offenders require a larger dose of treatment than can be provided in an office visit. Research by Lowenkamp et al. (2012) provides some beginning evidence that STARR reduces recidivism among high-risk offenders when it is coupled with officer training in motivational interviewing. More research into this promising use of treatment tools is merited.

### Conclusion: Expanding the Supervision Tool Kit

In the course of a year, probation and parole officers sit in a room, perhaps across a desk, and hold a supervision conference with their charges. Are these meetings being used productively? In some cases, officers may broker services for offenders or use best practices to deliver treatment themselves. But most often, the sessions are perfunctory, amounting to little more than offenders reporting in to their supervisors. Worse, on too many occasions, at-risk offenders who are straying from their conditions of probation or parole are greeted with the threats or reality of revocation.

In effect, these perfunctory or punitive supervision meetings amount to millions of hours each year of lost opportunities to intervene productively with offenders. Our central contention, however, is that probation and parole officers are not to be blamed for these opportunity costs. In a very real way, they are sent to the job site without a tool kit to use in their work. They may be trained in how to obey policies and complete paperwork, but they are not equipped with the skills to interact effectively with their supervisees.

Fortunately, it appears that steps are now being undertaken to study precisely how officer-offender interactions can be used potentially to reduce recidivism. In this regard, the research shows that officers can have positive impact on their supervisees' risk of reoffending if they build quality relationships with them and are trained to use RNR principles during their sessions. Only beginning steps have been made thus far, but they point to an important avenue for future development.

The conferences of officers with their probationers and parolees remain an under-researched area of corrections. In calling for the development of a “supervision tool kit,” we propose that systematic efforts be undertaken to explore how to expand the resources officers can draw upon in supervision. This enterprise promises to improve offenders' chances at avoiding further criminal involvement and to improve public safety.

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