

The first week of October is nationally recognized as Customer Service Week, and before the month was over, I talked with DOC staff about who our stakeholders are, and how our interactions with them should be rooted in good customer service. I wanted to share with you some of the things I shared with them.

Simply defined, a stakeholder is any person or entity who impacts or is impacted by our agency's actions. Understanding what matters to our stakeholders is essential to improving their experience with our agency. While the DOC has many stakeholders, one of the largest is friends and family of those in our care, and of the clients under our supervision. For many of them, the DOC is a complex and confusing entity. They may not always know or understand how all aspects the DOC work, and that's understandable. It's our job as public servants to help them navigate a complex system as best we can, and provide excellent customer service along the way.

During my time in corrections, I've heard from many people who are anxious or scared for their loved ones who are sentenced to a DOC institution. Most have no idea what to expect. The criminal justice system can be confusing and incarceration makes communication more difficult. During these interactions, I try to think about how they may be feeling, and I try to treat them how I would like to be treated if I were in their shoes. Whether this involves clarifying a few of our visitation rules at a facility, how the intake process works or how the agency is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe the DOC should always treat friends and family of those in our care and under our supervision, and all of our stakeholders, with respect and kindness. If a person is having difficulty understanding, we can try a new approach to how we are communicating. People have different learning styles and I emphasize that it's acceptable, even encouraged, to be creative in your communication with them. And sometimes, listening to their concerns is all they may need.

I recognize that customer service may seem far removed from state service and the Department of Corrections. However, this simply isn't true. Most of our staff participate in at least some form of customer service on a daily basis. Customer service can also be found in many of our Department's core values, such as "we treat all people with dignity and respect", "we respond effectively and appropriately in our interactions and communications" and "we recognize that we have one opportunity to make a positive first impression". This last one is especially important when assisting friends and family members who have never had a loved one in our care. A positive first impression is vital in shaping their end-to-end experience with our agency. While customer service is important to myself and to our agency, there is also something to be said about simply being nice. It feels good to help someone in need and it can make our jobs easier. Even a simple act can make a big impact.

Kevin A. Carr, DOC Secretary