

## “20plus – long-serving penal system employees” (handout)

Working in prisons is challenging and taxing. On one hand, experience and a certain “serenity” play an important role in this profession. On the other, however, long-serving employees run the risk of burning out under the continuous stress and lack of opportunities to assume new roles. It is not uncommon for these employees to have missed recent developments and to be reluctant to accommodate change. This poses a challenge for their superiors and, to some extent, team members.

The 20plus course is offered to employees who have been working in prisons for more than 20 years. It was designed for participants to take a week off from their daily working lives, look back on what they have achieved and set targets for their future path. A personal status report is compiled, and light is shed on more recent developments in the penal system. During the week’s course, some activities are deliberately held outside of the seminar room. At the end, personal targets are defined, which are checked six months later in a day’s follow-up session and adjusted where necessary. Since 2014, an annual, voluntary 20plus day has been held for all those who have completed the course.

Here are some experience reports from previous courses as to the challenges employees face:

- The employees have a great need to talk about the difficult situations they deal with in their daily working lives. When doing so, it is valuable to many participants if those listening to them are familiar with the reality of working in the penal system.
- Long-serving employees identify very strongly with their work. Changes in the profession are often taken to question their own selves and values.
- The expectations employees in the penal system have to meet have risen constantly over the past few years. Employee training has not kept up with the pace.
- The relationship employees have with their superiors has a significant impact on job satisfaction. Insufficient communication, a lack of support or fostering of employees as well as a lack of expertise among managerial staff can take a considerable toll on the atmosphere at work.
- Employees find monotonous work and not being involved in decision-making demotivating and particularly burdensome.

Eliane Zimmermann, [eliane.zimmermann@skjv.ch](mailto:eliane.zimmermann@skjv.ch)