

Wake up and smell the
contraband

KBOCC

2017



THE 25 LAWS OF CONTRABAND



DISCLAIMER

- These are the opinions of Joe Bouchard and are not necessarily those of the Michigan Department of Corrections. The Department is not responsible for the content or the accuracy of the following.



25 laws of contraband

- Everyone can identify contraband with a tangible example
- All are important at some time or another
- From the innocent pencil eraser to a prison made zip gun, all laws apply
- These are the 25 laws of contraband



Law 1

Contraband builds empires for enterprising inmates

- Prisoners with common sense, stamina, and a little initiative can rise up quickly through the unofficial inmate hierarchy
- Power can be obtained through barter.



Law 2

Everything is for sale



Law 3

Contraband equals power

- It allows anyone to purchase the services of others
- Someone who is physically weak, with the help of contraband, can acquire protection
- That makes anyone potentially formidable



Law 4

Small things are often connected to huge, unseen enterprises

- Discovery of a few betting slips can actually be the tip of the iceberg for a multi-facility, lucrative gambling ring
- That which is seemingly innocent, frequently IS NOT



Law 5

Often, in the mind of the incarcerated entrepreneur, the benefits of illegal commerce outweigh the sanctions

- Some inmates would risk a major misconduct for dangerous contraband.
- Rather face an assault on the yard from another prisoner than failed contraband reputation.



Law 6

Staff generally underestimate the lure that power derived from commerce has on prisoners

- Many staff believe that sanctions are sufficient to keep potential problems spawned by illegal trading manageable
- Comfort is key
- Staff do not consider the rationale of law # 5



Law 7

Contraband control is a never-ending proposition

- Prisoners new to the system will test it as though it had never been tested
- Older prisoners will patiently wait until classic modes have been forgotten
- With profit to be had, the lure will always be present



Law 8

Contraband lords are magnets for those who want to obtain associative power

- Hitching a wagon to the rising stars
- The more successful a reputation, the more followers a contraband lord will have
- The glorious facts surrounding a great legend do not have to be absolutely accurate.
- Perception is reality



Law 9

**The greater the profits from commerce,
the more difficulty in prisoner
management**

- Scarcity drives the prices up
- If tobacco becomes officially forbidden in segregation units, the reward for traffickers increases.
- More prisoners will take risks.
- Goals: profit and increased influence.



Law 10

Old tricks recycle while new inventions of concealment and transport, though less frequent, continue

- Staff may take note, for example, of recurrent resurgences in certain methods
- Through a career, we see fewer new methods
- Our collection of known modes expands with experience



Law 11

There is nothing new under the sun

- But there are many ingenious variations on existing themes
- For example, a book is a clever way to move bootleg.



Law 12

Exchanges and trafficking, when fully traced, are good indicators of inmate dynamics

- Consider a prisoner with no apparent connections or affiliations who also seems untouchable
- Linked to a contraband delivery system?
- Selected by a contraband lord to move illicit good because he seems to fly under staff radar?
- There are no vacuums in prison



Law 13

Diversions work

- Feigns and sacrifice contraband moves
- Sleight of hand can be efficient



Law 14

Some staff are placated by the ruses performed with feigns and sacrifice contraband moves

- **Lesser bootleg is offered or “found”**
- **Staff satisfied with simple bust**
- **Valuable contraband remains hidden**



Law 15

To prisoners, contraband equals comfort

- Will fight hard to maintain comfort



Law 16

Personnel will find a depressingly low number of all of the illicit items in a facility

- Prisoners simply have ample time at their disposal
- That is neither fatalism nor defeatism, but realism
- Facilities with alert, committed employees and proactive contraband control processes can improve on success ratios



Law 17

It takes a lot of maintenance, patience, foresight and luck for a prisoner to hold on to a 'business'

- Security is important to prisoners
- Everyone wants comfort that comes through power
- Potential competitors for a larger slice of the market are always watching



Law 18

It is usually a seller's market.

- **Scarcity will dictate price**
- **But a buyer's market will decrease prices**



Law 19

Opportunists and the more imaginative and daring prisoners are typically successful, particularly in the short-term

- They are usually easy to spot by staff
- Rise quickly
- Get to walk with stronger groups and power brokers



Law 20

**Conservative and unobtrusive traders
have extended commerce longevity**

- They characteristically are not easily detected by staff
- Quiet charisma keeps them under staff radar



Law 21

Staff should never overlook the obvious hiding places when searching for smuggled goods

- Do not forget to look up
- Squat
- Retrace steps during a search



Law 22

Established contraband empires are challenged by three groups:

- Prisoners new to the business that aspire to obtain a slice of the illicit trade pie
- Unscrupulous staff looking to earn some illegal money
- Honest staff who locate contraband to derail trade for the sake of safety



Triple threat to contraband empires

Threats to contraband empires

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graph TD; A[Threats to contraband empires] --- B[Competition from other prisoners]; A --- C[Corrupt staff]; A --- D[Honest staff];
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Competition from other prisoners

Corrupt staff

Honest staff

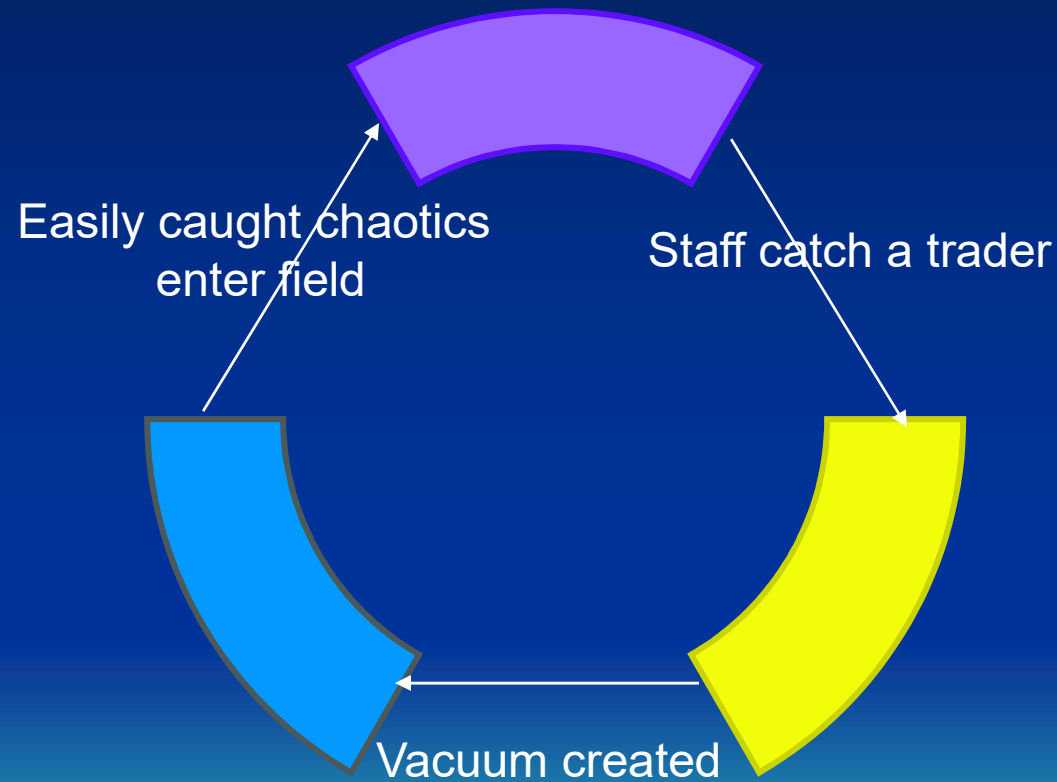
Law 23

Foiling unauthorized commerce enhances security

- Levels playing field
- Takes power away from the powerful
- Changes reputation of traders to less dependable
- Inspires the easily-caught chaotics



The Circle of Success



Law 24

Once an empire is dissolved, staff must fight to keep other would-be traders from filling the void

- **THE VACUUM WILL BE FILLED**

However:

- **Stings could be set up to catch chaotics**
- **Information may flow from such successes**



Law 25

There are at 5 mercantile paradigms

- Monopolist
- Oligopolist
- Multinational
- Inside trader
- Chaotic



Concepts are important

- Theories enhance practice
- They help us imagine motives
- We can construct mental dry runs prior to action
- A bunch of concepts plus our collective knowledge is a formidable weapon in our arsenal of safety



In conclusion

- Contraband is much more than a serendipitous discovery by custody staff
- 25 laws of contraband demonstrate the complexity illegal trade by prisoners
- By knowing the complexities, staff is in a good position to mitigate one of the biggest challenges in corrections



Remember # 23

“Foiling unauthorized commerce
enhances security”

