

COMMISSIONER JOE SCHMIDT keynote address to the Probation Officer Academy No.18 graduating ceremony, February 23, 2007, at the Wilda Marsden Theater in Anchorage:

Good afternoon, and congratulations.

Completing this academy is not an easy task. Your academic abilities have been developed, and tested. Your physical abilities have been developed and tested. And most importantly, your character is evaluated. Are you willing to stand for what you believe, and are you willing to stand for what is right.

If there were any question about your academic or physical abilities, or your character, you would not be sitting here today. Graduating today is an accomplishment you should all be proud of.

Much of the public fears the very idea of a prisoner preparing for re-integration into our communities, or the thought of an offender being supervised outside the confines of a secure institution.

When an offender betrays the public trust by breaking the law, the media will cover the case, and inform the public of the offenders misconduct, sometimes in great detail. The public is made aware of an offenders damage to our communities, and through the coverage, are reminded that any doubt works in the favor of the offender

This causes challenging public sentiment, and many differing views on what our role should be. For this reason, we must always be willing to educate the public, and we must always carry ourselves with pride and dedication to our field of work.

Eventually, the time comes for many offenders to prepare for re-entry into the community. We must always be mindful of how important and complex this process can be, both for the offender and for the community that we serve.

Preparing the offender for re-entry into the community, and supervising the offender in the community are important tasks. They involve thorough knowledge of the prisoners history and behavior. It involves using our best correctional practices and judgment in assessing risk to the community.

And it requires integrity. Being true to your self and being willing to stand behind your decisions both to the offender and the public.

We prepare offenders for re-integration into the community, we supervise them while in the community; and we must also undertake another task, of equal, or even greater importance. That is the task of preparing the community for the re-entry of the offender

Preparing the community is an ongoing task that requires each of us establish and maintain the public's trust. As public employees we serve the public interest first, and the community must be sure of this. Communities look to us for safety, and when we are trusted, we mitigate some of the fear associated with an offender living amongst us. The public has to know that we are confident, skilled and that we believe that we exist to protect them.

They look to us for sound decisions, sound judgment and accountability. And they must always receive it. Our effectiveness depends on the public's trust of each one of us, and our conduct must always reflect this commitment.

Your peers in the facilities and field offices will soon be seen as family. Sometimes you will agree with one another, and sometimes you will not, but like brothers and sisters, you would never let anything happen to each other. Even at your own risk, even at your own peril. If you would, you wouldn't be sitting here today

No one does more to ensure our families and neighbors live without fear than we do, and the work you do cannot be overstated. One of the goals of this administration is cooperation. Another is respecting the process by which the legislature appropriates our budget

Our three divisions working together, helping one another achieve their goals. When one of our divisions has a new or better way to do something, the other divisions will not only be aware of it, but they will be expected to help accomplish the goal.

One goal, one department

Always keeps this in mind while you conduct business starting next week: Remember that it's OK to take a moment and question yourself before you do something. It's OK to ask, if I were leading others, and the overall performance of the team were at stake, is this a good thing to do or say.

You are the mentors we will depend on when our prisoners are brought back to Alaska.

I would like to congratulate each and every one of you on your accomplishment today.

And remember: do things right.....but always do right things.
Thank you