Administrator Grows up Among Prisoners

Dennis Day grew up with prisoners.

The son of a warden in the federal penitentiary system, Day, vice president of Student Services, learned from the prisoners he met and conversed with during his youth in the minimum and medium security prisons where his family lived.

Day, whose office coordinates programs, activities and services for students, said he can quickly assess students' needs and their motivations, a skill he learned after years of interacting with convicts. They taught him to ask the second question.

"There are other issues than just what the person is saying," Day said.

Day's family lived in three different prisons over a 15-year period. During his high school years at the Federal Correctional Institute in Tallahassee, Fla., he spent many afternoons hitting golf balls on the prison's driving range and talking to prisoners who maintained the grounds.

"It was fascinating," Day said. "All of them would tell you they're not there because of the latest charge or conviction, but they deserved to be there because of all the other things they did."

Day earned a bachelor's degree in education, a master's degree in guidance and counseling, both from Southwest Missouri State University, and his doctorate in educational policy and leadership in higher education from the University of Kansas. Employed at Johnson County Community College since 1984, he has served as director of Student Activities, director of Auxiliary Services and Student Activities, director of Student Life, associate dean and then dean of Student Services.

Day recalled a dedicated phone in their home, which his father used to responded to prison emergencies.

"Every time she heard that phone ring, my mother would jump," he said. "It may be why I resist having phones now."

He once watched an inmate scale a barbed wire fence. That experience and years of alarms taught him one more thing.

"I became more cautious," he said. "You become very cognizant of your surroundings."

by Linda Friedel