

Is the day of a probation officer in Germany similar to the one of someone working in Romania? In the series 'A day in the life of a probation officer', we publish articles written by probation officers from different countries in Europe to see if their days look alike or are very different from each other. This article is written by Gordon Grech, a probation officer from Malta.



We sometimes underestimate the influence and the impact of little things in life, and then when you look back you realize that they were the big or important things for someone else. Make regular small changes and a big change will follow – this is the ethos that I try to abide by and live by on the place of work and in life. Let's tackle the elephant in the room, it is not always easy to wake up when you are startled by the alarm clock signaling that it's time to go to work. I cannot remember the number of times pressing the snooze button, knowing that I need to deal with people and their baggage.

Nonetheless, remembering that I have responsibilities towards my clients and my colleagues, I lumber towards the shower to get ready for the daily tugs of war and unexpected battles.

I used to find difficulty when friends and family asked what my work entails, then a rugby friend of mine joking replied to my over-complicated description as an appointed life coach that can "slap their wrists" if they step out of the line. To be honest, I like that description and I find myself using it quite often especially when meeting new people, because it is not that far from the truth. It is my responsibility to help my clients see their faults, what makes them tick and guide them for a better life, for some literally meaning a better day, or to cope with their demons. Imagine throwing a pebble in a pond, ripples form, and for good or for worse, something changed in that pond. Something will change especially when coupled with truth, reality and coming from someone who is objective and does not have secondary interests. Is it always easy? Of course not, particularly since a probation officer is always appointed by a court order or some other board and not everyone is ready to change or want to change – some are happy living their life or do not want to endure the necessary pain and toughness to do it. Let the battle of wits and friction begin: it feels like a game of chess, or a dance, going back and forth, where sometimes you take the lead and sometimes you are outsmarted by the client or the situation or other independent factors. It is very frustrating, seeing potential wasted, especially when working with young offenders, seeing their opportunities shut down because of their poor life choices and with every mistake, more doors shut down.

However, maybe just maybe, by the end of the session, I will win the tug of war and the client will see what I am driving at and accept my guidance. My strength and resilience are my colleagues, with whom I share the experiences and take notes and tips. Making matters worse, I am also a Senior Probation Officer, which means that not only my clients have to endure me but also my colleagues when supervising their work or guiding them through difficulties. To do this, I try to stay true to myself – what you see is what you get – my work, attitude and ethics being my portfolio and role model. The role of a senior is an ambiguous one, as one has to point to the management what are the problems and the morale of the Probation Officers, suggest a course of actions while helping the Probation Officers accepting the management's point of view. Although tips and guidelines exist, working with people may be very challenging. A formula that always works with everyone, does not exist, everyone is different and thus should be treated as such. Dealing with colleagues, other

professionals and dealing with clients, is not that different. The rules of engagement are the same, only the battleground, circumstances, and stakes change. Everything is about relationships, professional and healthy relationships. Making time for others is the secret, albeit not always easy. Those small and frequent amounts of minutes that we spend with others, help build a relationship that with some care can last a lifetime. Having a laugh with your colleagues is the best medicine after a stressful session with a client and helps strengthen bonds. As Charlie Chaplin once said: "a day without laughter is a day wasted!" A smile helps in every situation and it is free, so why not use it?

After a long day at the office or outside or both depending on the agenda dealing with people, nothing beats going back home, getting into comfy clothes and sliding onto the sofa and having some downtime doing your hobbies, sharing experiences with your loved ones. To top everything off, I de-stress myself by doing some physical training kickboxing, punching a heavy bag, or going down to rugby training, releasing the built-up pressure accumulated during the day. To close the day, a nice hearty meal, and a good night's sleep to help me prep myself for another unexpected day at the office full of its battles.