

Best Practices Guide



International Association of Chiefs of Police

Smaller Police Departments
Technical Assistance Program

Institutionalizing Mentoring Into Police Departments

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Best Practices Guide for Institutionalizing Mentoring Into Police Departments

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During the summer of 2000, the LACP program, Smaller Police Department Technical Assistance, published the first of the Best Practice Series - Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Police Personnel. One of the strategies cited as an excellent means of enhancing law enforcement recruitment and retention efforts was the practice of employee mentoring. At the request of the project advisory group and the many chiefs who have attended our symposia, this document is written to provide chiefs from smaller police departments with a step-by-step method for institutionalizing mentoring within their agency. It is the authors' belief that mentoring is an essential function in development of the next generation of police leaders.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a mutually beneficial relationship in which a knowledgeable and skilled veteran officer (mentor) provides insight, guidance and developmental opportunities to a lesser skilled and experienced colleague (protégé).

Mentoring is not a new concept or practice. History abounds with examples of professional mentoring. **Mentor** was the name of the man charged with providing wisdom, advice and guidance to King Odysseus' son in Homer's, The Odyssey. During the Middle Ages, boys served as apprentices to masters in a craft or trade while gaining skills to eventually qualify as a journeyman, and finally, as a master. During this time, the mentoring relationship ensured the continuity and quality of the craft being handed down to the next generation.

The modern concept of mentoring, that has recently been used to effectively recruit and retain new employees in business and academic institutions, provides law enforcement with an opportunity to engage and anchor new employees at a time when industry competition for those employees is at an all time high.

Mentoring Relationship Goal:

1) To promote professional growth, 2) Inspire personal motivation, 3) Enhance effectiveness of police service

Mentoring Benefits for Mentors

- Mentors are personally rewarded for spotlighting and developing talent.
- Mentors must be knowledgeable of department policies, procedures and contemporary policing practices.
- Mentors pave the way for others, thereby leaving their legacy in the department.
- Mentors are viewed as valuable in the organization and are respected by colleagues.

- Mentors obtain varying perspectives from their protégés, which generates creativity.
- Mentors “get by giving.”

Frequently, people become mentors because they were previously protégés who experienced the rewards of a mentoring relationship. Others become mentors because they wish a mentor had been available to them during their career. Whatever the reason, mentors derive great satisfaction from seeing a colleague succeed because of their efforts.

Mentoring Benefits for Protégés

- Increases likelihood for success. Mentors help protégés gain competency and avoid failure.
- Assists protégés in setting goals and charting career paths.
- Encourages and provides opportunities for new experiences and professional growth.
- Helps the protégé avoid pitfalls and learn through real-life examples.
- Enhances the protégés’ feeling of worth to the mentor and the organization.
- Encourages self-confidence by cheering protégé achievements.

Many successful people attribute their achievements to a mentoring relationship. Many “repay” their debt to the mentor and the organization by becoming future mentors. When mentoring begins with new employees, it is the first step toward institutionalizing mentoring in the department.

Formal Versus Informal Mentoring

Some police organizations have implemented new-hire mentoring programs as a method of reducing employee turnover, while others have chosen the more frequent method of informal mentoring. Examples of informal mentoring have occurred throughout the history of policing. Typically, a veteran officer encourages friends or acquaintances to apply for positions in their department. As a result, there is a natural tendency for the veteran officer to encourage, support and give information to his or her friend during the hiring and training period. This informal mentoring relationship provides an advantage to the new employee by helping them to feel connected to the new department.

The Benefits of Formal Mentoring:

- 1) Ensures that all employees will receive the benefits of a mentoring relationship
- 2) Promotes agency loyalty and inclusiveness
- 3) Identifies program goals
- 4) Creates program structure and procedures
- 5) Defines mentor/protégé roles and responsibilities

The best reason for creating a formal process is that it affords every employee the opportunity and benefit of mentoring and promotes loyalty and inclusiveness within the organization. In addition, a formal mentoring process identifies goals, creates structure and procedures, and defines mentor/protégé roles and responsibilities. Although the program requires time to plan and initiate and requires some oversight, it often results in enhanced employee self-esteem and a “great place to work” environment. Whether launching a formal mentoring program or creating a mentoring environment in an organization, mentoring can improve and promote any leadership initiative.

Law enforcement as an industry has experienced many challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel; this is due in part to national and local economic change and a transformation of effective recruiting methods influenced by the Internet. For law enforcement agencies interested in improving effective recruitment,

retention, and personnel leadership development by initiating a mentoring program, a step-by-step mentoring plan follows.

Institutionalizing Mentoring: A Step-by-Step Plan

1. Teach mentoring skills to all employees (sworn and civilian)
2. Chief must demonstrate and support total agency mentoring
3. Establish formal new hire mentoring process
 - a. Appoint mentor coordinator
 - b. Identify employee workgroup
 - c. Draft mentoring policies and procedures
 - d. Define mentor/protégé roles and responsibilities
 - e. Select and train mentors
 - f. Pair mentors and new hires
 - g. Evaluate and fine tune process
4. Create career development mentoring system
 - a. Identify command coordinator
 - b. Identify supervisory workgroup
 - c. Draft career planning/goal setting policies and procedures
 - d. Define mentor/protégé roles and responsibilities
 - e. Select and train mentors and protégés.
 - f. Pair mentors and protégés
 - g. Evaluate and fine tune process
5. Succession planning
 - a. Chief mentors commanders
 - b. Commanders mentor supervisors
 - c. Supervisors mentor line employees
 - d. Officers/civilian employees mentor colleagues and new hires.
6. Chief grooms and prepares his successor

What Mentors and Protégés Do

Before defining the roles and responsibilities of the mentor, the goals of the mentoring process should be understood by the mentor and protégé. For example, consider a new hire mentoring process. Is the goal to, 1) provide a welcoming atmosphere that will anchor the new employee to the organization, 2) provide a career development mentoring process to help employees identify and map out career targets, 3) begin a mentoring program that ensures the continuity and quality of the next generation of police leaders, or all three? Once mentoring program goals are identified, the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and protégé must be established in order to avoid confusion and potential conflict and to maximize program success.

Mentor Responsibilities:

- ◆ Encourage and model value-focused behavior.
- ◆ Share critical knowledge and experience.

- ◆ Listen to personal and professional challenges.
- ◆ Set expectations for success.
- ◆ Offer wise counsel.
- ◆ Help build self-confidence.
- ◆ Offer friendship and encouragement.
- ◆ Provide information and resources.
- ◆ Offer guidance, give feedback and cheer accomplishments.
- ◆ Discuss and facilitate opportunities for new experiences and skill building.
- ◆ Assist in mapping career plan.

The mentoring relationship requires commitment and shared responsibility for the protégé also. The partners should discuss mutual roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the relationship and review them periodically as necessary.

Protégé Responsibilities

- ◆ Clearly define personal employment goals.
- ◆ Take and follow through on directions given.
- ◆ Accept and appreciate mentoring assistance.
- ◆ Listen to what others have to say.
- ◆ Express appreciation.
- ◆ Be assertive- ask good questions.
- ◆ Ask for help when needed.
- ◆ Share credit for a job well done with other team members.
- ◆ Respect the mentor's time and agency responsibilities.

The Chief as Mentor: The Knoxville, Iowa Model

Successful leaders are often successful mentors. In most large agencies, line employees seldom have direct interaction with their chief, but in smaller agencies, employees interact with their chief on a daily basis. As a result, chiefs of smaller agencies can enhance their leadership effectiveness by demonstrating mentoring and by encouraging a total agency mentoring environment. As the lead agency mentor, the chief can model employee value to the agency by supporting employee career planning, by providing opportunities for training, and by encouraging learning and skill building. Chief Harvey Sprafka, who leads an agency of eighteen sworn officers in Knoxville, Iowa, models the chief as mentor.

A Goal Setting and Career Planning Approach

Goal setting and career planning sessions with the chief at Knoxville Police Department are usually conducted once a year with each sworn and civilian employee. These sessions are intended to promote employee growth and skill development.

The chief has seen reduced employee turnover and increased employee loyalty since instituting this practice. These sessions may occur with greater frequency for some employees when goals are being achieved quickly or with less frequency for employees who have not met short-term objectives. Because employee goals and interests continually evolve, the periodic review and monitoring of the employee's progress is vitally important to maintaining this program.

These goal setting and career development meetings with department employees are flexible in structure because the sessions must be tailored to meet the age, personality, and work/life experiences of each employee. By making the individual sessions informal and relaxed, the process can be an insightful and rewarding experience for the employee and the chief. ***The skill of active listening is an essential component of the success of the mentoring process!***

The Knoxville Police Department employee goal setting and career planning process requires two meetings. The first meeting is preparatory. Here the chief explains the initial phase of the process, during which the employee identifies and clarifies his or her current and future career goals. The employee is encouraged to consider the present and future in terms of short, intermediate, and long-term goals. Their goals must be achievable, but challenging. If the goals are achieved with little effort, they are seldom long lasting or fulfilling.

Next, the employee is asked to conduct a self-assessment in which he or she identifies personal strengths and weaknesses. This assessment provides both the employee and the chief with additional insight into the employee's disposition and temperament. The employee is required to succinctly document their goals on one type-written page.

During this stage, the chief offers to include a spouse or significant other in the goal-setting and personal examination process if the employee would like them included. This is an example of the "family-centered" policy of the Knoxville Police Department.

A week later a second meeting is conducted during which the employee's one page goal statement is reviewed and discussed. After reviewing the goal statement, the chief prepares questions and feedback for clarification then offers his recommendations for achieving the goals. The chief and employee mutually decide upon a timeline for review and accomplishment of the goals.

A copy of the typewritten goals are retained so that it can be referred to when planning and scheduling training opportunities or specialized assignments for the employee. As agency leader, Chief Sprafka believes he is responsible not only to influence and direct, but also to create an environment for positive growth by

providing resources, job-related opportunities, and experiences that will improve employee personal and professional skills. As their mentor, the chief strives to meet employee training and assignment “wants;” however, greater emphasis is placed on meeting individual training and assignment “needs.” The chief and employee determine the training and assignment need based upon the personal assessment completed with the chief, employee work experience, previous assignment evaluations, education completed, and the employee goal plan.

The chief provides private sector customer service and communication skill training as ways to augment agency educational opportunities beyond the traditional police training topics. Local banks and other businesses provide contemporary service-based training for the agency sworn and civilian employees. Private sector customer service and communications training provides police employees with the opportunity to interact with citizens and members of the business community. This cross training builds agency and community cooperation and supports broad-based perspectives of work, service, and community; something the chief feels is essential for law enforcement professionals.

The model of employee goal-setting and career planning in Knoxville may not work successfully for everyone. This model requires time and commitment to agency growth and improvement by both the chief and employees. The program has worked to the advantage of the Knoxville Police Department and community. The commitment of time and attention to his employees pays off for Chief Sprafka through successful labor negotiations, sustained employee loyalty, and low turnover rates.

This model is particularly beneficial to recruiting and retaining new employees who are focused on work and family relationships as well as the development of job skills. While the smaller agency chief may have the advantage of knowing and working closely with employees, it is the author’s belief that elements of this program and the chief/mentor model can be successfully implemented in agencies of any size.

Frequently asked questions:

1. What is the difference between a mentor and an FTO for new employees?

The role of the mentor and the field training officer (FTO) are distinct, yet compliment each other. The role of the FTO is to train and develop effective police officers. As required during field training, the FTO evaluates the recruit’s performance on a daily basis.

The mentor’s role is supportive and relational. Mentoring is *not* performance evaluation. The mentor is responsible for contacting the new employee before the agency appointment date and assisting with an effective transition into the police organization by answering questions and serving as a resource for information. The mentor maintains contact with the recruit during academy training to provide support, guidance, and encouragement. Unlike the FTO, the mentor does not evaluate recruit performance.

2. How do you prevent conflict between the FTO and mentor?

The first step in avoiding conflict between the FTO and mentor is for the chief to demonstrate support of the mentoring process. Second, include some field training officers in the development of the mentor program so that their input is included. The last critical step is to train mentors and field training officers so that they understand the differences in their roles. Periodic review and oversight by a mentor coordinator will help diminish the potential for conflict.

3. Is the mentoring process lengthy and a drain on staffing requirements?

The time devoted to the mentoring relationship is based on the needs of the protégé. For example, a new employee who is an area native will have fewer needs than an employee who is hired from outside the area. More time is needed to transition a new hire into the police department and the community. It is important to be flexible and support the mentor to provide this important assistance to a new employee. The benefits in terms of employee retention, enhanced morale, and department loyalty far outweigh the marginal

commitment of staff time. The mentoring function can be accomplished while the mentor is on duty in conjunction with fulfilling primary duties.

4. What resources are available to assist in developing a mentoring process for my agency?

- IACP Training Division offers a class titled, Developing a Mentoring Process.
- IACP Research Center program, Smaller Police Department Technical Assistance, provides grant-funded consultation and training in *Mentoring for Law Enforcement*. This project specializes in providing services for agencies with 1 to 25 sworn officers.

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About the Authors

Chief Harvey Sprafka (Ret.) is a 30-year law enforcement veteran. He began his career in 1975 in Knoxville, Iowa. During his career, he spent 16 years as a school resource officer and served in patrol and supervisory positions. In 1995 he was appointed chief of the Knoxville Police Department and served until January 2005 when he retired. He now is serving as the Mayor of the City of Knoxville, Iowa. Chief Sprafka has a bachelor's degree in English and History from Moorhead State College in Minnesota and graduated from the Brown Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, School of Radio-Television Broadcasting. Chief Sprafka was news and program director for KNIA/KRLS radio in Knoxville prior to becoming a police officer. He served a number of positions in the Iowa Professional Executive Forum and has served as a project advisor for the IACP Smaller Police Department Technical Assistance Program since 2001.

Lieutenant April Kranda (Ret.) is a 20 year veteran of the Fairfax County Police Department. Ms. Kranda served in a variety of operational and administrative positions, including patrol, criminal investigations, internal affairs, and media relations. As Aide to the Deputy Chief for Operations, Ms. Kranda developed and implemented the New Hire Mentoring Program for her department. She currently serves as a mentoring advisor for several law enforcement agencies and training facilities.