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Mentoring in Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

Many people are searching for new employment in anything they can find. The culture of law enforcement is so different that most new police officers experience a culture shock just as if they were in another country when they enter law enforcement. They develop different methods of coping with routine things that are mundane as well as tragedy. Currently, in most agencies throughout the country, there are no programs to help the new officers adapt to their new environment.

In order to keep up with the changing work environment, agencies all across the nation will have to develop a plan to help these new officers adapt to their culture. All law enforcement agencies should develop and implement some form of mentoring into their agencies as early as possible for new officers once they enter the agency. This will help acclimate the new officer and provide them with a better opportunity for success both short term and long term.

It is imperative that other agencies heed the results from agencies that have proven the success of having implemented a mentoring program for both new hires and for those seeking promotion. There are many different types of mentoring programs available depending on the true needs of the agency. The main concern is that each agency should have a plan for mentoring their new officers and those seeking promotion. Armed with this research, all law enforcement agencies should develop and implement a formal mentoring program within their agencies to help acclimate the new employee into the environment and to develop the leaders of tomorrow within their agency..

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INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement has entered into a new period of challenging times. Today's issues are much different than the issues of yester-year. Issues of times gone by were lack of public support, racism, and police brutality, to name a few. Recruiting was never an issue because soldiers that came home from wars or tours in the military would line up to accept jobs as law enforcement officers. There was never a lack of applicants to fill the vacancies that were available. However, as problems within law enforcement agencies and public perception grew negative, agencies started leaning towards the professional law enforcement officer. Agencies no longer wanted the high school graduate with military experience: they wanted the professional with the college degree or at least some college hours. When the shift in law enforcement went to the professional, model agencies raised their hiring and recruitment standards to ensure they were getting a good quality professional police officer. Law enforcement soon became a profession, not just a job. Recruitment of new officers did not seem to be an issue nor was there a lack of qualified applicants. In the early 2000s, after the disaster at the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, public opinion of law enforcement officers was at an all-time high. However, many of the available professional applicants left for the military or federal law enforcement agencies. This hit to the applicant pool for law enforcement officers was devastating to both local and state agencies. This has led to a major problem in law enforcement to recruit qualified new officers to join their agencies.

Currently, law enforcement agencies across the United States are competing with each other over a limited pool of applicants. Every federal, state, and local agency

is competing for the same qualified applicant. With agencies offering a varying degree of incentives and benefits to this pool of applicants in order to get them to join their agency, the competition is fierce. This brings up several issues for law enforcement agencies. Agencies have to find a way to compete with other agencies to get good quality candidates for their agency. Once they get those candidates identified, they have to figure out how to hire them. Finally, once they hire those candidates, they have to find a way to retain them.

Most new police officers experience a culture shock just as if they were in another country when they enter law enforcement. The culture of law enforcement is so different in the aspect that they do and see things that most people in society never see or experience. They develop different methods of coping with routine things that are mundane as well as tragedy. Currently, in most agencies throughout the country there are no programs to help the new officers adapt to their new environment. According to Gilmartin (2002), "The changes taking place in the new officer's life are often alluded to or spoken of in the police culture, but rarely , if ever, are these changes seen as a priority to correct" (p. 4). Research has found that mentoring could be a very crucial ingredient in a newly hired officer's transition into an agency, and mentoring benefits mentors, mentees, and the agency (Williams, 2000). Therefore, mentoring provides a positive transition into the new culture of law enforcement. Mentoring is based on the assumption that people relate better and much more positively to peer assistance than to supervisory assistance (Williams, 2000). It allows the new officer a better opportunity to understand the differences of the law enforcement environment and how to adapt to the changes. All law enforcement agencies should develop and implement some form

of mentoring into their agencies as early as possible for new officers once they enter the agency.

POSITION

Mentoring does not just happen; it has to be cultivated in order to make it grow. Many agencies are equipped with informal leaders and formal leaders who conduct a form of informal mentoring on a daily basis. The problem is that these relationships have no depth and are not very inclusive (Uppercue, 1999). For far too long law enforcement agencies have relied on the informal mentoring of the leaders within their departments to provide for the needs of newly hired police officers. This practice lacked the substance to truly aid in the adaptation of these new police officers into the law enforcement society (Colaprete, 2009). The development and implementation of a formal mentoring program within these agencies would aid in this adaptation.

A formal mentoring program is needed in all law enforcement agencies to better train new employees and provide them with every opportunity they need to succeed within their perspective departments (Sprafka & Kranda, 2003). This desire is two-fold; not only does it allow the new employee to succeed, but if departments and individual mentors provide the best training environment and opportunities, the police department will succeed as well. All law enforcement agencies are already engaged in some form of mentoring program with their field training programs. The problem is that few fully understand that mentoring occurs during this training. When officers are assigned to the field training program, the field training officers provide a "Team Mentoring" approach that allows each field training officer to mentor the trainee as they partner with each officer through their training. This approach allows the Field Training Coordinator

to better analyze strengths and weakness of each mentor and the mentee to better pair them for the probationary period (Colaprete, 2009). Once the trainee finishes the field training period and is assigned as a solo police officer, the approach changes to a "One on One" approach. This can also be called "Peer Mentoring," because the mentor and mentee are often assigned in the same area and on the same shift (Orrick, 2008, p. 206). This process allows the experienced officer an avenue to support, guide, coach, exchange knowledge, and acclimate the new officer into a brand new environment with the least amount of difficulties. The common thread of the mentoring program is the desire to enable employees to succeed in the best way they can.

Another benefit of a formal mentoring program is the development of those officers who are the mentors. This often encourages the officers chosen to be field training officers or mentors to continuously hone their skills and knowledge to provide the best possible training and coaching to the mentee. This fosters a feeling of camaraderie and develops an atmosphere of family and a sense of belonging to the organization (Colaprete, 2009). Once an officer feels like they belong to an agency and that they are part of the development and retention of other officers, they have a sense of accomplishment. When officers reach this stage, they are more likely themselves to remain part of something they helped build and develop.

A formal mentoring program would also be helpful to those who have a goal to become supervisors, and it would help prepare those who seek higher management positions including chief's jobs the opportunity to gain insight into these positions through mentoring. There are even fewer departments that offer a mentoring program for supervisors that want to advance. Cardenas (2002) found that many agencies have

a two week supervisor's course that all newly promoted supervisors attend, but there is no extension of training or mentoring past that period (Cardenas, 2002). The development and implementation of a supervisors mentoring program would be beneficial to further develop and enhance the newly promoted supervisor into the world of management and leadership. Without a formal mentoring program, many new supervisors are left to fend for themselves, which often causes them to develop bad habits and become disenchanted with the agency.

Law enforcement agencies have to bridge this gap both from the training program to the probationary period and from the seasoned officer to the supervisor position. The only way to make this transition beneficial for everyone is to develop and implement a formal mentoring program that encompasses initial entry into the agency and the newly promoted sergeant, lieutenant, captain, assistant chief, and chief. In recent years, several departments, such as Travis County Sheriff's Department and Deer Park Police Department in Texas and Lansing Police Department in Michigan, have made this a priority and have implemented a mentoring program into their agency. These areas of mentoring that are listed above will require adaptation to fit the particular emphasis and skill sets needed to accomplish their goals and departmental goals.

COUNTER POSITION

One of the major barriers to a formal mentoring program is the reluctance of any organization and especially law enforcement to change. Officers feel that they will lose their importance to the organization. They suffer a loss of autonomy in making the decisions on a new officer's progress with little oversight from supervisors, once a

mentoring program is implemented officers fear an increase in documentation and a major change in tasks and training (Colaprete, 2009).

According to Officer George Cartwright (2009), an officer with the Clovis, California Police Department, while planning the implementation of the mentoring program to the Clovis Police Department, they considered several barriers. He advised that it is important to recognize that officers who are involved in law enforcement, who are called to preserve order in society, often have a difficult time being vulnerable to each other. Consequently, beginning a mentoring program can be a precarious thing. As with any manner of interpersonal communication, the initial approach is what sets the tone for the relationship (Cartwright, 2009). Therefore, a major barrier to implementation of a mentoring program is a lack of or poor communication. The organization has to make the purpose and goals of the mentoring program clearly known to the employees in order to reduce resistance and confusion.

Many law enforcement agencies feel that since they have a formal field training program in place, they do not need a mentoring program. Others feel that the field training and the mentoring should not be combined. Another barrier offered by Officer Cartwright is the importance of identifying significant aspects of the organizational culture, so that it ensures consistency in the message communicated by each mentor (Cartwright, 2009). Few things will damage the credibility of a new program quicker than confusion caused by mixed messages or misinterpretation being sent within an agency. Once credibility is lost, it is difficult to regain that momentum (Cartwright, 2009).

Another barrier could be poor implementation from the start by choosing the wrong individual to become a mentor. Allowing mentors to be involved who lack

commitment, integrity, and the capability to actually mentor any individual whether they are new employees or seasoned veterans could lead to resentment and dissention among other mentors and officers within the department as well as negatively affect the mentee. Johnson and Ridley (2004) advised that mentor/mentee relationship boundaries have to be set and defined. Without these boundaries, relationships can cross a line into sexual relationships or other interactions outside of the professional relationship. There has to be a set of rules in order to maintain the integrity of the organization and the mentoring relationship. A lack of sensitivity could also lead to disaster when trying to implement a new program. Everyone involved needs to be aware of the needs of the new officer (mentee), the field training officer (mentor), other officers within the agency, and ultimately the department itself. Any of these barriers can be difficult to overcome, but a combination of more than one barrier can be devastating to the implementation of a mentoring program for any organization or agency.

RECOMMENDATION

The first goal would be to change the way officers are trained. This would allow the field training officer to act as a mentor, not just an evaluator. Historically, law enforcement agencies have relied on individual field training officers, informal standards, and subjective criteria in the determination of whether new officers should be passed to solo status or terminated. By establishing a formal mentoring process in the field training program, a new level of transparency will be achieved. What agencies would soon find out is whether the new officers are actually being trained and mentored or just pushed through a system.

Second, the mentoring program would greatly enhance accountability to the department, the training standards, other field training officers, and to the new officers by establishing objective standards, peer guidance, peer pressure of a formal cadre, and a formal review and evaluation of all training. Once accountability is understood and applied, the officers can develop a sense of responsibility to one another and to the agency. Third, the mentoring program would be designed to maintain contact with the new employee to provide support, guidance, and encouragement while assisting with an effective transition into the police organization. This can be crucial for feedback about the culture and how the mentee is dealing with the new environment. This can also be beneficial for understanding career paths within the organization or the law enforcement field itself.

Fourth, the mentoring program would provide the new employee with an avenue to receive answers to questions they may have and would allow them to develop self-confidence. By providing the new employee with a mentor, they know the expectations of the organization immediately and have a means to reduce fears or answer personal questions (Whitesell, 1999). Finally, the ultimate goal of the agencies would be to get employees to realize that all personnel share in the responsibility for helping to recruit and maintain good, quality officers. This actually makes the implementation of a mentoring program to the agency two-fold. Not only would the program be designed to help the new employee, but those already employed as well as those that are the mentors. According to Major Brian Uppercue (1999), of the Baltimore County Police Department: "If the essence of true leadership is the ability to influence others, then those who become mentors have the potential to extend their influence to an even wider

circle" (p. 58). With this influence mentors can give feedback, guidance, and encouragement that can equip the mentee in overcoming obstacles as well as organizational advancement.

Mentoring should begin as soon as the new officer is hired and has entered the agency. All police departments have a field training program that all officers enter upon completion of the police academy or upon being hired if they were previously certified. Many believe that mentoring is separate from field training. However, as agencies across the United States move from a number evaluation field training program such as the "San Jose Mode" to a "Coaching Model," this attitude is changing. The "Coaching Model" engages field training officers as a group of mentors that "Team Mentor" during the field training program, and upon completion, a mentor is assigned to a mentee for the remainder of the probationary period as a "One on One Mentor."

Upon successful completion of these primary goals of the mentoring program, the agency would implement secondary goals of the mentoring program to provide an opportunity for those officers with a desire to become supervisors. The final set of goals would include mentoring opportunities to those seeking higher-management positions, including jobs as police chief. The overall goal is to develop a mentoring program that will enable agencies to provide the best quality training and environment to an officer new to law enforcement or the lateral officer from another agency.

Agencies may want to consider policy changes to help support a mentoring program. The benefit to adding a section on mentoring in policy would be two-fold. It would clearly lay out the outline for the mentoring program and add a sense of credibility because it is in writing.

Each agency needs to be careful to make sure as they develop and implement a mentoring program that they adhere to high standards for the program. They need to pay close attention to what model they choose to implement, whether they do both "Peer Mentoring" and "One on One Mentoring," or only one of those, or they choose another approach entirely, the model should match the needs of the individual agency. Each agency should be careful how they select mentors and the training that is provided for them. Another aspect that is probably one of the most crucial is the matching of the mentor with the mentee. The person making the match should take care to how personalities fit, likes and dislikes, and the overall compatibility of both. The mentors, just like the field training officer, should be the most well rounded officers in an agency (Williams, 2000). The common thread of the mentoring program is the desire to enable employees to succeed in the best way they can. This may look differently to each individual agency. However, the ultimate goal is for each agency across the United States to understand the need for a mentoring program within their agency. This is not just for the new employee, but also for the employees that want to become the leaders within the agency. This is a win-win situation for all involved. All law enforcement agencies should develop and implement a formal mentoring program within their agencies to assist with the adjustment of a new employee into the environment and to develop the leaders of tomorrow within the agency

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