

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Mentoring:  
The Key to Professional and Organizational Development**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Interestingly one of the most important, influential, and yet undervalued human experiences is that of mentorship. Today's law enforcement professionals find themselves in a unique, if not challenging and pivotal time in American history. Twenty-first century police officers face a conglomerate of issues never before encountered in this country at one time. As such, newly-appointed officers are expected to perform at a high degree of effectiveness in an environment that does not easily forgive youth or inexperience. In addition, these same officers must be able to quickly adapt to an agencies culture and internal politics with little to no guidance from veteran personnel. For these reasons, law enforcement agencies should implement mentoring programs to aid in the development and support of their officers; increasing department productivity and loyalty.

Mentoring programs offer many advantages to both individual officers and their respective departments. At its core, mentorship is a supportive relationship built on trust that allows for the free exchange of ideas between protégé and mentor (Sprafka & Kranda, 2000). As such, the very nature of mentoring, according to the research, provides for a system for continuous growth and development; resulting in a net gain of lifetime learns. The research also suggests that mentoring builds agency loyalty, resulting in increased employee retention rates. Finally, the research indicates that veteran officers, through a mechanics, allows them to give back, become empowered and become more engaged due to the trust placed in them by their agency. Because of the positive attributes of mentorship it is highly likely that mentoring programs will become routine in American law enforcement.

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## INTRODUCTION

Perpetual change is a fact of life in the field of law enforcement. Since Sir Robert Peel introduced his 'Peelian' principles in the early 1800s, to the implementation of contemporary evidence-based policing practices, law enforcement has always had to adapt and grow with the changing times (Bauer, 2018). However, for law enforcement to truly evolve, it must be about more than the crime prevention strategies, paradigm shifts and the integration of technology; rather, greater focus needs to be placed on the development and growth of the individual police officer. Interestingly, the idea that greater emphasis needs to be placed on officer development is not a new concept.

Regrettably, the dawn of the twenty-first century saddled law enforcement with a whole new set of challenges: radical terrorism, bias-based policing/racial profiling and the influx of a new generation of police officers into the workforce. To address these challenges, law enforcement professionals have experimented with a variety of new policing models and philosophies, but none of them hold more promise than that of mentoring.

Historically, the term or "Mentor" originated from Greek mythology and was one of Homer's characters in his saga the *Odyssey*. Mentor was Odysseus' trusted servant who watched over and taught his son, Telemachus, when Odysseus left to fight in the Trojan War. Shea (1997) pointed out that the Greek god Athena disguised herself as Mentor to help guide and support Telemachus many years later when he left home in search of his father (para. 2). Since the time of Homer's *Odyssey*, the meaning of the word mentor has changed, but what it represents has remained the same. In fact, a mentor today is defined as a trusted counselor or guide (Merriam-Webster.com, 2016).

Mentoring has existed in the private sector for many years, but only now is it starting to get a foothold within the law enforcement community. Police leaders are starting to notice the benefits of a mentoring program and have begun integrating programs of this type at all levels of their departments. The benefits of a mentoring program are its ability to empower and build trust in senior officers, provide junior officers with a support system for continuous growth and development, and foster loyalty that aids with recruitment and retention. Because of these benefits, law enforcement agencies should implement mentoring programs to aid in the development and support of their officers; increasing department productivity and loyalty.

## **POSITION**

One of the many virtues of mentoring is its ability to mold and shape a person into the best version of themselves; however, for this to happen, trust must first be established. Whether mentoring occurs in a formal or informal setting, the relationship between mentor and protégé must be one of mutual respect and understanding. This is where traditional training programs (i.e. FTO Program) and mentoring programs diverge. Field training or police training programs are designed to train and evaluate new recruits for competency in performing the day-to-day tasks of a police officer, like responding to calls for service, writing incident reports, initiating traffic stops, and executing arrests. Mentoring on the other hand has nothing to do with competency or assessing an officer's work; rather, it is simply a supportive relationship (Sprafka & Kranda, 2000). Other authors, such as Zachary (2000), refer to mentoring programs as the practice of "cultivating a garden" and how the people involved need "tending" to produce the best results (as cited in Mankin, 2004, p. 14).

Understanding how the mentor-protégé relationship works is vitally important to the success of any mentoring program. However, the key to the relationship is recognizing the role each person plays and how knowledge is transferred from one person to another. Zachary (2000) used the term “Learning partnership” as the way people involved in a mentor-protégé relationship learn (as cited in Mankin, 2004, p. 15). Zachary (2000), further stated “The greatest learning may occur during simple conversations where a free exchange of ideas takes place” (as cited in Mankin, 2004, p. 15). In its simplest form, Zachary’s learning model places greater responsibility on the shoulders of the protégé, but this does not alleviate the mentor from offering ideas, guidance, or support.

Since a mentor-protégé relationship is based on the free exchange of ideas it is incumbent upon the mentor to set the tone. If the relationship is established by means of a formalized mentoring program it is important that police administrators select mentors who support and identify with the department’s philosophy. Interestingly, this is where a formal mentoring program may have greater ability to empower and demonstrate trust of their senior officers than an institutionalized environment of informal mentoring relationships. Either way, officers who serve as mentors develop a sense of pride in knowing they played a part in improving both their department and community for those who have yet to come (Mankin, 2004). Police officers who choose or are selected to be mentors have a strong influence on the career development of junior officers. Swope (2001) noted that “Mentors may facilitate adjustment, learning and stress reduction during difficult job transitions” as their protégé’s career progress (p. 145).

Although protégés and the department benefit from the advice and wisdom of mentors, mentors also profit from the experience. The most obvious benefit is that mentors seem to be happier in their jobs, knowing, at least on a personal level, that their efforts have helped another officer achieve their career goals (Swope, 2001). Another benefit to mentors is the recognition and trust their department demonstrates by empowering them to develop young and impressionable officers. According to Sprafka & Kranda (2000), "Mentors are viewed as valuable in the organization and are respected by colleagues" (p.1). A final benefit senior officers receive from mentoring is an elevated feeling of purpose and dedication to their profession brought on by new ideas and enthusiastic young officers (Williams, 2000).

It is clearly evident that a mentoring program offers several benefits to senior officers willing to invest their time to ensure the mentor-protégé relationship has a positive outcome. Conversely, it is that same ability to develop less experienced officers that has attracted the most attention from police leaders to mentoring programs. For many new police officers the mentoring process begins during the field training program, if not in the academy. However, as previously cited, they are two separate and distinct programs designed to achieve different results.

For the protégé, this is very important for their well-being and overall career development. Williams (2000) noted that the "Mentor-protégé relationship is undeniably one of the most developmentally important professional relationships a person can have" (p. 20). In fact, studies have shown that the mentor-protégé relationship does more to further the careers of officers by aiding in their lateral movement and upward advancement than any other system (Williams, 2000). Due to the supportive nature of

mentoring programs, protégés have access to someone they trust and believe can offer them direction when working to achieve career goals or are confused about career paths. This concept is supported by research, says Phillip-Jones (1982), Scott & Homant (2007), stating “The ideal of the protégé successfully reaching their goals is relevant, because their mentors are there to help protégés reach their personal and professional goals” (as cited in Visagie and Kruger, 2011, para. 34).

Along with offering younger officers a “go to person” when needing guidance, as stated by Joseph (2018), mentoring programs also aid with recruitment and retention. Perhaps the best criteria for assessing the state of an organization is its perceived morale and ability to retain people. Having a supportive environment that not only fosters continuous growth and development, but successfully integrates new employees is extremely important to the life of an organization.

Arguably, most police candidates are drawn to law enforcement because of a desire to help others, believe it will be exciting, or are looking for a career vastly different from the normal eight to five job. Unfortunately, when there is not an adequate support system to help with acclimation, the pressures of training and the realities of the job can quickly lead to frustration and disillusionment. Joseph (2018) noted that the “go to person” is someone a new employee can turn to for not only advice, but also to learn the organization’s culture and subtleties. According to Williams (2000), “As a result of the increase job satisfaction that mentoring programs often foster, they [officers] stay on the job longer” (p. 21).

Although recruitment and retention say a lot about an organization, it is only one side of the same coin. Anyone working today knows that in every organization there is



that person or group of people who are always complaining and never happy, but refuse to leave after twenty, thirty, or even forty years. Police departments experience this conundrum too; if “difficult people” are never confronted about their beliefs and assumptions towards the department they can quickly have a negative impact on the morale of the whole organization (Law Enforcement Today, 2012, para. 5). Fortunately, a properly implemented mentoring program can reduce or eliminate their numbers by giving everyone in the department an opportunity to contribute.

Williams (2000) noted, “The enthusiasm, camaraderie, and professionalism affect the entire culture of an organization” (p. 21). Understanding this is another key element of the mentor-protégé relationship. Police leaders who are devoted to supporting their officers through a program that offers continuous development is not only likely to retain those officers, but earn their respect and loyalty. A mentoring environment promotes the idea that an organization is taking a special interest in their employees; leading employees to flourish and be more engaged in their agency (“Mentoring inspires,” n.d.). Employees participating in mentoring programs are more likely to be involved with the department and promote the department as a “great place to work” organization (Sprafka & Kranda, 2000, p. 2).

## **COUNTER POSITION**

Many of the benefits associated with the mentor-protégé relationship have been researched and well documented; nevertheless, if not carefully planned for or implemented mentoring programs are subject to fail. One of the major barriers to a successful mentor-protégé relationship is the lack of purpose and goals. Whether a police department establishes a structured mentoring program or encourages an

atmosphere of mentoring its chances for success are in question without clear direction. Purpose and goal setting is a two way street, those developed by the protégé and those set by the mentor or department.

Regrettably, as Nemanick (2005) pointed out, “many protégés have not articulated their goals to their mentors...mentoring ends up being tactical, dealing with situations as they arise” (para. 1). Organizations and mentors do the same by failing to ask “what do we need new employees to know” (Chisler, 2014, p. 41). If the purpose and goals for involved parties are not understood and clearly expressed, much of the organizations institutional knowledge will never be transmitted and mentees do not get a clear vision of what it is they are to achieve.

The easiest way to fight against this barrier is for police departments and perspective protégés to articulate their purposes and goals. Whether the mentor-protégé relationship is formal or informal in design, understand the intent of the program, each person’s role and what they hope to achieve is paramount for a successful program (Williams, 2000). Finally, police leaders should make certain that the purpose and goals for a mentoring program are clearly outlined and seek input from all areas of the department before implementation.

The second and perhaps most easily understood barrier to a mentoring relationship is the mismatching or incorrect pairing of a mentor and protégé. Lacey (1999) stated “People entering into a mentoring relationship, as either a mentor or mentee, have an expectation that the relationship will be of some benefit to them” (as cited by Mankin, 2004, p. 13). For any benefit of the mentor-protégé relationship to be affected the people involved must be able to communicate and work together.

Proper matching of mentors and protégés is a key element that must be satisfied to ensure the mentoring relationship is successful and the department's program objectives are realized (Williams, 2000). If one or both individuals feel forced into a situation they dislike or do not agree with the tendency will be to resist the arrangement. According to Joseph (2018), "The strained relationship can be counterproductive and even make the mentee feel he is not a welcome addition" (p. 1). The essence of the mentor-protégé relationship is to provide guidance, advice, and support in an environment built on trust. If either party believes none or all of these criteria can be satisfied, then the relationship will not be successful. Scandura and Williams (2002) noted that pairings of this type are "Characterized by discontent, anger, jealousy, resentment, sabotage, deception or harassment" (as cited by Pinho, Coetzee, & Schreuder, 2005, p. 21).

Although this barrier does present some challenges it can be easily overcome with mere forethought and common sense. If operating under a formal structure, Williams (2000), suggested "To facilitate a proper match, mentor and protégé should complete formal applications. Then meet informally to discuss their needs and wants" (p. 23). That being said, simply looking at the personalities of both mentor and mentee and pairing those that match is the best practice ("Mentoring for the Transition," 2009). If the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the mentor and the wants and desires of the protégés align their pairing will be obvious and their relationship successful.

A final barrier to the mentoring process is whether the culture of the police department can sustain an environment of mentorship, much less an integrated mentoring program. Ryan (2010) referred to this type of culture as "Allergic to

mentoring” (para. 3). The good old boy club is a prime example of this barrier. Lee (2014) stated that this system is “The network where the unwritten rules define the insiders and the outsiders. The standards that decide who is successful and who is not” (para. 1). This is in direct conflict with the mentor-protégé relationship, which according to Williams (2000) “Provides a nonthreatening environment for learning and growth” (p. 20). One of the principle characteristics of mentorship is the free exchange of knowledge and information; otherwise known as learning. If an organization’s culture does not facilitate or is outright opposed to this exchange, the mentor-protégé relationship cannot exist.

Of all the barriers, a culture opposed to learning and continuous development is perhaps the most difficult to overcome. Having said that, it is possible to change the culture of an organization, but it begins with the leader. The leader sets the tone of an organization, but for real change to happen the leader must demonstrate their commitment. To accomplish this, leaders must be role models; investing their time and energies to develop and promote an atmosphere of continuous learning at all levels of the department (Zachary, 2002). Bell (2013) referred to this as a “learning organization” where “Promoting the need for organizations to build a culture where learning, improvement and constant experimentation are that of the core of the enterprise” (as cited by Mankin, 2004, p. 13). Leaders must surround themselves with likeminded people that help spread and entrench the message of the benefits of mentorship.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Law enforcement is entering a new and exciting era filled with diverse and complex challenges; radical Islamic terrorism, technological advancements, social

media and dwindling department budgets are only a few of the issues that are influencing today's policing profession. Police leaders, more than ever, are in need of innovative solutions that effectively prepare their department, current employees, and prospective police candidates to meet these challenges. Fortunately, police leaders have started to recognize the benefits of mentoring and how a system of this type can positively impact the professional growth and development of their officers.

Mentoring relationships empower and build trust in senior officers, provides less experienced officers with a support system that enables continuous development and learning, and cultivates loyalty for the department that aids with recruitment and retention. A few obstacles that could interfere with a successful mentoring program are understanding its purpose and goals, incorrect pairing or mismatching of mentor and protégé, and a department culture at odds with the values of mentorship. All of these obstacles can be overcome with basic planning, common sense, and a leader willing to set the tone for the organization. That being said, law enforcement organizations should implement mentoring programs to bolster department productivity and loyalty by means of a support system that fosters an atmosphere of continuous growth and development in all ranks.

Whether a department is looking to establish a formalized mentoring program or create an environment of mentoring there are several systems and subsystems that must first be created. As cited above, one of the most important considerations is whether the organization's culture is open to mentorship (Ryan, 2010). An initial recommendation would be that police leaders conduct an environmental scan of their department to determine if a mentoring program will be successful. The Lansing

Michigan Police Department is a perfect example of how an environmental scan can be used in determining the purpose and goals of a mentoring program. According to Williams (2000), "LPD conducted a series of focus groups, including a representative mix of supervisory and nonsupervisory personnel from every area of the department" (p. 21). Once the scan is complete it recommend that police leaders devote time to examine the information gained and not rush into their selection of goals, mentors, or protégés. In addition to an environmental scan it is further recommended that police leaders establish a program coordinator to develop training for interested mentors, monitor protégé progress, and supervise the rollout and growth of the overall program. Along with the establishment of program coordinator it is also recommended that a system for feedback be developed for both mentors and protégés to develop better ways the program can be improved ("Mentoring for the Transition," 2009). A final recommendation would be the development of an exit plan for protégés who have met their goals or are simply looking to leave the program.

The only additional recommendation would be that departmental policies and procedures be developed for those organizations wanting to integrate a formal mentoring program as part of their training or career development units. Supporting people as they develop and grow has always been the focus of mentoring-protégé relationships. Instilling this mentality throughout the policing profession is absolutely paramount to the health of all departments and the continued wellbeing of the communities they serve. Stefan (2012) pointed out that "The policeman had and will have an important role in society, being one of those social factors that can influence public awareness, mentalities and behaviors" (para. 1). Realizing the positive impact

mentoring can have on the policing profession and the enhanced community relations it can lead to, it is highly likely that mentoring programs will become commonplace within American law enforcement in the near future.

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