

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Mentorings Involvement  
In Succession Planning**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

As a result of the research conducted into the idea that law enforcement should implement a mentoring program as part of their succession planning, it became evident that as a profession, law enforcement is behind the curve on this idea. It is the assertion of this paper that law enforcement agencies should implement a strong mentoring program in an effort to prepare the agency for successful succession. With the impending retirement of a major portion of the American workforce set to retire in the not so distant future, agencies find themselves ill prepared to transition employees upward through the ranks into positions of increased responsibility. Research will show that law enforcement would be well served by instituting mentoring programs in order to properly prepare their employees to run the agencies of the future.

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## INTRODUCTION

Today's modern law enforcement agency administrators must be effective and efficient planners. An administrator or a member of a command staff could be called upon to plan anything from a parade route to the emergency evacuation of an entire city in the case of a natural disaster. One glaring weakness in many agencies' planning abilities is the ability to successfully plan for the succession of younger agency members to replace senior ones. Law enforcement members are taught to adopt a mental toughness and a mindset as an individual who has the ability to go into the situations that others cannot and come out unscathed. Societal influences tell law enforcement that they should be able to take on things that others will not. In the very machismo world of policing, veteran leaders can be hesitant to train and pass on needed wisdom to younger officer; they may fear being overtaken at their position. This could lead to the failure of law enforcement agencies to implement steps to ensure the successful succession of younger staff members as older ones either promote further up the chain or retire.

Law enforcement leaders have become very adept and effective at planning and implementing major events and undertaking; as a whole, they should be better suited and more efficient at succession planning. Law enforcement agencies should evaluate why some officers fail to ensure the future success of not only the subordinates under them but also future of the agency they have devoted most of their lives to.

A key piece in an agency's successful transition to newer personnel lies with the department's senior officers' ability to positively mentor younger ones. Zuidema and Duff (2009) stated, "Agencies must focus their attention on both developing new leaders

and maintain the effectiveness of existing one” (p.10). Getting this plan into effect is easier said than done due to the lack of this type of program existing in many departments. Law enforcement agencies should implement a strong mentoring program in an effort to prepare the agency for successful succession.

## **POSITION**

As the modern age of fast paced policing is in full swing, older generations must mentor the younger officers to ensure that they are capable of taking the reins of the modern agency when the opportunity presents itself. As the generations merge, occasionally there is a breakdown in the flow of communication. One generation may become reluctant to train the younger one. The other’s opinion may be that the older crew is outdated and behind the times. A strong feeling from the older generation that may not be ready to retire yet is that if the younger generation is taught a specific task, they will take the job from the older person. It becomes incumbent upon the head administrators to ensure and reassure that this does not become commonplace or that the flow of communication comes to an immediate halt.

As an agency develops a mentoring program to enhance the successful succession of subordinates, input should be taken from directly within the agency as well as from others who have already established a successful program. Perhaps administrators will find the even the senior ranking staff members will provide positive input on the mentoring process. As mentoring and succession planning is a relatively new idea in the law enforcement community, it is likely that they remember when they were placed into a role that they were not properly prepared for.

It would be imperative for a chief to get the input from both sides of the mentoring process to gain better information on not only what the younger generation wants to learn but also to what the older generation feels it is imperative for them to learn. Through the mentoring process, both generations gain new perspectives into how the other is thinking. Possibly even more important is that they gain access to why they think the way they do. Alhstrom (2009) stated, "The greatest benefit that I've received is that officers now have a better understanding of my job and the reason behind some of my decisions. They in turn become my spokespersons in the organization when questions from their peers come up" (p. 334).

The mentoring of young officers should be introduced as soon as possible and continue as they ascend each rank. It is vital that the proper mentors be chosen to teach the younger ones. With the establishment of the mentoring program, the younger officers or mentees will benefit from a downward flow of information from the mentors. Mentors should be a senior officer of strong character with an established work record. Mentors should have a strong grasp of the values and mission of the department and be able to effectively communicate the same to the mentees. Something that should also be taken into consideration is the area of interest of the mentee. If the younger officer shows a desire to be a drug detective, then the officers supervisor and senior drug detectives should work together to enhance his skills in that area (Bratton, 2008). Many programs institute a tracking or grading system for the mentee, documenting both the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee and track his or her progress in the program.

Mentoring through the levels of supervision is imperative to have a successful transition from rank to rank. With each level of rank attained, there comes with it an

increased amount of responsibilities and an expectation of involvement of that individual in departmental affairs. As found in Blair (2005), the flow of information stays open and productive through regular meetings and briefings and some of the stronger, more experienced mentors may even have more than one mentee at a time. If this is the case, then these meetings become even more important in the process (Blair, 2005).

Through this mentoring process, it is believed that both sides will benefit from the program. The younger mentees gain access to the experience and expertise of the mentor and the mentors now may benefit from information gained on how their mentees view particular issues. Murphy (2005) of Carleton University stated, "Many respondents believed that they could benefit from coaching and mentoring" (p. 238). He also noted in this study that "Respondents expressed worries about being perceived as unqualified due to a lack of meaningful feedback and support" (Murphy, 2005, p. 241). Should this data and theory hold up upon application then the positive aspects of the program could possibly for all involved employees.

If any mentoring and succession program is to succeed, it needs to foster a positive belief in the success of program at all levels. Thinking of the program as a chain and the chain only being as strong as its weakest link leads to the thought that each level of supervision needs to be a willing participant in the program. The flow of mentoring success will be generational, with the thinking that a lieutenant whom was once mentored as a sergeant and has reaped the benefits of the mentoring program will be ready open and ready to accept further mentoring from the next level of supervision the promotional chain.

One step that must be stressed in the mentoring program is the proper matching of mentors to mentees. This has to be done correctly or the program itself will not reach optimum success. The greater the involvement the mentee has in finding the mentor, the greater the chance for success. Administrators need to allow mentees to at least provide input on the mentor (Freifeld, n.d.).

It is no secret that the Baby Boomer generation will be retiring in droves in the forthcoming years. With this knowledge, many private sector companies have established mentoring programs within their organizations. Companies such as IBM, Pepsi Corp, and AT&T have established mentoring programs. Sources, such as an article by Bryant (2017), stated that upwards of 70% of all Fortune 500 companies have mentoring programs. Perhaps they have seen what law enforcement has somewhat failed to see. At the root of the entire issue is that law enforcement administrators owe it to their agency members to pull out all the stops when it comes to member and agency success. If the individual member is not successful, the agency as a whole cannot succeed. Sprafka (2008) stated, "Many successful people attribute their achievements to a mentoring relationship. Many repay their debt to the mentor and the organization by going on to serve as mentors themselves" (p. 4)

Once the program is set up, it will be helpful if each participant has clear and defined responsibilities to ensure project success. Mentors are responsible for encouraging behavior that would be conducive to the mentee attaining their goals and setting the example of how to proceed. They would also impart lessons learned through previous experiences, counsel the mentee with challenges both at home and professional, and assist in mapping a career plan. The mentee or protégé are also



responsible for several aspects like presenting the mentor with lucid employment goals and following through with agreed upon progress markers with them, asking for help when needed, and listening to what others have to say. Both roles must be fulfilled to the fullest in order for this mentoring program to benefit the succession of the subordinates. A factor that needs to be considered when matching the mentor and the protégé is the issue of rank. Some think that the mentor holds a significantly higher rank than the protégé in order to ensure there will be a sufficient difference in experience. Others will argue that the best mentors are those of only one rank higher because they can better relate to the protégé's role (Allen, Finklestein, & Poteet, 2009).

### **COUNTER POSITION**

With such positive statements about this issue, one might ask why there are not more agencies implementing these types of programs. In addition, there is factor that could possibly detour an agency from adopting such programs. Never before have more generations simultaneously been intertwined in the work place. With the mixture of Baby Boomer, Gen X, and the Millennial generation, often effective communication is not obtained. Some may see this as an obstacle in the mentoring process due to the differences in the way that each generation is viewed by the other. There is no correct or incorrect view, it is just that they are seen from different viewpoints. Unfortunately different generations can develop skewed misconceptions of another generation. This can be due to the lack of communication with the other generation. Often times, many of the generational differences can be overcome with basic in-service training that is readily available at little to no cost. Each generation must know and understand that just because they are apart by age that they are not apart by intentions. It would be an

eye-opening experience for them to realize how alike minded they are in the goal of both personal and agency success. Due to different set of intrinsic values associated with each generation what appeals to one demographic may not appeal to the other. Members of the Baby Boomer generation are highly motivated by monetary gain as where the Millennial generation will value things such a free time as a great reward. Many of the older workers may find with the right formula of coaching, encouragement, and direction that they will be able to mentor the younger generation. This idea was addressed by Holtz (1998): “When you concern yourself with the welfare of others, you engender loyalty and respect. You create value. And you acquire power” (p. 26).

Another pressing issue that naysayers will use in an effort to dissuade the idea of active succession planning is the fact that law enforcement agencies are already very constrained when the issue of available personnel presents itself. There is an overriding need to satisfy all needs with the little resources provided to departments. There are, however, some agencies where both the administration and the funding sources, i.e. city council or commissioners court, get the importance of success planning for the future and the importance of adding successful mentors to the mix. These however are the exception and not the rule. Many agencies simply do not feel that they are able to allocate the resources to a program such as this. Even in a small agency, new and different mentoring programs can be utilized. One such idea is e-mentoring: “this involves more experienced individuals sharing experiences with younger or less experienced protégés with the mission of helping the protégé with the use of email, online chats and conferencing tools” (Rowland, 2011, p. 63). The idea of e-mentoring is relatively new. There is, however, successful programs out there for

use. This type of mentoring really has now bounds in regard to staffing limitations as shift assignment is not of importance due to the fact that the mentor can transfer knowledge to the protégé at any time with the use of computer networking devices. This medium also allows for the different generations to communicate on a more even level. The older Baby Boomer or Gen X mentors who will likely be hesitant with this idea will be able to see benefits of the effective communication flow that will open up as a result. Also, in terms of personnel issues or more exactly the excuse that the lack of personnel would prevent establishing a mentor programs, these programs do not have to be very time inclusive and can be conducted in a very streamlined fashion if the right amount of effort and planning is directed towards it. With some creative staffing efforts by the administration, a more traditional type of mentoring program can be established. The required meetings can be nothing more conversation of a cup of coffee when the call load permits. This type of interaction leads directly to overall success of an agency. Ultimately, "An empowered organization is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organizational success" (Covey, 2006, p. 38).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

As shown, there are many reasons for forward thinking police administrators to implement a strong mentoring program in the succession planning of their agency. The modern police agency should definitely commit and institute a mentoring program in an effort to develop and train their strongest members to take over as older officers either promote further up the chain of command or retire. When the mentoring program takes shape and develops over time, an inner strength will start to develop within the group of

participants. This will transfer over to overall welfare of the agency and benefit those involved in the program.

As important as intelligence sharing is within law enforcement in regards to criminal investigations and cases, the successful flow of information in regard to passing on successful and needed leadership traits is just as imperative. Gone should be the days of learning the position once a promotion has been received. This failure to plan for succession sets up the agency member for failure from the start. This, in turn, sets the department up for failure. Taking on the increased burdens and responsibilities of promotion and a new level of command can be potentially overwhelming event. Had the appointee been properly prepared and trained on the inner workings of the new level, he or she may have better assumed such command.

By taking the ideas implemented in some of the world's most successful private corporations, law enforcement agencies can learn from the trial and error they already gone through to successfully establish a well working mentor program. Overtaking the obstacle of multigenerational communication is not something to be mastered overnight. Also, both parties must commit to evaluating problems and attempting to communicate with each other in a way that is mutually beneficial. By training mentors and protégés on the generational differences, the mentoring process will begin to grow and foster a learning environment that will aid in the succession of the officers to new levels.

This is not a task to be taken lightly nor should an agency expect overnight results we deciding to implement such a program. There is an old adage in law

enforcement and that there is only one thing that cops hate more than change, and that is the way things are right now. This is comical however it rings very true.

Departments that are tight on funds and personnel resources can use a successful mentoring program without breaking the proverbial bank. By implementing creative ideas on mentoring to prepare the protégé to take on new responsibilities, departments will find that it is much more cost effective to prepare the worker ahead of time for potential new roles than to pay to fix mistakes or, even worse, to have to demote or pass over a worker because they were not given the tools they needed to succeed. By empowering the best and brightest with the agency and promoting this type of out of the box thinking, agency administrators should be able to show solid dividends in regards to the transition from rank to the next with each employee. Following up with the employees after the transition will provide that needed feedback and may ultimately add to the continued success of the agency.

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