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Retention Through Mentorship

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ABSTRACT

Government budgets are decreasing and interest in the law enforcement profession is deteriorating (Orrick, 2008). Law enforcement officer (LEO) recruiting rates have dropped dramatically and job satisfaction changes on a day to day basis. Agencies face personnel problems and are constantly having to hire new officers with little to no experience (Orrick, 2008). Agencies with little to no experienced officers on the streets face credibility issues in the community, further straining relationships and potentially creating liability issues (Schmidt, 2005).

With all the problems that appear to be occurring with the retention of officers, there is actually a simple, relatively inexpensive means of mitigating the issue. LEOs are not any different than other employees in the job market, they too want to feel like they are part of the solution. In other words, they, as others, need to be internally motivated to feel like they are part of the team or the reason the agency is successful. The way to ensure an officer internalizes motivation is through mentorship. Mentorship provides key relational values that otherwise may not exist through normal police training. Law enforcement agencies should establish a mentoring program that will increase retention rates.

With proper communication through an agency, a mentoring program could be established and functioning in a short amount of time. Implementing an in-house informal mentoring program will provide an opportunity for an agency to reduce turnover percentages along with numerous other benefits. The mentoring program will be beneficial not only to the retained officers but to the agency as a whole.

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INTRODUCTION

Much like any other organization, today's law enforcement landscape is in a constant state of change. Whether that is good or bad is determined by numerous factors such as budget, force size, and service functions to the community, just to name a few. As those cuts or increases come and go, focusing on competing demands becomes more and more important. The most valuable asset to any organization, whether it is private or a public law enforcement agency (LEA), is its personnel.

Over the years, law enforcement agencies have seen a decrease in available qualified personnel. Recruitment has gone down due to a rising economy and availability of better jobs. Retention has become more difficult due to transfers into higher paying departments in need of personnel. There has been more change in the past 20 years than the previous 100. In years past, there would be up to 50 people applying for a single position in the police department. Now that number is closer to three (Orrick, 2008). Agencies have failed to keep up with the demands that were placed on them from the rising job market (Orrick, 2008). Agencies will need to look at how to retain services and continue growth with less support. One of the ways to fulfill that obligation is to devote time and effort to the retention of experienced officers. If nothing is done to retain those experienced officers, there will be noticeable decrease in quality of service to the community and productivity will fall (Orrick, 2008).

Personnel will leave for a variety of reasons, and each agency will have to decide which direction to take depending on organizational demands. On many occasions, organizations have difficulty competing with larger agencies in salaries, making it hard to retain experienced personnel looking to increase their income and receive better

benefits. However, organizations can narrow their focus on objectives that have little to no cost to initiate. A retention plan centered on the internal motivation of the employee, such as formal or informal mentorship, will see greater success.

There are two types of mentoring identified: formal and informal. Each have their benefits as will be discussed later in this paper. A mentor program, regardless of which one an agency decides to go with, as long as it is supported by management, will allow all ranks within the agency to flourish and every individual will feel like they are a part of the organization and its mission. With proper mentoring, experience will grow in the agency and cost for continual recruitment may decline (Orrick, 2008). The cost of organizational turnover is more than just monetary. It can be loss of experience which can cause higher liabilities for the agency (Schmidt, 2005). Law enforcement agencies should focus on the retention of personnel by implementing a mentoring program.

POSITION

Agencies will experience turnover on a regular basis, and the following research will provide ways to decrease that turnover. Research has been done in recruitment and retention but one specific determination as to why loss occurs was not explicitly available (Orrick, 2008). There are many different studies that show a multitude of reasons officers leave, varying from low salaries, little benefits, and poor supervision. However, the true issue of turnover, or inability to retain, is related to more than just a single numerical data set. Personnel are people and people require good leadership along with the feeling of acceptance and ownership. One of the major factors in officers leaving involves organizational-wide dissatisfaction with their immediate supervisors, who have not been developed to succeed as effective leaders (Orrick, n.d., p. 8).

Most supervisors spend a majority of their time dealing with inexperienced employees who take away from their role as a trainer and developer. The officer may feel alienated and not as important to the agency's mission. Employees who feel disconnected from the agency and not part of the mission may not mention they are looking elsewhere for employment. Leaders who are developed to be better leaders through mentorship will facilitate a more-committed workforce. Most of the time, people associate a mentorship program as related to a young intern or coworker, but mentorship can be for any age who seeks a higher knowledge or get further in their career (Hayzlett, 2017).

Perceived opportunity to advance in an individual's job or training could shape both satisfaction and dissatisfaction depending on the variable (Monk-Turner, O'Leary, Sumter, 2010). The variables can be whether or not peers and supervisors are ensuring officer involvement, creating a sense of self-worth, and for furtherance of the organization. If an officer is convinced their position is for the advancement of an organization, they will feel committed to that organization (Marrs, 2018). If the officer is committed, then motivation becomes internal.

Motivation, such as mentoring, is a relatively new idea to most police agencies but it has been around for a very long time in other professions. Departments that actively employ formal mentoring have reduced retention problems (Orrick, 2008). With agencies using formal mentoring as a platform, officers feel like their agency actually cares for them, which increases motivation and productivity. A mentor, that has most likely been with an agency for some time, has the capability to get things done, will be

teaching the mentee organizational values and how to get things accomplished through problem-solving (Williams, 2000).

In 2000, Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner said the loss of personnel can have an indirect effect on the agency through low morale, loss of contacts, and new or inadequate staff performing duties (as cited in Wareham, Smith, & Lambert, 2013). However, when mentoring has a strategic purpose that is linked to talent, leadership development, planning and goals, it has a positive impact on the organization by improving retention of employees (Dy & Compton, 2014). This shows that taking the opportunity to mentor and develop employees has a great deal of benefit to an agency.

There are two types of mentoring which are available, informal and formal, which one chosen will be up to each individual agency depending on their requirements. In 2011, Herrbach, Migonac, and Rcihebe said most informal mentoring is self-directed, has very little structure and is spontaneous in creation, and it also is not recognized by the organization as formal (as cited in Bynum, 2015). Formal mentoring is more-stringent with specific dates of meeting certain goals for the mentee. Informal and formal mentoring are mainly different because of the intensity of the relationship, the commitment to the mentee, the duration of the mentorship, and the structure (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000).

The benefits of formal and/or informal mentorship are cost savings to the local government on different levels. Failing to retain experienced officers can prove quite costly for local, state, and national government. Since law enforcement is a service to the community, when there are not enough officers on the street, customer service

begins to decline and the community suffers. Retention of those who are highly qualified should be at the forefront of every agency for better community relations.

When those officers with great experience remain at an agency, the agency retains credibility in the eyes of the community. As stated earlier the most valuable asset of any business, company or police agency, is its personnel. And, when personnel are frequently changed out, they become one of the greatest liabilities (Schmidt, 2005). Managing liability is an essential task of an agency that should not be overlooked.

Liabilities come from various interactions in law enforcement, most visibly from service provided to the community. Fewer officers on the streets create more work, taking time away from community policing. The community will tend to trust the experienced officer which they have come to know them and be more willing to give them information related to a crime. The experienced officer is also far less likely to have use-of-force complaints filed against him or her. In 2005, Schmidt further stated that employees that were high risk of leaving, posed a 33 percent greater chance over the next two years of doing so (para. 5). The cost of that turnover to an organization, especially the ones in a budget crisis, can be nearly as much as two times an officer's annual salary (Orrick, 2002).

Additionally, mentorship not only provides positives, such as retention of personnel, but, can also reduce discipline rates. High rates of discipline can take supervisors away from their developmental duties. According to Sergeant Snyder of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, in their agencies first year, discipline rates were reduced by 40% (Stelter, 2015). That is a significant drop in discipline rates. The

reduction in the discipline rates will allow more time for supervisors and officers to be active within the community. Snyder further stated that the more officers that participated, the stronger the program and agency will become (Stelter, 2015).

A mentor program allows for personnel to feel like they are part of the agency and its mission. Mentees learn from experienced mentors who have a degree of expertise, allowing for ease of information gathering that may have not been provided by the organization (Newby & Heide, 2013). Mentoring is a proven method of motivating personnel to be productive members of an agency and more willing to make a career out of law enforcement. And finally, the cost to an agency for failing to retain good employees is more than just monetary. Losing experienced personnel means losing knowledge base and contacts. Law enforcement agencies that focus on and implement a mentoring program in their agencies will see an over-all increase in retention.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

A mentor program could be more trouble than it is worth, especially if there are problems between mentors and mentees. The selected mentor could have personal issues with the mentee creating more of a problem than there should be and the selection process could appear to show favoritism to officers who are selected as mentors. Frustration can build during the mentoring phase when the mentor feels progress is not being met as quickly as it should. When the mentee shows progress or goes above the mentor, resentment can build which can breed low morale, anger and dissent between mentor and mentee is possible (Ragins & Scandura, 1999).

Though not all situations can be mitigated, designing a program for formal mentorship that allows for natural informal mentorship to take place can prove very beneficial to the organization. Since mentors are not conducting evaluations on mentees, there should be very little conflict. Mentors are assisting with the mentees in obtaining knowledge and understanding of how the organization operates and what the organization stands for. Mentors will guide the mentee in more of a paternal direction allowing them to grow in their work and the realization they are part of something bigger. Mentors are a guiding force in growth and do not get involved in the evaluations or judgements of the mentee (Sprafka & Kranda, n.d.). Mentors are selected by their attributes as a leader, mentor, and forward-thinking capabilities.

Another complaint may be cost and time of training for mentors that could have a negative impact on the daily operation of the organization. Programs can be costly depending on how an agency institute and utilize its resources (“How to Start a Mentoring Program,” 2016). Some would say there is not time to send employees for training nor are there funds available. Some mentorship programs cost money for training that may not be available in the current budget. The training required for mentors will take patrol officers away from the street creating shift work problems. One could quite possibly go as far as to say field training officers (FTO’s) could be used for training and save money since they have already been trained to deal with new officers. They are already with the officer for a designated amount of time, further saving resources.

Valuable re-training cost should not be ignored by departments when retaining good officers (Church, 2007). In 2015, Reaves estimated the cost to the community to

replace a full time sworn police officer was about \$131,000 (as cited in Brady, 2017). Re-training or replacing an officer who has left is time consuming though an academy that could take up to six months just to get a new officer on the street, then another three months in the FTO program. As for using an FTO program for mentorship, it could prove ineffective and do more damage than good. FTO's are evaluators and as stated above by Sprafka and Kranda (n.d.), mentors are not evaluators that make judgements about the mentee for job effectiveness. Retaining is much more cost efficient. Hom and Griffith found in 1995 that the indirect cost could be even more, by lowering productivity disrupting social networks, severing community ties, facilitating low morale, and finally producing the probability of more officers leaving (as cited in Brady, 2017). Losing the community connection could prove to be a liability in which the community cannot replace.

RECOMMENDATION

The first priority is to get the organization to buy into the fact that retention can occur with the proper mentorship program. Not all agencies are the same so once approval is given to start an evaluation there should be a time of critical needs testing to determine what goals are to be expected out of the program. Many questions will need to be answered, such as how the mentors are selected, are there any agreements needed, how much time will be allotted for meetings and so on (Orrick, 2008).

It is recommendation to implement a formal mentoring program that allows for informal mentoring as well. A formal mentoring program can be very successful if it allows for and promotes informal mentoring that has good mentors (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). The formal mentor program will need to have set standards for tracking the

progress of mentors and mentees which meet predetermined specific goals. There are no perfect ways to mentor, each program should be tailored to the mentee for meeting the goals of the agency (Orrick, 2008). Each mentor and mentee will need to complete an application process which may also include a questionnaire for likes and dislikes so matching for each allowing for a successful match. To find suitable matches, mentors and mentees will need to take a personality test to determine primary and secondary personality types (Stelter, 2015). Many times, within formal mentorship, informal relationships build, making the commitment stronger.

Next would be determining and selecting the mentor. Mentorship will be on a voluntary basis only guiding those that want to help others become part of the agency. The position of mentor may be voluntary but the department needs to seek successful, experienced officers who demonstrate enthusiasm for their job and a passion for law enforcement (Stelter, 2015). Mentors should have good people skills, willing to share their knowledge base with others and a positive attitude toward the department. The mentor will have a great deal of credibility and accountability within the agency having served in different areas of the organization (Orrick, 2008).

One of the goals of the mentor is to get the mentee to feel like she or he is part of the agency and their position in furthering the organization. As stated earlier, if the mentee feels like she or he is a vital part of the organization and they are here to help forward progress, then they are likely to stay with the agency for a longer period of time. With mentorship, the mentee has had their initial needs met. Retention can occur if the initial needs of the officer are met which will save the organization cost in more recruiting and retention (Valencia, 2009). Officers will face a plethora of various mental

stressor throughout their career. There needs to be ways to assist officers who face those stressors that may not know what to do. Dr. Chuck Russo said mentoring programs must take advantage of the differences today's officers bring to law enforcement. The officers are exposed to a more structured support system that has the potential to assist officers to grow, remain open throughout their careers and when they are met with a critical incident they will know how to deal with the stressors which may develop, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (as cited in Stelter, 2015).

A mentoring process should begin when all standards have been met for an assignment. As soon as a new officer or probationary officer (PO) is hired is when the mentoring process should begin. The agency should ensure that officer or PO, now referred to as mentee, has someone to turn to for questions, who may not be related to the everyday job of an officer. The mentor is someone the mentee can confide in and learn the nuances of the agency without causing perceived friction with other officers or her/his FTO.

Once the program is in place and initiated, there will need to be an evaluation period to see where the program is headed. After a set time period, as decided by the organization, is completed, there will need to be a time of review to determine if organization goals have been met. If organizational goals are met as agreed upon and the program is successful then the process will continue. If the goals were not met, this would be the time to reevaluate the process and determine a secondary course of action.

Budgetary constraints of governmental functions do not appear to be letting up, requiring more cuts to maintain the status quo. How budgetary funds are managed by

all sectors of government determine the future growth of an organization. For a police department the personnel are the most important component so why not ensure their security. Thousands of dollars are spent on training and equipping officers so that they can protect and serve the community, yet there is so little investment on the officer's development. Mentoring is a small investment on a large return which could reap benefits for an agency overall growth. Failing to mentor is the exact opposite: turnover cost, liability cost, organization loss. For overall effectiveness, law enforcement agencies should focus on the retention of experienced sworn personnel by implementing a mentoring program.

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