

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**The Need for Mentoring in Law Enforcement**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Police officers today are not adequately prepared to handle the diverse and dynamic field of policing. They attend lengthy police academies and subject themselves to an incredibly difficult state test, only to hand over their future to the first police department that will take them. In turn, these agencies place the new officer in a relatively short field training program. The officers are expected to keep the streets safe, while not getting themselves, or their respective agencies into any "hot water". These young police officers are making numerous mistakes which could be avoided with proper training and tutelage. Police administrators need to look at alternative methods to ensure these employees have a long and successful career. One method would be to develop a formal mentoring program. The purpose of this paper is to look at the field of mentoring, the benefits it would provide to police departments and those they employ.

The researcher analyzed numerous articles and books on mentoring, only to find the field of policing is one of the last professions to get on the "bandwagon". The benefits of mentoring for all of those involved are endless. The implementation of a mentoring program would enable the younger officers a greater chance of success, as well as providing them with stable footing upon which to build. This higher level of education and preparation would enable the rookie to better perform his job and not place himself, the citizens he is sworn to protect or his agency at risk. We owe this to the officers we employ. The time for mentoring is now.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the past several years, law enforcement has noticed an increased turnover rate and a reduced applicant pool. Part of this large turnover rate can be attributed to the more experienced officers, otherwise known as “baby boomers,” retiring from law enforcement (Sprafka, Kranda 2000). These retirements present police departments with a large problem. As these officers retire, police departments lose their experienced and seasoned employees. This void leaves departments with the loss of their mentors as well as the realities of hiring and staffing departments with generation X and Y officers. “Generation X” officers are defined as people born between the years of 1960-1980. “Generation Y” officers are defined as people born between the years of 1980-2000 (2000). The largest percentages of departments are now made up of these employees. As these generations change, so do their attitudes, needs and ambitions. The second group, generation Y is described as independent, creative, skeptical and impatient. Organizational longevity with this group of employees is not a top priority. Generation Y employees are generally described as optimistic, polite and tenacious. They need supervision and structure and are inexperienced in dealing with difficult people (2000). Today’s young, inexperienced officers are making poor decisions and using faulty judgment. This has led to decreased productivity, an increased number of complaints, as well as an increased number of officer misconduct incidents. A successful mentoring program designed to involve these employees and help them succeed is paramount to good employee retention and performance.

Today, the training trend in law enforcement today is to have potential applicants attend a law enforcement training academy varying in length from four months to one year. After successful completion of the academy, the potential applicant is required to pass a state certification test and only then is allowed to apply for employment. The potential employee is

then subjected to an intensive and lengthy hiring process. After receiving employment, the employee must then complete a field training program. This varies in length from department to department. After graduating from the field training program, the employee is then released into the world of law enforcement. At this point, all guidance and tutoring comes to a halt. Once an employee completes the field training program, mentoring is no longer provided. The neglect of the needed mentoring program is the problem this paper will address.

A mentor or mentoring program would help employees transition into the organization and become a productive member. Mentors help the employees by filling such roles as teachers, guides, coaches, confidantes, role models, advisors, facilitators, sponsors, promoters and protectors (Williams, 2000). A successful mentoring program would also benefit the mentor and the organization. Mentors take pride in their protégés accomplishments and in the fact that the knowledge and insight they provided has made a contribution to their agency (2000). The mentor also absorbs some of the new employee's energy and excitement, which in turn renews their commitment to the job. The organization benefits because mentoring creates a positive atmosphere. A positive environment equals longevity in the workplace. There is also an increase in morale throughout the department because of the enthusiasm, camaraderie and professionalism the mentoring program has brought (2000).

The purpose of this research paper is to answer the question: What can be done to effectively mentor police officers in order to obtain and retain a dedicated, energized and productive employee? The method of inquiry for this research will include review of professional journals, periodicals, articles, books, and internet sources. The information received from the research will be used to present to law enforcement agencies the benefits of running and maintaining a successful mentoring program.

It is anticipated that the researcher will find that law enforcement agencies are “dropping the ball” when it comes to mentoring their employees. In order to run an effective and productive department, law enforcement administrators must establish some type of mentoring program. This will require thinking outside the box and taking a pro-active stance in employee retention and training.

The implications of this research will affect law enforcement agencies, officers, and the public they serve. If agencies adopt a mentoring program, they will improve employee retention, as well as work productivity in the areas of both quality and quantity. Law enforcement departments that initiate a mentoring program will lower incidences of misconduct, thus lowering the number of complaints, as well as liability risks. A mentoring program would also increase workplace morale through better employee attitudes and a much more efficient working environment. The public would benefit by a highly motivated energetic police force, which would translate into, better police contacts and a more efficient police presence.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Mentoring, what is it and where did it come from? Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary gives the definition of mentor as, “a trusted counselor or guide, tutor, coach” (Webster Dictionary). The U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 22-100, states, “Mentoring is the pro-active development of each subordinate through observing, assessing, coaching, teaching, developmental counseling, and evaluating that results in people being treated with fairness and equal opportunity.” (Mentoring – Kem) Yet others state it is “the term used to describe the dynamics shared between a more experienced person while guiding a less experienced person

who is pursuing a specific goal.” (Cardenas) In its basic form, mentoring is simply helping others to succeed.

Mentoring is not a new concept. It has been around for thousands of years. It began in 1500 BC, when the King of Ithaca, Odysseus, needed someone to look after his son, Telemachus, while he was off fighting the Trojan War. During his absence, he entrusted an old friend to take care of the boy and to impart his wisdom, values and learning. This wise and trusted counselor was named Mentor (Craig).

Many professional organizations have implemented some type of mentoring program to help their employees succeed. Crosby (1999) states that mentoring programs in the corporate world have become as common as annual reports. Many organizations such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, Police Athletic Leagues and National 4-H Councils have also utilized mentoring programs (Cardenas). The profession of policing is simply one of the last organizations to realize the potential positives of this type of program. These numerous positives benefit the agency, the mentor and most importantly the protégé.

### The Police Agency

Police agencies would benefit by acquiring and retaining a better educated, better prepared police officer. These employees would have a higher degree of loyalty and a higher degree of job satisfaction. Due to the increase in job satisfaction, they would stay on the job longer and become more productive while turning out a better quality product (Williams). Harr (2003) stated that mentoring equals motivation. An effective mentoring program would also assist the new employee with an increased chance of successful graduation from the field training program. This would lower the department’s costs associated with the recruiting and

hiring process. Once off the field training program, the new employee would be less likely to commit costly errors. These errors, or growing pains, are expected but can sometimes turn into costly, time consuming issues that the administration or legal department must rectify.

In the current training environment, new officers graduate from the field training program they are more often than not unprepared for police work. These new officers then typically go through a 1-2 year period where they make countless mistakes. These mistakes take manpower and money to correct. These mistakes can range from mishandling calls, to getting injured on the job. This could eventually lead to “burn out” in just a few short years. Today’s new officers are involved in far too many fleet accidents and far too many police incidents involving the wrong type of force or excessive force. They are also accused of police misconduct far too often.

#### The Mentor

The mentor would benefit from his relationship with the protégé in several ways. He would gain personal satisfaction and take pride in the protégé’s accomplishments. The protégé would gain a higher feeling of self worth and an increased sense of worth, or value within the organization. They would derive a strong sense of pride in knowing that they are instrumental in guiding and developing the future employees of the department. In addition, the joy of passing on what they have learned, as well as feeling the excitement coming from a new employee would invigorate the mentor (Williams & Sprafka).

## The Protégé

The protégé would also benefit in a number of ways. As stated before, the protégé would have a much higher chance of successfully completing their field training program as well as their probationary period. The protégé would also obtain an increased competency level, thus reducing the number of his/her mistakes or errors. Similar to the mentor, the protégé would receive a higher sense of worth within the organization. This higher sense of worth and belonging would increase loyalty, increase the likelihood of retention and increase employee morale.

Locating, hiring and retaining qualified employees is becoming increasingly difficult in today's market. Mentoring can be utilized as a great tool or selling point in attracting, hiring and retaining new employees. In addition, by assisting the new employee with his personal and professional growth, the agencies benefit. They benefit by increasing the retention period of the employee, saving themselves money and manpower by not having to replace that employee a few years down the road (Edmundson).

Most, if not all, of the literature researched, shows that mentoring benefits all of those involved. As police agencies look to entice and retain qualified employees and lower the number of police misconduct incidents, they will look for alternate methods not tried in the past. One of these methods will be mentoring. All of the research conducted shows that an effective mentoring program ensures the new officers success, increased worth to themselves and to the agencies that employ them.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Today's younger generation of police officers seem to be making costly, avoidable mistakes. In most cases, these mistakes could have been avoided if the new employee had simply not been cut loose on their own and "thrown to the wolves". As stated before, the new employee is subjected to a lengthy academy as well as an exhausting hiring process. They are then hired and placed into a field training program. After successful graduation, officers are then placed in a car by themselves and expected to perform at the level of a seasoned veteran officer. That is just not possible with the current hiring and training practices. We as a profession must do more to enable these officers to better handle the daily work activities of policing.

The purpose of this research paper is to answer the question: What can be done to effectively mentor police officers in order to obtain and retain a dedicated, energized and productive employee? The answer is quite simple. Law enforcement must create and implement a mentoring program that would take the new employee from the moment of job offer, walk with them hand in hand through the field training program and even quite possibly their first year or two in policing. This would eliminate, or greatly reduce mistakes and create a happier, loyal and more valuable employee.

The researchers believe that most police departments do not have any form of mentoring program to aid them in hiring and retaining these employees was found true. Numerous web based articles, magazine articles and books were consulted. A composite of the Missouri City Police Department was also taken to provide a sample in tenure, the amount of police misconduct incidents and the number of complaints. All of the articles and books state that mentoring has been used effectively in other organizations for quite some time and all suggest that the implementation of a formal mentoring program would accomplish the intended goals.

These same articles state that great care must be taken when implementing the mentoring program to ensure success for both the new officer as well as the department.

## **FINDINGS**

It was stated in the previous section that today's young, inexperienced officers are making poor decisions and using faulty judgment. Poor judgments then lead to an increased number of complaints. Combined, it all leads to decreased productivity and a drop in morale. All of this can be attributed to the department's lack of adequately preparing today's officers.

The Missouri City Police Department is made up of 68 sworn officers, with the patrol division comprising the largest portion. A total of 45 patrol officers make up this division. The average tenure of the officers assigned to this division is two years. It can be said the Missouri City Police Department has never been younger or more inexperienced.

In the Missouri City Police Department any time an officer uses any type of force, other than handcuffing someone who is subsequently arrested, they must complete a Use of Force form. The same process and form is used for fleet accidents and pursuits. This data is then entered into a computer and reviewed periodically for trends. The results are alarming. In the Missouri City Police Department during the year 2004, officers were involved in 88 incidents involving use of force, 9 pursuits and 12 fleet accidents. During the same time period there were 45 complaints made against officers. As the table below shows, the numbers for the year 2005 show a significant increase in every category.

Missouri City Police Department	2004	2005 (Jan through July)
Use of Force Incidents	88	51
Police Pursuits	9	6
Fleet Accidents	12	10

These Use of Force incidents include officers handcuffing suspects (no arrest), leg restraint, drawing and pointing their weapon at suspects, shooting at suspects, shooting suspects, using an ASP baton (Impact Weapon) or OC spray, using pressure points / compliance techniques or using hard hands. While most of these incidents are acceptable and did fall within departmental guidelines or policy, some clearly did not and still others fell into a grey area. These grey area incidents then had to be broken down and quite often resulted in policy modifications.

The number of fleet accidents has also increased over the last year. The above total of 12 accidents includes three totaled police cars, numerous days of missed work on the officer's part and an incredible amount of money for repairs to the cars as well as the civil lawsuits that arise out of these accidents. A large portion of these accidents can be attributed to officers making poor decisions regarding their driving habits and how they handle themselves while driving emergency traffic.

The same can be said for police pursuits. Officers are making poor decisions, engaging in unjustified pursuits, violating policy and placing themselves, along with the department, in a precarious position in regards to liability.

The number of citizen complaints has also risen. While the majority of these complaints are rudeness or professional conduct complaints, we are starting to see more severe complaints,

civil rights violations and excessive use of force. And while some of this increase can be attributed to the citizens being better informed and even encouraged to point out incorrect behavior, some of them are most certainly the fault of the officers and the department's inability to prepare these officers.

At the same time more and more officers have bounced around to other agencies or even quit policing entirely and gone to work in the private sector. When these officers leave after just a short period of time, they leave voids which take several months if not longer to fill. These vacancies can create safety problems on shifts, as well overtime issues. Officers having to work longer hours with fewer officers can also lead to a drop in employee morale, as well as an increase in physical and mental problems which in turn leads to abuse of sick time.

The goal of this research paper is to develop a method or process to lower these incidents of misconduct while at the same time increase retention levels of police officers. The research showed that to accomplish this goal a mentoring program must be put into place. An important aspect of the mentoring program is that it needs to be supported by all members of the organization from the highest administrator to the newest line officer. This support includes policy statements, allocation of physical and financial resources and even the possibility of inclusion of mentoring as a consideration for promotion (Williams).

The key and most important aspect of a successful program is the selection of the mentor and their abilities to pass on their wisdom and expertise to that new officer. One research study in the United Kingdom suggested that mentor criteria fall into three areas; 1) Be a good role model, 2) Offer guidance and counseling and 3) possess a strong knowledge and experience within ones profession (Williams, Whitesell, 2000). The mentor is effectively providing the protégé with their wisdom and expertise obtained over their career without the pain of having to

go through it themselves (Craig). The mentor must have a significant expertise in policing. They must have a passion and the ability to teach. They must have a supportive demeanor, have very good interpersonal skills and be willing to let go of their own ego. They must be tolerant, respected, liked, motivated, confident, flexible and accessible at all times to the protégé. They must have a good attendance record and discipline record (Peoria Police Department). They must have an extensive knowledge of the department policies and procedures. They must also have a high sense of organizational loyalty. They must personally get to know their protégé and determine what their goals and dreams are. This is important if they are to know what motivates and inspires the protégé. The mentor in most cases will become a lifelong contact and resource for the new officer.

Once the mentor is selected the actual mentoring stage should be monitored and supervised.

Whitesell (1999) suggests that there should be four steps in the mentoring process;

- 1) Modeling – Simply showing or demonstrating a job
- 2) Mentoring – Allowing the protégé to help you
- 3) Monitoring – Changing places and allowing them to perform the task
- 4) Motivate – Give them a boost and stand back

A mentoring program should be different or separated from the formal field training program. The field training program, in its very nature, is too rigid with rules and daily grading to effectively facilitate a mentoring relationship. The mentor should separate himself from this actual process and simply be a sounding board, or a resource the new officer could utilize while in the training program. The mentor should be a friend, guidance counselor and coach all in one.

## CONCLUSION

The time for mentoring in policing is at hand. In the last fifteen years we have promoted or lost all of our seasoned veteran officers. We have entered an era where the police officers are younger, make more mistakes and most importantly need more guidance. Most of the officers hired in the present day are taken directly from an academy setting and thrust into the world of real policing with little or no warning. This is a recipe for disaster. History has shown that these officers are making costly and avoidable mistakes. As stated in the introduction, immediately after being hired they are placed in a 12-16 week field training program. The program itself is very rigid and filled with time restraints that leave little room for error. While a field training program provides these new employees with a good stable foundation on which to build, it does not ensure they will grow into the productive self sufficient officer that all agencies look for and covet. And, of course the agency has spent untold thousands of dollars on this new employee at this point and wants to ensure that their money and time has not been for naught and that they get some sort of return. A mentoring program is one way or method to ensure success for all those involved.

The marketplace for qualified acceptable police officers is extremely competitive. Police agencies spend a considerable amount of time, money and effort in locating and hiring these new officers. A look at any police journal or newspaper will show the many different styles and methods of recruitment that are being presented to prospective new employees. Police agencies are beginning to fight fiercely for these applicants by offering more and better incentives as a means of enticing the new officers. These incentives range from higher salaries, step programs, better benefits, better equipment and so on. As agencies change their incentive packages to match competing agencies others are forced to look for new ideas. Every agency is looking for a

means to market what they offer in a more favorable light and lure these prospective employees. Once a recruit graduates from an academy their one and only concern is getting a job. If an agency were to effectively market what they offer, including an effective mentoring program, they would greatly increase their chances of obtaining these employees. Once hired, this new employee would then become a tool or spokesperson to be used to obtain more employees through word of mouth.

An effective mentoring program would benefit all involved. As one researcher stated, “The question law enforcement leaders must ask is no longer, “Why use mentoring?” but rather, “Why not use mentoring?” (Williams)

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