

Creating a Leadership Mindset in Law Enforcement Regardless of Rank

Lieutenant Tim Rodwell, Emmet County Sheriff's Office
First Lieutenant Jason Nemecek, Michigan State Police
Lieutenant Matt Ungrey, Grand Rapids Police Department
Director Frank Anthony, Richfield Township Department of Public Safety

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Abstract

Leadership development often starts after an employee is promoted to a supervisor in law enforcement agencies across the United States. Unfortunately, the new supervisor struggles with the skills necessary to be successful. Developing leadership for each member in the agency, regardless of their rank, promotes the appropriate mindset for the individual officer to achieve mission success and avoid a negative impact on themselves, their agency, and ultimately their community. As change moves laterally through an organization, members will have the skills necessary to reach the organizational mission, vision, and values. Understanding the importance of effective communication and a growth mindset will help members to possess a foundation supporting interpersonal skills and personal development. As the agency develops a wellness program, as well as a peer-to-peer mentoring program, members will undergo a long-term development plan building resiliency against the hardships often experienced by law enforcement officers. With these skills and programs, the organization will improve their individual members. Ultimately, each member will be better able to serve their communities.

Creating a Leadership Mindset in Law Enforcement Regardless of Rank

A leadership mindset is important for each member in the law enforcement agency. This includes everyone in the chain command encompassing the civilian support services, certified police officers, supervisors, and executive leadership. According to the American Management Association (2017), by giving leadership training to all employees, organizations can retain high performers and high potentials. Key to meeting these challenges is to train leaders at all levels. Leadership cannons should be demonstrated throughout the organization.

In order to encourage this mindset, leadership can implement key programs and skills in the agency ensuring each member understands their responsibility to be a leader as well as their accountability to be a leader. Each member is empowered to make decisions as a member of the agency which reflect the mindset leading to mission success. Not only are technical skills of important to reach mission success such as emergency vehicle operation and firearms proficiency. Interpersonal expertise including positive communication skills, and growth mindset are a foundation for each officer to be a leader. Implementing programs for members promoting wellness, and peer to peer support systems will facilitate members to learn important skills leading to success.

Effective Communication

The current culture in law enforcement focuses on several training areas including; emergency vehicle operation, firearms, defensive tactics and first aid. One area that is consistently overlooked is communication. The ability to properly and positively communicate within your community is imperative to your agencies support and success. Communication internally and externally dictates whether enforcement members have complete buy in to your agencies mission and goals.

As the community looks at each individual agency, it is immediately drawn to the agency's leadership team. All law enforcement agency members will be scrutinized on their conduct, character and department policy. Anderson, Gisborne and Holliday (2018) state, "the reach up for leadership from those who are wiser; they pull those "below" them upward, to greater, unseen heights" (p. 37). If the agency practices and embraces a MAGNUS leadership philosophy, it will inspire confidence and communication in all aspects. The MAGNUS leadership philosophy promotes performance by inspiring others through proper communication. Anderson, Gisborne and Holliday (2018) state, "the MAGNUS officer deploys habits of action by deliberate choice defined by sound reason" (p. 12).

The first step in effective communication is knowing your members. There has been a transition in law enforcement over the past few years for many agencies. We struggle to communicate internally as veteran officers retire and are replaced with inexperienced millennials. In order to close the gap in communication, supervisors are educated in the proper communication techniques of traditionalist, baby-boomers, generation x, generation y and millennials. It is imperative that supervisors reach out to each member and know their preferred communication method. This will not only enhance communication between the members but will ensure proper reception of the transmitted information.

The second step in effective communication is becoming a better listener. The higher a law enforcement member rises in their respective agency, the more their opinions are often weighed at a different level than rank and file employees. This sole response can limit the agency's ability to grow simply by disregarding the opinion of a member who has limited time and experience on the job. Which can certainly lead to some destructive and distrusting dynamics within the agency. In order to create a professional culture and versatility agency

leadership should respect and promote engagement at all levels. According to Normore, Javidi, Anderson et. al., (2014), “Law enforcement leaders, who contribute to the development of credible leaders within their organization, subscribe to the belief that increasing an employee’s professional intellect translates into excellence in public service” (p. 33).

Lastly, in order to promote a positive culture of communication, members should show gratitude, improve their personal wellness and close the loop by self-reflection. Gratitude is an easy task but is often overlooked by senior level management. The author’s experience as a law enforcement has shown there is a mindset in law enforcement that supervisors need to be strict disciplinarians and show no emotions. Members who are grateful are less likely to be hateful. Supervisors can use the human brain to positively impact each employee. Just as addicts use illicit drugs to create a dopamine release, supervisors can display gratitude which naturally releases dopamine for each employee. Creating this positive culture will improve employee self-esteem and is essential for optimal performance. (Wooten 2018) Members who are happy at work will interact appropriately with the community they serve and provide a positive perception of law enforcement. Anderson, et al. (2018) state, “Interpersonal communication skills are the vehicles by which all interactions between are made clear” (p. 135).

According to Lyons (2015), internal and external feedback is needed to measure where the department is regarding its brand and reputation (Department Branding and Reputation section, para. 1). The ability to close the loop is imperative to providing transparency in your community. As law enforcement, we are extremely good at debriefing high risk situations. We rarely debrief or reflect on our communication methods. Communication is not a secret; therefore, we should not be scared to communicate with the public, media or outside agencies. When agency’s refuse to comment on an issue the public automatically assumes, they are trying

to hide something. MAGNUS officers are not afraid to comment because they realize positive communication will promote transparency. Communication is constantly changing therefore the MAGNUS officer should be willing and able to adapt to any situation they encounter.

Positive Growth Mindset

Positive growth mindset sounds like the latest altruistic, “feel good” program to launch personal success. The truth is, that a growth mindset is a required trait for a developing leader. Without growth, a person will fail to possess, expand, and deliver the leadership development the high demand world of law enforcement requires. According to researcher Carol Dweck (2019), “there are two types of mindsets: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset” (Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset: What REALLY Matters for Success, para. 1). She goes on to say, “In a fixed mindset, people believe their qualities are fixed traits and therefore cannot change. These people document their intelligence and talents rather than working to develop and improve them. They also believe that talent alone leads to success, and effort is not required” (Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset: What REALLY Matters for Success, para. 2).

If a police officer enters the career with this fixed mindset, it is imperative that our program and our leadership address it to help transform the officer’s mindset. In this demanding and constantly changing profession, growth and development is the one requirement that is non-negotiable. Our ever-changing environment including case law, new standards, new statutes, tactics, policies and procedures - to name a few, will tax even the most adaptable growth mindset officer. Dweck (2019) asserts, “Alternatively, in a growth mindset, people have an underlying belief that their learning and intelligence can grow with time and experience. When people believe they can become smarter, they realize that their effort has an effect on their success, so

they put in extra time, leading to higher achievement” (Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset: What REALLY Matters for Success, para. 6)

According to Carolyn Bramley (2019), “When possible and through a thorough selection process, a fixed mindset candidate may not be an appropriate choice for law enforcement” (Defining Growth and Fixed Mindset Section para. 5). Once an officer begins his career with your department and enters the leadership program their assigned mentor will assess the officer’s current level of growth mindset. This will be done through one on one coaching, evaluations, and peer to peer feedback.

As a part of the program curriculum the officer will be educated and trained in many leadership traits and concepts to include this positive growth mindset. The importance and a continues state of personal and professional development will be emphasized. To further enhance and reinforce this growth mindset, a training, education and development plan will be created between the officer and the assigned leadership mentor within the department command staff. This plan will be a living document to be updated as needs and successes arise in the officer’s career. The positive growth mindset will be the foundation of the leadership program as it is what will allow and facilitate the officer applying their self to the challenges ahead.

The positive growth mindset as a culture throughout the department will feed itself with mindset development at the entry level officers ranks. As a result of officers will see and the feel the encouragement of education and development while working toward personal and professional goals. The positive growth mindset within a department is “A culture in which all employees are seen as possessing potential, are encouraged to develop, and are acknowledged and rewarded for improvement, not solely achievement” (Wooten, 2018).

There is no greater influence on the evolution of a law enforcement agency than establishing this mindset culture. According to the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015), "To build a police force capable of dealing with the complexity of the 21st century, it is imperative that agencies place value on both educational achievements and socialization skills when making hiring decisions. Hiring officers who reflect the community they serve is important not only to external relations, but also to increasing understanding within the agency" (p. 51). O'Neill (2019) further iterated that, "Learning to think of your career journey as a series of challenges and development opportunities can have a hugely beneficial effect on your ability to succeed." (Three advantages to adopting a growth mindset para. 1). This continuous improvement approach to life and career feeds the leadership culture of excellence to prepare your officers for today's professional law enforcement profession.

Ellis and Normore (2015) assert that an organization is only as good as the sum of its parts, and in law enforcement agencies these parts are both the sworn and unsworn staff who engage in collaborative efforts to serve the community. Capable supervision of these valuable human resources is critical and essential to ensure that the organization meets its strategic objectives in an effective, efficient, ethical, and coordinated manner (Performance management strategies for effective leadership and accountability process, para. 1). Leadership and its sub-component, positive growth mindset is the foundation for a credible, functional, and virtuous law enforcement agency. Ellis, Normore and Javidi (2019) further assert that the proper personal and professional development of all employees provides an opportunity not only to enhance the organization beyond the technical skills its staff possesses, but also to provide an avenue for building great organizational values and cultures that will ultimately lead to less human error (Providing clarity cleaning the murky waters with leadership para. 1)

As all facets of this leadership mindset regardless of rank program combines and compliments each other, the growth and positive change in the department will be seen for decades to come.

Officer Wellness

There is a need for police executives and first line supervisors to recognize that officer wellness is a key component to their leadership and officer development. Police agencies and the community have been affected by officer suicide, obesity, and stress related discipline issues. The leading cause of death for police officers is suicide (Smith, 2019). (The suicide rate among police officers is also higher than that of the general population; 17/100,000 of police officers compared to 13/100,000 for civilian population (Heyman, et. at., 2018).

Similarly, agencies are experiencing an epidemic of officer obesity. The Body Mass Index accounts for variances in height. According to an FBI study, eight out of ten police officers are obese as defined by a Body Mass Index of 30 or higher (Loux, 2017). Contributing factors to officer obesity are higher stress levels, shift work, and lack of sleep. Police officers who do not deal with the stress of the job or have an outlet to work through their emotions are the same officers who make bad decisions and negatively impact the community and the agency. These officers are often the same officers that are labeled “Gray Rhino’s” or a neglected threat that we can see coming yet do nothing about.

Agency command staff and first line supervisors can shift their focus from disciplining behavior to recognizing and identifying the underlying issues that cause these problems. There is an opportunity to change the culture among police officers to confront the issues of officer suicide, obesity, and stress management through leadership. Police agencies can not only offer an officer wellness program, they can make it a part of their culture by making the use of some of

the various services mandatory or offer incentives for participation. Offering biometric monitoring systems such as a Fitbit would be an example of an innovative idea in an officer wellness program.

Police officers are typically reluctant to speak about psychological trauma or the need for assistance due to the stigma they fear from their peers and supervisors. They are afraid that if they ask for help, they are at risk of being fired or having their gun and badge taken away (Muller, 2013). Police commanders can assuage the officer's concerns by explaining "The Why" to them and showing them that a wellness program will align with their personal goals of career survival, development, and longevity. Commanders can also explain that having officers who have reduced stress, are better physically fit, and have an emotional support system provide the community with better service through better officers.

An agency that changes its culture to not only offer a wellness program but promote it as the way in which it provides service to the community will be an attractive agency for potential new hires and a place where officers can develop their careers. Some agencies have wellness programs or portions of wellness programs in place such as Employee Assistance Programs that may be mandated after an officer involved shooting or other traumatic event, physical fitness programs focusing on cardiovascular health and chronic disease prevention and stress management. Other agencies have included police chaplains for spiritual support. The focus of this research paper is not to create a wellness program but to utilize these programs to develop officers' leadership.

Police officers are viewed by the community as leaders by the position they hold and services they provide. Beginning with recruitment, officers should be developed as those leaders.

When an officer takes a position with an agency that has a culture of wellness it is understood that they will be expected to participate and support that mission.

Developing police officers as leaders is typically reserved for first line supervisors and command level positions. The use of wellness programs and services will be a part of each officers' training and development as an officer and a leader. An officer who utilizes wellness program services will be able to speak credibly to other officers and may also be able to empathize with members of the community who may be in crisis. Officers are developed as leaders through the wellness program by identifying and understanding the underlying causes of conflict. They will be able to recognize that decisions made by their fellow employees may be affected by lack of sleep, stress, or an inability to cope with post-traumatic stress. Officers as supervisors will be able to use the tools, they have learned from the wellness program to address these issues and effect a positive change. It is the premise of the authors, leadership through wellness program participation will create a culture and environment that will show each officer that their fellow officers, supervisors, and community care about their well-being and ability to serve effectively.

Peer to Peer Mentoring Program

According to the licensing standards published by the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards (2016), when officers begin their career, they have already undergone an extensive effort achieving an academic degree, training at an academy, as well as rigorous screening and testing prior to their first day. Agencies spend a great deal of time with “on the job” training, in-service training, and routine evaluations ensuring their technical skills are proficient. These technical skills include emergency driving, firearm accuracy, and defensive tactics when responding to resistance. Rossow (2008) stated, “The challenge of today’s law

enforcement leader is to ensure that the new recruit maintains a belief system where words like honor, fairness, integrity, nobility, leadership and character are not just words, but a way of life". (Mentoring our new warriors, para 2.) A peer-to-peer mentoring program in the agency can support the growth of this belief system which is critical to develop the leadership capabilities in each member: and to the success of the officer, their agency, as well as the well-being of the community they serve.

Sprafka and Kranda (2018) argue that mentoring is a mutually beneficial relationship in which a knowledgeable and skilled veteran officer (mentor) provides insight, guidance and developmental opportunities to a lesser skilled and experienced colleague" (Best practices for institutionalizing mentoring into police departments, para. 2). A peer-to-peer mentoring program is a long-term relationship passing information between the skilled veteran officer to the lesser skilled officer not to only one issue of performance, but the overall performance of the lesser skilled. This relationship is a collaborative effort developing trust, resiliency to adversity, and specifically directed to the needs of the lesser skilled officer.

When an officer starts his or her career, many are not acclimated to the hardships facing them as a result of their career choice. Personal issues or social issues may affect their performance. For example, when a lesser skilled officer is exposed to a particular violent scene, many are shocked by the violence and need a positive way to handle the trauma. The peer-to-peer mentor can facilitate positive ways to process the trauma which do not lead to a negative outcome for the lesser skilled officer.

The collaborative effort may also provide friendship, acceptance, and support that may not be part of a formal field training program. According to Inzer and Crawford (2005), "Mentoring is too beneficial for it not to be formally implemented in an organization. Informal

mentoring will always occur" (p. 2). In order to develop the leadership of each member in the agency, a peer-to-peer mentoring program should be formalized in order to increase the consistency, quality, and facilitate the collaboration between the more skilled and less skilled officer. When both the more skilled mentor, and the less skilled mentee understand the expectations the chances of a successful program increases.

Sprafka and Krenda (2018) recommend the following expectations for a successful mentoring program:

- Encourage and model value-focused behavior
- Share critical knowledge and experience
- Listen to personal and professional challenges
- Set expectations for success
- Offer wise counsel
- Help build self-confidence
- Offer friendship and encouragement
- Provide information and resources
- Offer guidance, give feedback, and cheer accomplishments
- Discuss and facilitate opportunities for new experiences and skill building
- Assist in mapping career plan (pp. 3-4).

These same researchers stress that the mentoring relationship must involve mutual commitment and that the protege must share responsibility for his or her own development. The following responsibilities are suggested for proteges:

- Clearly define personal employment goals
- Take and follow through on directions given

- Accept and appreciate mentoring assistance
- Listen to what others have to say
- Express appreciation
- Be assertive - ask good questions
- Ask for help when needed. Share credit for a job well done with other team members.
- Respect the mentor's time and agency responsibilities (Sprafka & Krenda, 2018, p. 4).

Leadership looking to implement a peer-to-peer mentoring program should consider two key imperatives. First, they should not select any member of the organization at random to be a mentor. The leadership of the agency should screen the mentors prior to allowing them to participate to make sure the mentor exhibits the positive qualities endorsed by the leadership. A thorough understanding of the mission, vision, and value of the organization is essential. If the more skilled employee fosters a belief system that is negative, toxic, or will hurt the performance of the less skilled officer, they should not participate. Second, they need to select mentors who show interest in the program and would enjoy helping the lesser skilled officer through their ability to teach and share their knowledge. Often, patience is necessary when interacting with a lesser skilled officer when they are going through a problem or an issue. Listening and communicating appropriately using empathy, while being confident in their ability is essential. Overtime, the relationship will build credibility and trust between the more skilled and less skilled officers.

The overall goal of the peer-to-peer mentoring program is to improve the resiliency of participants to face the hardships of being a law enforcement officer. A correctly implemented peer to peer mentoring program will often improve the emotional intelligence and moral compass of less experienced officers which guides their decisions each day. The peer-to-peer

mentoring program is to compliment the formal training program, as well as the technical training offered by the agency. When developing the leadership of each officer, a correctly implemented peer to peer mentoring program will be a critical component to ensure each member knows they are a leader each day, each call, and with each decision they make.

Conclusion

The skills of effective communication and a positive growth mindset and programs including a wellness and peer to peer mentoring; agencies can foster leadership at all levels including the MAGNUS mindset. Truthfulness, integrity, honor, nobility, humility, faithfulness, respect, responsibility, prudence, and gratitude can be instilled into members. Avoiding the belief of anger and bitterness embody the standards of being a MAGNUS officer.

If an agency feels a need for change at both micro and macro levels, then each officer must go beyond the call of duty, obligation and supererogation to embody change at both personal and professional levels. Developing the leadership of each officer, moving from peer to peer laterally across the agency, will allow the officer to adapt to their environment. Management will be able to exercise versatility skills to meet the specific needs of members in the agency to fulfill its mission, core values, and goals. Anticipated benefits include a better community relationship through positive citizen interactions for the ultimate purpose of delivering results with confidence.

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